The Music of David Nowakowsky (1848-1921): A New Voice from Old Odessa*

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The great triumvirate of nineteenth-century Jewish synagogue composers, Salomon Sulzer, Louis Lewandowski, and Samuel Naumbourg, are generally acknowledged as having reinvigorated polyphonic music for the synagogue. Their style, based on features of Protestant church music, established a model for Jewish worship until after the middle of the twentieth century. It is still held to be "the Jewish tradition" in some quarters, a belief that has cast other synagogue composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into shadow. One of the great losses of that obscuration has been the Russian composer David Nowakowsky, whose compositional approach wedded East European *chazzanut* with the harmonic language of Western Europe and merged the vocal pyrotechnics of the solo cantor into an elegant choral texture.

Although he was acclaimed during his lifetime by leading figures in Russian music and literature, recognition of Nowakowsky has flagged since his death in 1921. There are a number of reasons why his music seems to have been overlooked, none of them having much to do with the music itself. Circumstances seem to have conspired almost willfully to keep the music from public view. Smuggled out of Russia into a vacuum of silence, then buried for safekeeping from the Nazis, his scores were lost for almost two generations. When the manuscripts finally came to light after the Second World War they attracted little attention at first because of the enthusiasm for quasi-folk style guitar songs that characterized so much Jewish music in the latter half of the twentieth century. The music came to rest in several different places, then tentative plans for a complete edition had to be deferred because of an institutional fire that, while not directly involving the manuscripts, siphoned away funds planned for their publication.. Only in recent years have people had occasion to look at his compositions, and the judgments, though still few, have been consistently favorable. As young Americans who grew up on youth movement tunes reach maturity, there is a slowly increasing interest in music with greater depth than unison melodies. It may be, then, that time has finally come for Nowakowsky's reclamation into the all-too-small body of polyphonic Jewish liturgical composers.

The progression of his compositions from Odessa to New York and Los Angeles is a dramatic story, virtually a film scenario. It features a highly regarded composer who died

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in poverty, a dauntless heroine who smuggled his music out of certain destruction in Russia directly into the jaws of the holocaust, a family's terrified flight from the Nazi annihilation machine, burial of the scores for safe-keeping, then their recovery in the years following WWII and the music's modern resurrection in the United States. It is a romantic tale worthy of a Romantic composer, and the musical reward at the end makes the game well worth the candle.

I was first introduced to Nowakowsky's music in a 1993 conversation with enthusiast Ron Graner, of Toronto. I looked up the composer in the most obvious places: *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* and found nothing. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* had a brief, sixteen-line article[1] that was more than covered by Graner's typescript. Brief mentions could also be found in *Lebensbilder Berühmter Cantoren* (Friedman 1927), *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (Idelssohn 1929) and *The Music of Israel* (Gradenwitz, 1996), but those were only minimally informative and, to a great extent, redundant. After continuing for a time with other projects that were already on my plate I returned to Nowakowsky in 1999, and was happily able to able to arrange several meetings with the composer's descendants in Los Angeles during the summer of 2000.

Nowakowky wrote in a post-Mendelssohnian vein that, at first hearing, does not sound too different from the "traditional" synagogue music of the late nineteenth-century masters most Jews grew up with. On closer acquaintance, though, I found it increasingly individualistic, and will try to convey some of my attraction to it here. Acquaintance with the composer's background will provide better understanding of his intention and may move you, as it did me, to hear this music in a different light. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl once wrote that "A society develops its music in accordance with the character of its system,"[2] and it is clear to most observers that one cannot fully understand any music without understanding the society for which it was created. That, of course, is one of the rationales for the study of music history, and it embodies an approach particularly applicable to Nowakowsky's case, for this Russian-born Jewish composer set both liturgical and secular texts in German as well as Hebrew, annotated his music using the Roman alphabet rather than Hebrew or Cyrillic, and adopted the style of contemporary German colleagues rather than those of his own country. When one understands the cultural milieu of Odessa and its Brody Synagogue, the community in which Nowakowsky spent his entire professional career, the reasons for those apparent anomalies become clear.

