The Music of the Synagogue

Max Wohlberg

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### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

It is suggested that this locture be given by someone familiar with synagogue services, the reading of the Torah, and a knowledge of the prayer books. The cantor or someone familiar with synagogue music should illustrate musically. There are also a number of recordings (refer to Bibliography of Recordings published by Pational Jewish Music Council) . . . which may be used if a cantor may not be available.

The Lecture is comprehensive and somewhat long, but is so written that it may be divided into the various phases of synagogue music, any section of which would be of sufficient length for an illustrated lecture.

The lecturer should be thoroughly familiar with the text merely referring to it, not reading it before an audience. This is a much more effective manner. The musical illustrations should be well rehearsed in advance so that there is perfect coordination between lecturer and performer, or recordings. Therever possible the audience should be invited to participate, in learning the melodies or in singing those they already know.

A complete bibliography prepared by Max Wohlberg is available for further research.

While the Jewish people never closed its eyes to the new and the novel it was yet unwilling to discard the ancient, time-honored customs which shaped the life of its ancestors. The obstacle of conflict between the old and the new was ever overcome by reinterpretation; by dressing tradition in modern garb. For minhag, tradition, was ever held high by our people.

Thus, when we wish to understand the music of the synagogue of today, we of necessity, must consider the history of its traditional sources - the Temple and the Synagogue in its earliest day. For surely in his worship of God, the Jew was wont to follow in the path of tradition.

### The Temple Service

Biblical sources, while not too informative, are yet sufficiently revealing as to the form of service in the first Temple. It was mainly in charge of the Priest. He would offer sacrifices (minute details of this function are related in Leviticus), he would bless the people (1), and on the Day of Atonement he would confess his sins, the sins of his household, and those of all Israel (2).

The Levites would sing appropriate psalms, and an orchestra of varied instruments, such as harps, the shofar, trumpets, pipes, flutes, and cymbals were heard. The minimum number of instruments employed at the Temple service, as well as of singing Levites, was twelve, (Psalm 150), (mishnah Arachin II,3). Tradition has it, that the nucleus of our prayers, such as the Blessing of the Shema, the Ceulah, the Avodah, certain benedictions, and the Ten Commandments, were already used in the Service of the first Temple. (3)

After his return from Babylonian exile (458 B.C.E.), Ezra reinstituted the Service in the Second Temple. Of this Service the records are more abundant. (4) Here the Priestly recitations included the Ahavoah Raboh, Benedictions of the Amidoh, Sim Sholom, the Hallel, etc. (These may be referred to in the Prayer Books).

The musical part of the Service was announced by the sound of the pipe organ. The blowing of the trumpet was followed by the sounds of the cymbal, all of this serving as a prelude for the daily psalm and parts of the Pentateuch sung by the Levites. The latter, by the way, were trained musicians who, between the ages of 25 and 30, received vocal and musical instruction and were on active singing duty until the age of 50. (5) To add melodic sweetness to the Service, the choir was augmented by the voices of young boys. (6). At the conclusion of each musical phrase, the Priests would blow the trumpets, and the worshippers prostrated themselves.

The Service in the Second Temple was democratized to the extent that the people partock in the singing of refrains; such as Amen, Hallelujah, Hoshonah, Aneinu, and in the responsive chanting of certain Psalms. (7)

Lov. 9:22

Lev. 16

A.Z. Idelsohn, "Jowish Liturgy", Chap . I .

<sup>4)</sup> Mishnah Tomid V; Mishnah Arachin XI, 3-6; Ecclesiasticus L, 13.

<sup>5)</sup> Rosh Hashanah, page 31,a.

Arachin XIII, b. Mishnah Arachin II,6 Mishnah Sotah VII, 5; Mcclesiasticus L, Il-21.

The people bringing sacrifices were required to recite benedictions over them. (8)

#### The Early Synagogue

The Temple, however, was not the exclusive place for public worship. The need for a House of Assembly - Synagogue - was strongly felt in Babylonia. And when Ezra rededicated the Temple Service, he also instituted the public reading of the Pentateuch at regular intervals (Mondays and Thursdays, which were market days) and public instruction in the Law. The Synagogue was the inevitable place for these activities.

To the men of the Great Assembly (458-201 B.C.E.) which he had convened, is ascribed the authorship of a great part of our present-day Liturgy: the Benedictions, Prayers, Kedushas, and Havdalahs. (9) Some-what later the reading of the Haftarah from the Prophets was introduced.

