



NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

Notes on the original recordings by Lorin Sklamberg

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01 ICH TANZ' UND MEIN HERZ WEINT

I DANCE, BUT MY HEART IS CRYING

Originally recorded by Pinkas Lavender (1898, Łódź-1976, New York) accompanied on piano by Max Janowski (1912, Berlin-1991, Chicago).

This romantic ballad was recorded by the Łódź-born singing actor Pinkas Lavender (also known as Pinchus Lavenda). After an early career as a boy soloist in a synagogue choir, Lavender made his first stage appearance in his hometown at the age of 12, gradually moving into leading juvenile roles and touring in Europe and South America. After making some recordings in Poland, Lavender immigrated to the United States in the late 1920s, became a fixture of the Yiddish-American theater and lifelong active member of the Hebrew Actors' Union, and recorded 12 sides for New York's Brunswick and Vocalion record companies. He appeared in Sidney M. Goldin's Yiddish film *Gelibt un gelakht* (Live and Laugh, 1933). It was on a trip to Europe during this period that he presumably made the six recordings published by Hirsch Lewin's Semer label, most of which were later reissued on Lewin's subsequent Israeli label, Hed-Arzi. His piano accompanist on these recordings was the renowned composer/conductor Max Janowski. Lavender's last discs were made in the 1940s for the New York-based Banner label. The lyricist and composer of this song are unknown. Pinkas Lavender is buried in the Mount Hebron Cemetery in Flushing, New York.

02 SCHOLEM BAITH

PEACE IN THE HOME

Originally recorded by Esther (1895, Łódź-1943?) and Jakob Moschkowitz

The manic marital sparring duet *Scholem Baith* is one of two surviving recordings of six made by this husband and wife team issued by the Semer label around 1931. Esther (née Gelibter) met her future husband Jakob while touring in Poland and in 1919 they arrived in Berlin, where they established their career and appeared in various Yiddish cabarets, cafes and stage revues. Between 1930 and 1933 they regularly performed at the literary cabaret *Kaftan*, run by Yiddish singer and Kishinev pogrom survivor Maxim Sakaschansky (1892-1952). The material performed at this venue was viewed as either "the strangest and most original" by the press or as somewhat embarrassing by more assimilated German-Jewish audiences, though a 1930 review opined that the couple should "moderate their all too robust sense of humour and tone down their brash cheerfulness." Their recorded output seems to have been drawn from their popular and amusingly low-brow *Kaftan* repertoire, though no composer or lyricist credit is indicated. The Nazis shut down the *Kaftan* following the return of the company from a 54-city tour. Sakaschansky was accosted with verbal and physical abuse, after which he and his wife, fellow artist Ruth Klinger, escaped Berlin. After the Moschkowitzes, together with their son, Abram, reestablished themselves in Paris, Esther and Abram were deported during the occupation, presumably perishing in a concentration camp. Jakob Moschkowitz, however, survived. The Moschkowitzes recordings were accompanied by an orchestra led by Paul Schmidt, musical director of Berlin's *Folies Caprice Burlesque Theatre*.

03 SIMCHU BI JERUSCHALAJM/ E'ISE PELE

REJOICE IN JERUSALEM/WHAT A WONDER

Simchu bi Jeruschalajm originally recorded by Mordechai Roth (1902, Buczyna-1986, Tel-Aviv) with orchestra conducted by Sigmund Petruschka (1903, Leipzig-1997, Jerusalem). *E'ise pele* originally recorded by Joseph Goland (1907, Ukraine-1974, Israel) with the Kulturbund Dance Orchestra conducted by Sigmund Petruschka.