Odessa

The city of Odessa was founded in 1794 as a trading outpost, a foothold mandated by Catherine the Great to consolidate her recent conquest of territory around the Black Sea from the Turks. In less than a century it became a robust, wealthy commercial center of nearly half a million people, the nucleus for export of Russian grain to Western Europe,

earning it the nickname "City of Wheat." During the early nineteenth century it played a role in Russian consciousness not unlike that of the "Wild West" of the United States. The area's population was swollen by a growing number of runaways and, after 1861, freed serfs. Not at first weighted down by an existing landed autocracy, Odessa developed a relatively open, capitalistic economy based primarily on the grain trade, but trade in flax, meat, tallow, hides, butter, and wax also became important. Foreigners were actively sought for residence, so the cultural influence of Western Europe was stronger there than in most of Russia's growing empire, and a free-wheeling capitalist economy gave the city a unique character. By 1839 more than 40,500 foreign colonists lived in Kherson Province alone, and by the early 1840s Odessa's foreign traders were responsible for almost a quarter of Russia's exported grain.

Great Russians, Little Russians, and Byelorussians made up the bulk of this population, but many Greeks, Poles, Germans, Italians, and French came, as did Albanians, Moldavians, Armenians, Tatars, and Bulgarians fleeing from the Turks. And, migrating by the hundreds from their villages and towns in hopes of a better life, the Jews also came. It was these people, with their skills, trades, and professions, who mingled, worked, traded, and together created the city. In the first year the population tripled, and by mid-nineteenth century Odessa was Russia's third largest city, its chief center of grain export, and the true capital of the Ukraine.[3]

Jewish Life in Odessa

Such a situation was, if not entirely hospitable, at least less inhospitable to Russia's persecuted Jews than the metropolitan centers of the north. In 1794 the city's Jewish population numbered 240, accounting for 10% of the total population.[4] Jews played an important role in the city's history, even participating in the municipal government, hardly a normal circumstance elsewhere in the country. In Odessa's first election (1796), Meir Elmanovitch was one of ten elected to administrative posts. Not much is known, though, about the earliest Jewish settlers. An influx of "enlightened" Galician Jews (*maskilim*) in the 1820s provided the first organized *kehillah*, leading many to assume that they were the first Jewish settlers, "an assumption that those self-confident, often wealthy settlers themselves helped to foster."[5] A ghetto did not exist as such, although there were "more-Jewish" and "less-Jewish" neighborhoods. That housing mixture, especially prevalent among the considerable upper classes of Jews, offered some slight protection against the pillage and burning of entire Jewish districts in the pogroms that sporadically swept through the city following an especially "effective" Easter sermon.

Russian officialdom did not always discourage such expressions of religious zeal:

> During these scenes of carnage and pillage [the pogroms] the local authorities have stood by with folded arms, doing little or nothing to prevent the occurrence or recurrence, and allowing the ignorant peasantry to remain up to this day under the impression that an

> ukase existed ordering the property of the Jews to be handed over to their fellow-Russians."[6]

The writer notes in the next sentence, though, that "this charge was quite incorrect in regard to Odessa." In an oppressive society under anti-Semitic rule, Odessa was far from the worst place to be a Jew. It was not that the city did not suffer from the anti-Jewish riots that periodically blighted Jewish life in Russia; but rather that the authorities, sometimes in opposition to their own feelings, made some attempt to restore order when such violence did break out, as the actor Jacob Adler recounted in his own upper-middle class family's experience.[7] Modern and liberal though Odessa might be, it was still Russia, whose press justified the vicious pogroms of 1881-82 by writing, "It must be acknowledged that in Slavonic countries the Jew does not exhibit of his race in an admirable form. He obtrudes his nationality as Jewish rather than Russian in dress and manners."[8]

