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Remembering Issachar Miron Nation Builder, Bridge Builder, Jewish Music Great

For most of his 95 years, renowned composer and poet Issachar Miron (Michrovsky) devoted his life and artistry to the Jewish people—and to all peace-loving people around the world. Best known for the international hit song “Tzena Tzena, Tzena” Miron composed numerous classically oriented instrumental and vocal works, as well as scores for radio, film, and television. He earned many awards and much critical acclaim for his compositions, writings, and multimedia productions. Miron died on January 29, 2015.



Miron (then Michrovsky) was born in Kutno, Poland, where his family had lived for generations. His father was an accomplished concert violinist and his mother an amateur pianist. Miron studied music and chemistry in Warsaw and migrated alone to British-mandated Palestine in 1939. Only three years later, after the German occupation of Poland, his entire family would perish at Chelmno, one of the Nazi's first extermination camps. Miron served in the Jewish Company of the British Buffs Regiment in Palestine and joined the Israeli army after statehood.

Miron wrote “Tzena Tzena, Tzena” the song that would define his career, during his time in the British army. The catalyst was his instructor's request for a song to celebrate the soldiers' completion of training. With Hebrew lyrics by fellow brigadier and poet Yahiel Haggiz, Miron composed a two-part melody that he set to a lively dance rhythm. The chorus urges young women to *tzena* (go out) and meet the male soldiers in the *moshav* (farm settlement). It was an immediate hit with the men in Miron's company. The song's popularity grew to global proportions when Pete Seeger and the Weavers added it to their repertoire. Miron and Seeger would become lifelong friends, their heartfelt bond cemented by a shared belief in song as an instrument of peace. In 2000, the Milken Archive conducted a videotaped interview of Seeger and Miron during a performance of a new trilingual version of the song that includes verses in Arabic, as well as in Hebrew and English.

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The Milken Archive of Jewish Music remembers Pete Seeger and Issachar Miron's legacy in this short documentary on the song, “Tzena, Tzena, Tzena.” A moving story of music's ability to transcend boundaries and communicate universally, the video captures a rare moment featuring Seeger alongside the song's composer, Issachar Miron, as they lead a performance of a new trilingual version of the song that includes verses in Arabic, as well as in Hebrew and English.



[View on YouTube](#)

By the time Israel achieved statehood in 1948, Miron was already deeply engaged in the region's musical and artistic life. The state's cultural leadership saw him as a *wunderkind* of Israeli music, with one admirer calling him the “Jewish Mozart.” Miron was appointed as the first National Deputy Director of Music for Israel's Ministry of Education and Culture. He also served as National Officer-in-Chief of Art and Music Programs for the Israeli Defense Force, where he introduced his concept of “integration through singing,” which aimed to use music to build community among soldiers from different cultures and national backgrounds.

As chairman of the Ministry's Committee for Musical Programs in Immigrant Settlements, Miron similarly promoted music education as a means of assimilating Israel's diverse ethnic communities, the population of which had doubled between 1948 and 1953 and continued to grow. "We are acting on the simple principle that music is an international language which everybody can understand and enjoy," he told *Reader's Digest* in 1961. "It brings people together spiritually and emotionally. We are using it as a tool to shape a harmonious nation."

If Miron viewed music as an essential instrument of nation building, he also saw it as a means of building peace between nations. This was the impulse behind his songbook *Arabic Songs: Garlands of Melodies*, which he edited in consultation with a committee of Arab and Jewish music educators." I thought that the same concept could also be applicable to Jews and Arabs," he told the New York public-access TV program *Let Them Talk* in 2010, "because if we sing together we will not want to make war against one another."

During the 1940s and 50s, Miron arranged, documented, and promoted Israel's new folk music, while he also composed instrumental solos, cantatas, and works for chamber ensemble. Two of his solo piano works from that period, *Passacaglia for Moderns* (1958) and *Seven Syncopated Preludes* (1959) are included in musicologist Rudolf Gantz's compendiums of modern piano masterworks.



Issachar Miron (left) and Pete Seeger in 2000.

After resettling in the United States in 1963, Miron composed for radio, film, and television. His oratorio *The Golden Gates of Joy* and his cantata *Song of Esther* were performed by the Ray Charles Singers and broadcast nationwide on CBS television in 1968. Miron also collaborated with Theodore Bikel on *Silent No More* (1971), a narrated recording that features songs of the Soviet Jewish struggle for freedom. Of his work during this period, Miron was particularly proud that his song "Ufi ruah"—the first Hebrew song to be featured on Egyptian radio—was broadcast following the peace talks between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin in 1977. He also made valuable contributions to the emerging Klezmer revival of the late 1970s and 80s with his work *Klezmer Reflections* for oboe and piano and his recording *The Art of Klezmer*. Several of Miron's works are featured on Milken Archive recordings, including his [*Psalms of Israel: A Hallel Oratorio*](#), which is a setting of Psalms 113 through 118, also known as the hallel (praise) liturgy.



Miron's book of music, prayer, and poetry *Eighteen Gates of Jewish Holidays and Festivals* (1993) brought him critical acclaim, as did his many concerts, films, and multimedia productions for the United Jewish Appeal. The latter earned him Gold Awards from the International Film and Television Festivals of New York. Miron is also the recipient of ASCAP's Deems Taylor Award for creative writing, Israel's Engel Prize for composition, and the Kavod Award of the Cantors Assembly. He served as Dean of the Music Faculty at the Jewish Teachers Seminary and the Herzliah Teachers Institute, both in New York City.

"We have lost one of the treasures of Jewish music," said Milken Archive of Jewish Music founder Lowell Milken. "Miron's artistic vigor was matched only by his deeply-held humanism and generosity of spirit. May his artistic gifts continue to inspire."

Learn more about [Issachar Miron](#) and his works [Hafaya banashim](#) and [Psalms of Israel](#).