It is more than likely that since the Levites, Priests and laity often came directly from the Temple to the Synagogue (10), and since there could hardly have been created a different set of chants, the melodies used at the Temple were carried over to the Synagogue.

### The Cantillations

The oldest existing musical material available for our study is the system of cantillation used in the reading of the Pentateuch, Prophets, Esther, Lamentations and other Books of the Biblo. The melodies of these Tropes (neumes, accent marks) were - as all old music, the Oriental to this day - transmitted orally through the agos. These signs were transcribed and systematized in the 9th century by Aaron ben Asher, in Tiberias.

While, it is true, slight deviations appear in the cantillations utilized by Jews in Iraq, Yemon, Tunis, Germany and Lithuania, their similarity despite centuries of isolation from the other Jewish settlements, attest to both their antiquity and to their common ancestry: Before the Palestine exile. What is singularly peculiar and characteristic of these Tropes is the fact that their melodies vary with the different Books of the Bible. They are also chanted differently on Rosh Hashano and Yom Kippur.

# (See Illustration No, 1 at end)

<sup>8)</sup> Deut. XXVI, 5-10, 13-15; Kohler "The Origin of Synagogue and Church".

<sup>9)</sup> Berchot, 33, a.

<sup>10)</sup> Sukah, 53, a.

Bibliography: A. Baer, Bal Tefiloh; Idelsohn, Hanginoh Hoivris; A. Perlzweig, Megilas Esther; M. Mathanson, Chumosh.

### The Prayer Book

With the destruction of the Second Temple and with the loss of statehood, the Jewish people and Jewish religion faced the danger of extinction. Fortunately there were men like Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, who laid the foundation for the academies of learning where the old laws would be studied and their knowledge carried by the people on their wanderings. Perhaps even more important were the achievements of men like Rabbi Camaliel the Second, who, by recatievements of men like Rabbi Camaliel the Second, who, by recatient and public worship, created a unifying force, a center of gravity strong enough to hold together a dispersed people. (11)

Rabbi Gamaliel appointed the periods, the reading of the Shema, made the Evening Service obligatory, and decreed the relating of the story of Exodus on the Passover. At his bidding, the Benedictions of the Amidah were revised and augmented and, thanks to his influence, the greater part of our standard prayers were composed and written down. Most of these Rabbi Judah the Prince incorporated in his compilation of the Mishnah.

The Prayer Book grew through the centuries with inevitable variations in different communities. Thus, precentors - Hazzanim - were hard put to it to memorize its content, as for a thousand years it was retained only in a few scattered manuscripts.

Finally, before the end of the ninth century, the Prayer Book was codified by the Caonim, Amram, Natronai and Saadyah. That of Amram is the first complete Order of Prayers. Rabbi Jacob ben Moses Molin, of Mainz (1365-1427) is responsible for the present form of our Ashkenazic ritual.

# Piyutima - Liturgical Poetry

There is one other important element in our Prayer Book, which had great bearing on the development of the music of the Synagogue. These are the Piyutim: prayers and hymns for special Sabbaths, Festivals and High Holy Days, also for Fast and Feast days, set in metric and often in acrostic alphabetic form.

In its ancient form, the Prayer Book, excepting the chapters of Psalms which have antiphonal that is, responsive reading, structure, consisted of unrhymed prose. Boginning with the Seventh Century, and under the influence of Arabic poetry, new liturgic material in the metric form was introduced by the precentors. These new insertions were often sung to borrowed and non-Jewish melodies.

<sup>11)</sup> A. I. Schechter, "Lectures on Jewish Liturgy".

The singing of these melodies made greater musical demands upon the procentor and thus was prepared the way for the professional Hazzan. (12)

#### The Hazzan

While in Talmudic days greater stress was laid on the pleasant and humble traits of the "Shaliach Tsibur" - Hazzan, upon his pious character and upon his thorough acquaintance with the literature, with the period of the Payetanim (composers of the Piyutim), the qualities of his sweet voice and musicianship were emphasized. (B. Taanith, 16-a) Thus Hazzanut gradually became a field for specialists. (13)

Although originally most of the Hazzanim were laymon, carning their livelihood in diverse fields, they gradually assumed other religious and communal duties. They taught children, took care of the synagogue, officiated at weddings, wrote the scrolls of the Law, read the Torah, were slaughterers, preachers and messengers of the Jewish Court of Law. With the Renaisance they discarded most of these functions and narrowed their field of activity until their sole task was that of the conduct of the Synagogue Service.