Another element in the official attitude towards Odessa's Jews in the nineteenth century was the strong identification much of the community felt with the winds of liberalism sweeping through the rest of Europe. Revolutionary talk—and action, after the fateful year 1848—was sweeping Europe. Under the influence of the *haskalah*, the "Jewish enlightenment" movement that had its roots in German culture with Moses Mendelssohn at its head, many pointed to the examples of France and, however grudgingly, England, to argue that full civil rights should be extended to Jews. The Jews of Odessa seemed, as a group, too tainted with liberal views to be viewed with comfort by reactionary elements. Following the pogroms that accompanied the 1905 revolution, portrayed by Sergei Eisenstein in his classic film, *The Battleship Potemkin*, the Jewish community was charged with having brought disaster on itself by "playing a dominant role in the revolutionary movement,"[9] and the chief of police charged them with attempting to establish "their own Tsardom."[10] In spite of that, a tradition of Jewish participation in municipal affairs remained alive in Odessa, even as vicious anti-Semitic campaigns that resulted in sadistic persecutions in the northern territories were launched first by forces inside the government, then later by the government itself. From the 1860s through the 1880s, the leader of Odessa's Jewish *kehillah* (community) also supervised the city's financial affairs. In 1863, thirty-seven of the seventy-five members of its *duma* (assembly) were Jewish.[11]

Odessa had an ambiguous reputation among Russian Jews. On the one hand, it was viewed as a place of opportunity, receptive to Jewish settlement, undeveloped and open enough that possibilities for financial and social advancement were there for the taking—even for Jews. It was endowed with a gentler climate than the great cities of the north, and offered all the blessing of a wealthy, well-designed urban environment: theater, opera, educational institutions, fine restaurants, and synagogues of every stripe. The reverse side of that coin, though, was its reputation for "chewing up poor Jews and spitting them out," and for being a hotbed of hedonism, temptation, and atheism. One well-worn caveat among Russian Jews was, "*Zibn mayl arum Odes brent der gihenom*" ("The fires of Hell burn for seven miles around Odessa"), and in Yiddish, overly glamorous women of high fashion were

scornfully called "*odesere levones*" ("Odessa moons"), with the implication that they were no better than they had to be. For Jews, Odessa did not have the attraction of a great Eastern European center of Talmudic scholarship such as Vilna. Its attributes were economic opportunity, social freedom, and liberal thought.

The last of those was perhaps the most unsettling to many Jews of the Russian pale. The Jewish community of Odessa "was more acculturated than Russian Jewry as a whole."[12] In the latter half of the nineteenth century Odessa was Russia's greatest hotbed of *maskilim,*" admirers of the social and religious programs advocated by their German-speaking brethren. Later, continuing that tradition, it would become a principal center of Zionist agitation. Russia's only Yiddish newspaper, *Kol Mevasser* ("Voice of the Herald"), as well as its most important Hebrew paper, *Ha-Melits* ("The Advocate"), were both published there by Alexander Tsederbaum.

While musicians had long been at the bottom of the social order, that attitude was primarily directed at instrumentalists who played light music for community celebrations: the *klezmorim*. In Odessa, the town's *klezmorim* generally lived in the Moldovanka section, best known as a neighborhood of thieves. Singers, on the other hand, were generally held in higher regard as a class, and synagogue singers—with *chazzanim* at the top of the pyramid—enjoyed great respect. As choral director and assistant *chazzan,* Nowakowsky was accepted into the city's cultural elite, where he was well regarded for his talent and native intelligence. Odessa was home to outstanding Jewish intellectuals, many of whom were among Nowakowsky's circle of personal friends: poets Shaul Tchernikovsky and Chaim Nachman Bialik, writers Mendele Mocher Sefarim, Ahad Ha'am, Leon Pinsker, and Sholem Aleichem, and historian Simon Dubnow to name only a few, and could claim as native such expatriate figures as Jacob Adler (1855-1926), one of the most influential actor-producers of Yiddish theater in Russia, England and later, the United States. While the motherland of these *maskilim* was Russia, their lodestar was the country of enlightenment, of culture, and of learning: Germany.