This is a medley of two early Israeli dance songs. The first, *Simchu bi Jeruschalajm* (Rejoice in Jerusalem), was itself originally recorded in 1936 as part of a medley of Palestinian *Horras* by classical singer and *chaltznik* Mordechai Roth while on a concert tour which included a stop in Berlin. The lyrics are a paraphrase of the Book of Isaiah 66:10, while the music comes from the Hasidic tradition; Roth sings one of several known variants of this *hora*. Early Zionist settler and theater singer Joseph Goland sang *E'ise Pele* as one of 30 early Israeli songs recorded in a mammoth one-day session in March 1934. As no recording studio yet existed in Palestine, the recordings were made in Berlin with members of the Jewish Culture League Orchestra. *E'ise Pele's* lyrics come from the poet Nathan Alterman (1910, Warsaw-1970, Tel Aviv) whose other well-known songs include *Shir Ha'emek* and *Layla, Layla*; the provenience of the tune is unknown. The two exuberant *horas* are typical of the repertoire of the period in the way they combine older musical elements together with Biblical words or contemporary Hebrew lyrics to create something fresh and new.

04 DIE WELT IST KLEIN GEWORDEN

THE WORLD HAS BECOME SMALL

Originally recorded by Dora Gerson (1899, Berlin-1943, Auschwitz) accompanied by Sid Kay's Fellows directed by Sigmund Petruschka

The tragic events of actress/cabaret artist Dora Gerson's life and career are belied by the few vivid recordings she made in a Berlin synagogue basement in April 1935. Die Welt ist klein geworden, with words and music by cabaret writers Fred Endrikat (1890, Nakel an der Netze-1942, Munich) and Curt Bry (1902, Berlin-1974, Los Angeles), is a startlingly modern take on the state of the world which could have been written yesterday, and is all the more astonishing considering when it was penned and performed. Gerson appeared as stage actress, in cabaret and in films (notably with Bela Lugosi). By 1933, her opportunities had shrunk to performing for small all-Jewish audiences in Berlin, Paris and the Netherlands. She soon fled to relatives in Amsterdam, married and gave birth to two children. On the way to freedom in Switzerland, Gerson was caught and subsequently murdered, together with her family, in Auschwitz. The one available surviving shellac disc containing this song was pieced together and restored for its recent reissue.

05 KADISH (DER JÜDISCHE SOLDAT)

KADDISH (THE JEWISH SOLDIER)

Yiddish version originally recorded by Pinkas Lavender accompanied on piano by Max Janowski.

The well-known song Kaddisch, with German lyrics by Kurt Robitschek (1890, Prague-1950, New York) and music by Otto Stransky (1889, Brunn-1932, Berlin) was popularized via the 1928 Odeon recording of the openly gay Jewish popular cabaret singer Paul O'Montis (1894, Budapest-1940, Oranienburg), who, assigned a pink triangle by the Nazis, perished at Sachsenhausen. Kaddisch (sanctification) refers to the hymn to God traditionally recited by Jews in memory of the departed. Pinkas Lavender (see track 1) recorded the song three times: for the Syrena company in Warsaw, for Brunswick in New York in 1929 and for Artiphon in Berlin in 1931 (reissued by Semer in 1934 and later on Hed-Arzi in Israel). The author of the Yiddish version sung by Lavenda is unknown. The song was brought to the United States by two Viennese-born Jewish singing actors – Martha Schlamme (1923, Vienna-1985, Jamestown, NY), who, together with poet Yuri Suhl, made her own Yiddish adaptation and recorded it in 1963, and Theodore Bikel (1924, Vienna-2015, Westwood, CA), who published an approximation of the original German version in his collection *Folksongs and Footnotes: An International Songbook* (Meridian Books, 1960). In the book, Bikel notes, "It is quite plausible that a village might have a Jewish blacksmith called Yankel who is forced to go to war... it is, however, completely unthinkable that he would charge [his wife] with the duty of praying nightly with the boy, asking him to kneel down with her. This is a completely Christian image which could only come from the pen of one who is totally unfamiliar with the fact that Jews simply do not kneel, not even to God." It is notable that both known Yiddish versions of the song have been made more authentic in this regard.