These men were the guardians of our ancient musical heritage. They watched zealously over the musical traditions of the past and they enriched this heritage with melodic adaptations, with original tunes, with the enthusiasm of their talents and with the offerings of their hearts.

Since, after the destruction of the Temple, the use of all instrumental music was abolished, the prayers of the Hazzan replaced the function of the officiating Priest, of the Levites and the Temple orchestra. Of all instruments only the musically limited Shofar remained, to arouse the people to penitence.

(See muscial illustration No. 2 at end)

# The Synagogue Modes

An examination of the musical literature of the Synagogue reveals that the bulk of it may be divided among a number of distinct Modes (scales). The number of these Modes (scales) is, according to Idelsohn, eight. Others, such as Singer, Friedman, Sparger and Kaisor, would limit these Modes to three. These three Modes, the 1) Mogen Obos; 2) Adoncy Moloch; 3) Ahavoh Raboh or Hedjaz (Arabic), correspond to the following three scales. (14)

(See illustration Nos. 3, 4 and 5)

<sup>12)</sup> D. Ackerman, "Der Synagogale Gesang"; "Die Judische Literatur" Vol. 3, p. 499

<sup>13)</sup> I. Elbogen, "Der Judische Gottesdienst in Seiner Geshichtlichen Entwicklung", p. 489; S. Krauss, "Synagogale Alterthumer".

<sup>14)</sup> M. Bernstein, "Muzikalisher Pinkes" adds another so-called "MiShebeirach" Mode similar to the Ukrainian scale.

What is characteristic of these scales is the fact that none of them has a leading note, i.e., there is a whole note between the seventh and eighth steps of the scale instead of a half note; (lecturer play on piano).

In the second scale, the third note (f) is usually natural if it occurs above the octave. The seventh (c) is usually sharp, if it is below the tonic.

## (See illustrations 6 to 10)

In the third scale, the sixth (b) is natural if it occurs below the tonic. Occasionally, the seventh (c) is raised. Often more than one Mode is employed in the singing of one musical selection. (15)

(To the lecturer: These technical explanations may be ommitted, but the scales should be played several times or sung.)

Traditional or Scarbove (Sacra) (16) Melodies.

In addition to these Modes we have a great number of prayers that have their own specific melodies. Among the best known in this group are the Mol Midrei, Oleinu (for Rosh Hashono), the Avodoh (for Yom Mippur), the prayers for Dew and Rain (Ceshem and Tal), Eli Zion (Tisha Beov), the melodies for Maoz Tsur, Addir Hu, Ledovid Boruch, etc.

Some of these melodies, like the Eli Zion, Maoz Tsur, Lecho Dodi for Sefira may be traced to foreign sources. (17) Hazzanim often "borrowed" tunes from street singers, military bands, dance orchestras, and wandering jugglers and sometimes directly from the church. Most of the Rabbis opposed these adaptations; many, however condoned it unless it was used in church service. (18) Most of these tunes, however, seem to have their source in the ancient, probably Palestinian past.

(See illustrations No. 6 through No. 21. Any of these may be chosen to illustrate this section of the text)

The same ingeniousness the Jew has shown in varying the Tropes according to the particular Book of the Bible, he has manifested in applying different melodies to the same text on different days of the year. Thus the Kaddish, for example, is intoned differently at almost every service.

## (See illustration No. 22)

- 15) See Berosh Hashanoh as transcribed by Scheurmann
- 16) Scarbove these tunes were sanctified and were considered sacred melodies or scarbove (a corruption of the Latin sacra). They were also called missinal tunes which means "received by Moses on Mt. Sinal".

(SEE IDELSOHN JEWISH MUSIC P. 136)

- 17) Idelsohn, "Jewish Music" Chap. VIII; Saminsky, "Music of the Ghetto and the Bible", p. 170.)
- 18) Ackerman, Pp. 512-514.

For centuries these modes and melodies were transmitted orally by the Hazzanim. As was inevitable, in every land of extended sojourn, they assumed a bit of the flavor of the local national song. Thus, in Western Europe the slower, measured, stately, major melodies were more popular. In the Ukraine, Poland, Bessarabia, on the other hand, the florid, plaintive, lyric, minor songs were loved. The closer the synagogue was to the East, the more did its music retain the old, free, unrythmic, coloratura-embellished qualities.

### Hazzanic Virtuosos

In the 18th Century, geniuses of Hazzanuth arose in Eastern Europe who frequently, with most meager musical knowledge but with innate musical feeling, Jewish sentiment and fiery temperament scaled the heights of musical phantasy. Their choirs, consisting of the best the ghetto had to offer, followed the improvisations of the cantor with instictively felt harmonies, often in four parts. A bass was often required to improvise on the spot, a sort of prologue or overture before the selection proper, and it was not unusual for the alto to accompany the newly improvised tune of the cantor a sixth below on the scale, or for any member of the choir to join in the singing of the original melody. Legendary fame was attached to the names of these masters of Hazzanuth. With awe and humble affection were pronounced the names of Dovidl Broder (1783-1848), Itzigel Kanarik (middle of the eighteenth century), Shlomo Kashtan (1781-1829), Bezalel Odesser (ca. 1790-1861), Sender Minsker (1798-1869), Wilnaer Balbeisil (1816-1850), Yeruchom Hakoton (1798-1891), Nissi Belzer (1824-1906), Zeidel Rovner (1856-1943?). Unfortunately there is very little left in print of the compositions and masterly improvisations of these masters. Israel Lowy (1773-1832) also known as Israel Glogow is credited with introduction of the first modern choir in Paris in 1822. (10)

# Early Reform Synagogue Music

The writing down of music and the establishment of regular fourpart choirs originated in Western Europe. There the study of music
gradually penetrated into Hazzanic ranks and we soon find musically
trained men who notate, compose, and collect compositions for the
Synagogue. Among the first of these were the Cantors Ahron Beer,
1738-1821, of Berlin, who collected over twelve hundred compositions;
Meier Leon, the composer of the famous Yigdal tune who later became
the opera singer Leoni in London (d. 1800); Yekel Singer or Yekel Bass
(end of eighteenth century) of Prague; Abraham Singer of Prosnitz
(d. about 1780); Sholom Friede (1783-1854) of Amsterdam; Joseph Goldstein
of Oberlauringer a. M. (toward end of eighteenth century) and finally
Loew Sanger (1781-1843) of Munchen.

#### The Great Masters

Up to this time the type of service in the Synagogue depended only on the ability and knowledge of the Hazzan, for the modes and melodies traditional as well as recent, were not written down and their acquisition was an oral art, not always with the most artistic results.

<sup>19)</sup> For biographies of these and others who follow, see articles of Author in the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia.

It was no wonder, then, that the founders of the Reform movement desired to abolish entirely the sing-song, and the formless chanting of the unmusical precenter. But too strongly was Hazzanuth imbedded in the Jewish past to have it abolished in a moment of history. The reaction against extreme reform brought about the, perhaps, most glorious chapter in the development of Synagogue music. Cantors and choir leaders schooled in the rudiments of occidental musical theory and counterpoint, and at the same time thoroughly versed in the ancient modes of our liturgy composed Synagogue music in modern form, harmonized according to Western harmonic laws. Hazzanim with sufficient musical and scientific background collected and wrote down the traditional melodies once and for all. These became the standards in reform synagogues for all cantors to follow.

In the first rank of these modern composers belong Solomon Sulzer (1804-1890) who was the first to write a complete annual service, with solos, choral numbers, and responses in modern form. He brought order in the hitherto chaotic profession. Louis Lewandowsky (1821-1894) following in his footsteps and at times even exceeding him in fine harmonizations and melodiousness. He also raised the lowly status of the recitative, once the foundation of Synagogue music to a noble art. Samuel Naumbourg (1813-1880) introduced the lyric strain into the Service, Hirsch Weintraub (1811-1882) transformed the East European Hazzanuth in West European garb. E. Gerowitch (1844-1913) fashioned Jewish harmonies for the Jewish Prayers, and finally that unsurpassed master of Synagogue music, David Nowakowsky (1848-1921) blended the ancient Hebraic melodies with the modern fugue and counterpoint. Of great importance are the collections of traditional melodies for the liturgy of Maior Kohn (1802-1857) Moritz Deutsch (1818-1894), Max G. Lowenstamm (1814-1881), Abraham Baer (1834-1894), E. A. Aguilar (1824-1904), and David de Sola (1796-1860), J. and M. Cremieu, M. Wodak (1832-1902); A. Z. Idelsohn (1882-1938) and I. Lachman (1838-1900).

Among the most renowned European composers for the Synagogue are Dunayevsky, Birnbaum, Friedman, Goldstein, Abras, Kirschner, Henle, Rubin, Rose, Hast, Mombach, Alman, Rozowsky, Schorr, Bachman and Berkowitz.