06 DAS KIND LIEGT IN WIGELE

THE CHILD LIES IN THE CRADLE

Yiddish folksong originally recorded by Simon Berkowitz with instrumental ensemble

This beautifully haunting Yiddish lullaby appears in two printed collections – *Yiddish Folksongs in Russia*, S.M. Ginzburg and P.S. Marek, St. Petersburg 1901, and *Jewish Folk Songs*, collected, harmonized and arranged by Platon Brounoff, New York, 1911. Renowned cantor Pierre Pinchik (1900, Zhivitov-1971, New York) was also known for his repertoire of Yidische folklieder and recorded the song for American Victor in 1928. Little is known of the singer Simon Berkowitz, except that he participated in two Berlin Jewish community events in 1934 – a house concert and a fundraising evening in a café. Das kind liegt in Wigele was recorded for the Artiphon in 1931 and subsequently [re]issued by Semer. The vocal intensity and unusual, uncredited arrangement in Berkowitz's recording have greatly inspired the Semer Ensemble's version. One note on the text: in the traditional Jewish burial, shards of unglazed pottery are placed over the deceased's eyes and mouth, as a way of hastening the contact of the body with the earth, as a sign of repentance for any sins that may have been committed during their lifetime or to signify the frailty of human life.

07 CZÁRDAS

Originally recorded by Adreas Weißgerber (1900, Bólos, Greece-1941, Tel Aviv), violin accompanied by Kurt Sanderling (1912, East Prussia-2011, Berlin), piano

Adreas Weißgerber, the soloist heard on our extremely rare source recording, was born into a family of musicians originally from Sadigora. His European tour as a child prodigy led to studies in Budapest with Hungarian violin virtuoso and composer Jenő Hubay (1858-1937), among others. Weißgerber embarked on a short brilliant career as a virtuoso violinist, performing programs of brilliant showpieces to great public acclaim, as well as establishing himself as a prolific recording artist. In 1936 he settled in Palestine, joining his cellist brother Joseph in the Palestine Symphony Orchestra, which was becoming a haven for Jewish musicians losing their jobs in Europe. He died of a heart attack at the age of 41. Weißgerber's disc of Hubay's bravura Czárdas (Csárdajelenet No. 5 "Hullámzó Balaton") is one of two surviving recordings he made in association with Berlin's Jüdische Kulturbund. On it, Weißgerber is accompanied by Kurt Sanderling, who, following a short association with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, survived the war in the Soviet Union where he established himself as a conductor, later serving in that position with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden and London's Philharmonia Orchestra.

08 ACHEINU KOL BET JISSROEL

AS FOR OUR BROTHERS, THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

Isroel originally recorded by Cantor Salomon Kupfer (ca. 1881, Białowieża-Manchester, 1965) accompanied by Leo Kopf (1888, Tarnowiec-1953, New York), harmonium

The source recording for this piece was one of the most popular items issued by Semer. It was published by no fewer than five times following its initial recording and release by Leipzig's Kalliope label in 1929. The performer, Salomon Kupfer was born into a family of cantors. His early renown (including, presumably, the 30 cantorial recordings he made for Warsaw's Syrena label) led to a major synagogue position in Leipzig. After the Nazis came to power, Kupfer resettled in Manchester, England, where he served as cantor at the New Synagogue. His accompanist on the recording, Leo Kopf, was also the son of a cantor. He later became the director of the Berlin Jewish Choral and Orchestral Association of the Reich Association of Jewish Cultural Leagues. He too, fled to Britain and established himself as a choral conductor in London before finally settling in New York. His papers are housed there at the Leo Baeck Institute at the Center for Jewish History. The prayer Achenu kol bes Isroel comes from the Jewish morning liturgy and is recited after the weekday Torah reading. Kupfer sings the Achenu in a virtuosic setting composed by the world-renowned cantor Josef Rosenblatt (1882, Bila Tservka, Ukraine-1933, Jerusalem). Rosenblatt recorded Achenu for the Victor company in New York in 1920. Kupfer's cousin, Cantor Lipa Meyer Goldwasser, recorded Rosenblatt's Achenu for Artiphon several years later.