#### The United States

During the past 25 years, the outstanding musical compositions for the Synagogue were written in the United States. Among these composers are: Joseph Achron, A.W. Binder, Ernest Bloch, Julius Chajes, Dymont, Geishon Ephros, Isidore Fried, Fromm, Grauman, Max Helfman, Frederick Jacoby, Pinkus Jassinowsky, Katchko, Low, Lazare Saminsky, Mark Silver, Stark, Chemyo Vinawer, Jacob Weinberg, and Zavel Zilberts.

Of great value are the volumes of recitatives published in the U.S.A. by the cantors Rosenblatt, Kwartin, Zemachsohn, Weisser, Wassilkowsky, Chagy, Halpern, Semiatin, Ancis, Charloff and others. Music for congreational singing may be found in the volumes of Samuel Goldfarb, Goldenberg, Jacob Weinberg, Colia Adler, Moshe Nathansohn, Coopersmith, and Max Wohlberg and the late Jacob Beimel.

#### The Future

Notwithstanding the scattered gems of these men, the state of music in the American Synagogue is deplorable. The music utilized is mostly banal, often in improper mode and style. The singing is too often theatrical. Responses, hymns, organ, selections, wedding music, often have no bend with Jewish music. Aside from the Shema, Ki Mitsiyon of Sulzer, the En Keloheinu of Freudenthal, the Aden Olom of Corowitch and the traditional Hashiveinu and a few other prayers there is little congregational singing.

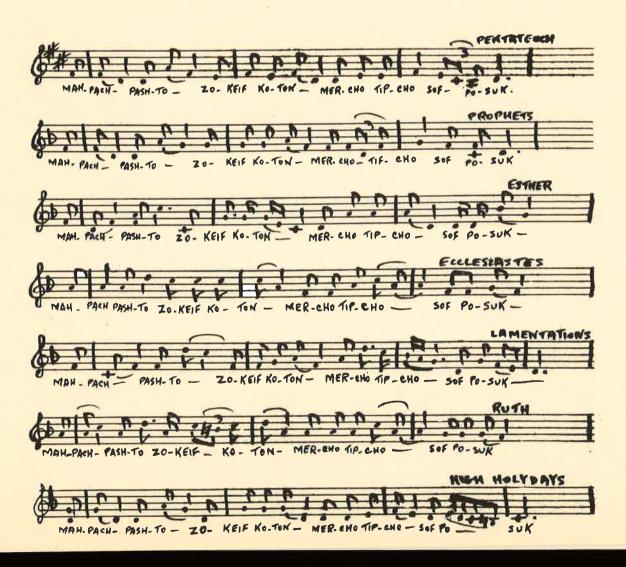
# (See illustrations Nos. 23, 24 and 25)

This situation is, without doubt, the result of not having at this late date, an established academy for the training of cantors and choirmasters, where courses in Jewish musical literature would be given to those whose talents, properly nourished could bring about a glorious epoch in the history of our Synagogue and its music.

With a more sympathetic and enlightened view on the part of our lay leaders, with the understanding and the good will of Rabbinic institutions and with the help of our Cantors, Choirmasters and composers, the greatest of whom, both in number and quality, are in America, we may hope to establish a Synagogue Service worthy of the prayers to which the music is composed.

NAMES OF THE HEBREW ACCENTS.

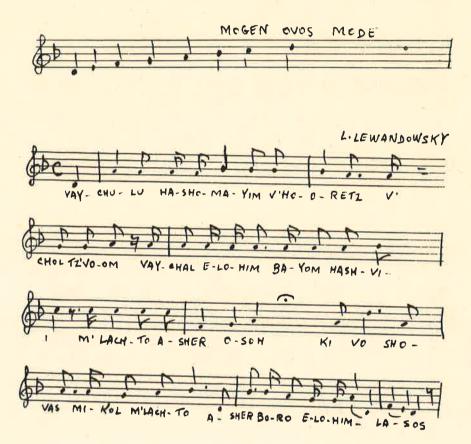
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### ILLUSTRATION NO. 2



#### ILLUSTRATION NO. 3



### ILLUSTRATION NO. 4





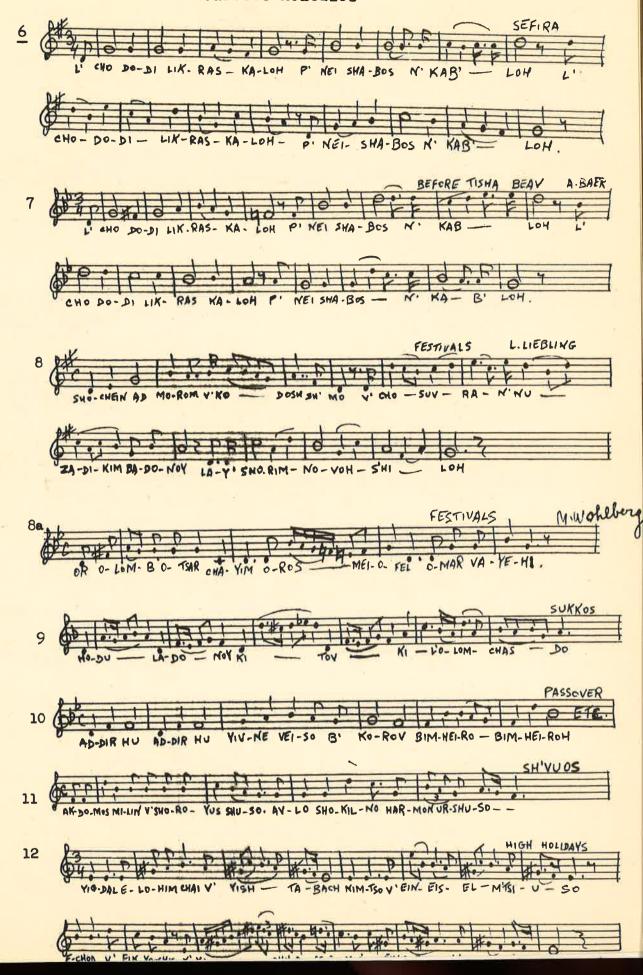




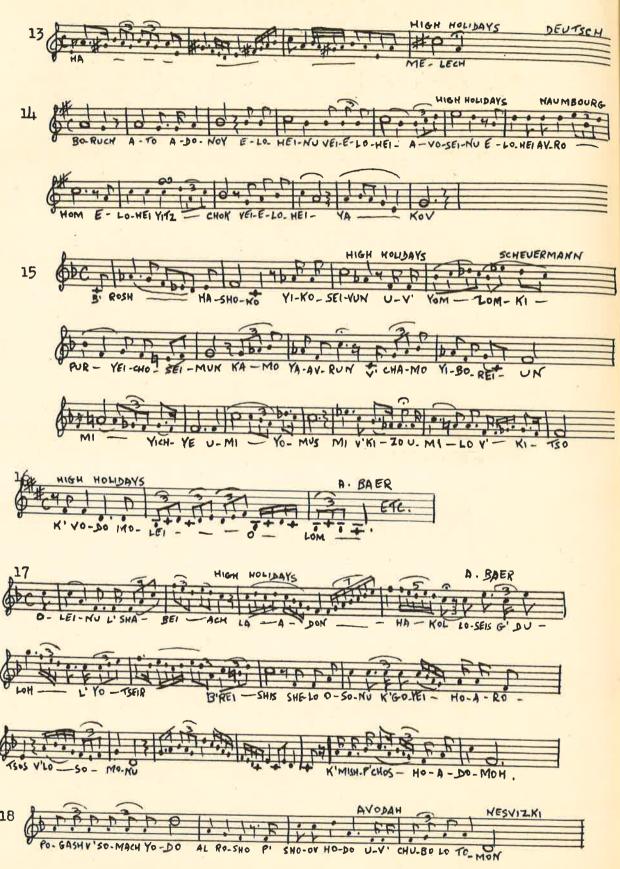




#### Scarbove Melodies



### Scarbove Melodies (continued)



LLUSTR NO. 22

No. 23



ILLUSTRATION NO. 20

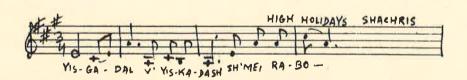


ILLUSTRATION NO. 21



YISGADAL MELODIES





LLUSTRATION No. 22 b



ILLUSTRATION NO. 22 c



ILLUSTRATION NO. 22 d

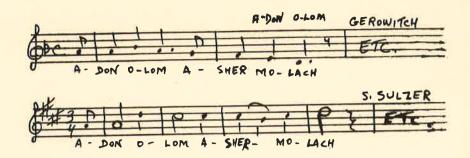


ILLUSTRATION NO. 22 •



ILLUSTRATION NO. 22 f





### ILLUSTRATION NO. 24



### ILLUSTRATION NO. 25