09 JAD ANUGA

A TENDER HAND

originally recorded by Mordechai Roth with instrumental ensemble directed by Wolf Weintraub (1893, Chrzanów-1986, New York)

The words of the song Jad Anuga come from the pen of poet Zalman Schneour (1887, Shklov, Belarus-1959, New York) and was written during his early years in Vilna. The lyrics are part of a much longer poem, Et kol liba masra lo (She gave him all her love) originally published in the early Hebrew literary periodical Hame'orer (London, 1906). Though originally sung to a different tune, when brought by early settlers to Palestine it was newly fit to a familiar Arabic melody, and it is in this version the song became one of the best-known romantic pioneer ballads. Mordechai Roth (see track 3) recorded Jad anuga in an arrangement by the Russian Jewish composer Michael Gniessin (1883, Rostov-1957, Moscow) for the Semer company during a visit to Berlin in 1934. In addition to the beauty of Gniessin's stunning chamber arrangement, Roth's version is notable for his choice of a different second verse than has become common in performances of this song. In modern times Jad Anuga has been included in the repertoire of such singers as Nechama Hendel, Esther Ofarim, Ofra Haza, David D'or and the Greek vocalist George Dalaras.

10 LEBKA FÄHRT NACH AMERIKA

LEYBKE GOES TO AMERICA

Originally recorded by Pinkas Lavender accompanied on piano by Max Janowski (see track 1)

One of Semer's most popular releases was this double sided slice of life story-song recorded by Pinkas Lavender in 1931 and subsequently issued on both the Syrena label in Poland and on Hed-Arzi in Israel. Though the author of *Lebka fährt nach Amerika* is uncredited on the disc, Jane Pepler, a performer and researcher of Polish Yiddish cabaret material found it referenced in one of the interwar song pamphlets published by Warsaw shop owner Itzik Zhelonek as being performed by one M. Brodetski, though he's not listed as the author. The song, a more complex cousin of Solomon Smulewitz's well known Yiddish tear-jerker *A brivele der mamen* (A letter to mother), ruefully reflects some of the realities experienced by immigrants to the U.S. and those they left behind in the old country and affords abundant opportunities for the performer's ability in portraying the many characters in the piece.

11 IM GASTHOF ZUR GOLDENEN SCHNECKE AT THE GOLDEN SNAIL IN

originally recorded by Willy Rosen (1894, Magdeburg-1944, Auschwitz) with Sid Kay's Fellows directed by Sigmund Petruschka

It now seems incredible that this catchy, lighthearted gem could be created and recorded in the cellar of a Berlin synagogue considering the time and place. But so it was in April 1935 when the multi-talented Willy Rosen made this and a handful of other sides for the Jewish label Lukraphon. Having composed and performed for cabaret, theater, film and on records, the beloved Rosen's employment opportunities were dwindling and his world grew smaller. Though he established residency in Amsterdam, he continued returning to Berlin for performance opportunities under the auspices of the Jüdische Kulturbund. Rosen continued his activities in Amsterdam until he and his wife were deported to Westerbork in 1943. Rosen and other interned artists created cabaret shows to boost the morale of their fellow inmates, but in the end he was sent to Theresienstadt and then to Auschwitz, where he perished.

12 VORBEI

IT'S OVER

Originally recorded by Dora Gerson accompanied by Sid Kay's Fellows directed by Sigmund Petruschka (see track 4)

Our last song is the poignant chanson *Vorbei*, words by Bert Reisfeld (1906, Vienna-1991, Badenweiler), music by Rolf Marbot (1906, Breslau-1974, Cannes) – the pair was known for their film music as well as lighter German popular songs such as *Mein kleiner grüner Kaktus*, made famous by the vocal group the Comedian Harmonistist. Gerson's recording of *Vorbei* was made in the same session as *Die Welt ist klein geworden* in 1935. The song was also recorded by the renowned Austrian operatic tenor Richard Tauber (1891, Linz-1948, London). Tauber's version, in contrast to Gerson's, is dramatically extroverted. The definitive collection of recordings by Jewish artists made in Berlin in the years 1933-38 (and the source for the Semer Ensemble's material) takes its name from this song's title – *Vorbei... Beyond Recall* (Bear Family, Hambergen, 2000).