Music was much in evidence among manifestations of German culture that marked the life of Odessa. Society's principal entertainment was the opera, which attracted all those who could afford tickets, not excepting the Jews, who mingled freely in the audience. Love for the opera formed a bond that brought together a broad cross-section of the many different ethnic groups of the city, a pleasure that gave them common ground for conversation and enthusiasm without necessitating close social intercourse. Steven Zipperstein writes:

> Local Jews, even those who had no knowledge of foreign languages, found the opera enjoyable, and for the mere price of a ticket (tickets were priced quite low) they could appreciate a sense of belonging to, and participating in, the larger cultural milieu. . . . Jews flocked to the opera house and were said to nearly monopolize its seats. . . . Even Jews with sidecurls attended.[13]

Of course, old prejudices were not cast aside quite as easily as that picture seems to imply. Russian socialites complained in the 1840s that Jews "ruined the performances by their unseemly fervor after every scene and for every singer."[14] For all that, such complaints bore witness to active Jewish support for the opera and other musical performances. Jewish instrumentalists played in the orchestras and synagogue choristers sang in the opera chorus.

Jewish musicians had played no visible role in Russian music until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Jewish-born brothers Anton and Nicolas Rubenstein founded the country's first conservatories. Anton had begun the Russian Musical Society in 1858 and with the support of the Tsar's sister-in-law, Helena Pavlova, opened the country's first music conservatory at St. Petersburg in 1860, bringing some of the best professionals in Europe to the faculty. Many of them were Jewish, such as the great cellist Karl Yulievitch Davidov, Europe's leading violinists, Henryk Wieniawski and Leopold Auer, and pianist Theodor Leschetizky.

Over the next century, though, Jewish musicians would play a major role in the development of Russian music, and Odessa was not left out. As much as anything else the city became famous for its Jewish violinists, giving birth to a whole string of major international concert artists such as Mischa Elman and, in the next generations, David Oistrakh and Julian Sitkovetsky. That identification was so well known that a joke was told about the Soviet and American cultural attachés during the cold war, one of whom was trying to convince the other that an exchange of artists would be beneficial to both countries. "You send us your Jewish violinists from Odessa," one is supposed to have said to the other, "and we'll send you our Jewish violinists from Odessa."

Jewish Liturgical Music in Odessa

Little wonder, then, that music, and specifically German music, came to play so great a role in Odessa's Jewish worship service. In addition to a number of smaller, more traditional synagogues catering to the orthodox sector of the community, there were two large synagogues in Odessa that viewed themselves as more liberal: The older, more established *Bet knesset ha-gadol* (Great Synagogue) and "The Brody." The Brody Synagogue was founded about 1840 by, as the name implies, immigrants from the city of Brody in Galicia, a town steeped in the *haskalah.* Those settlers felt a need to perpetuate their own cultural traditions with a separate institution from the established *Bet knesset ha-gadol.* Unlike the Great Synagogue, which was supported by a self-imposed Jewish community tax, the Brody was depended on members' contributions. In keeping with its avowed modernity, it ruled out the sale of *aliyot* and *mitzvot* as a source of institutional income. In spite of those seeming financial drawbacks, by 1863 the Brody was able to put up a splendid new building in Moorish style, replete with a central dome and gabled façades. The building was a public symbol of the *haskalah*, a visible assurance that this was a "modern" synagogue calling on Jews to embrace European (i.e., Christian) culture, though not to assimilate into it. The

service was Europeanized, too, so that it would conform to the expectations of the Gentile community in regard to decorum and presentation, and was streamlined by dropping the lengthy medieval *piyyutim* long featured in Jewish worship. When, in 1841, the celebrated *chazzan* Nissim Blumenthal was hired as cantor of the Brody Synagogue, a post he held until 1903, he was expected to write up-to-date four part compositions for the choir, as music "was maintained according to the model of German temples."[15]

Chazzan Blumenthal was responsible for the training of a choir made up of boy sopranos and altos, with adult men as tenors and basses. His own music was written with an eye to that of the great Jewish liturgical composers Salomon Sulzer (1804-90) in Vienna and Louis Lewandowski (1821-1904) in Berlin. As time went on the task of being soloist, composer, organist, and conductor grew too arduous, and after twenty-nine years of that grueling assignment a brilliant young chorister, David Nowakowsky, was brought in from Berditchev to be his assistant. The assistant's function was to relieve Blumenthal of the most onerous of his tasks, rehearsing and disciplining the choir, so that the famous *chazzan* could devote himself entirely to singing and composing. As the years went on Nowakowsky's share of the work grew. He gradually took on the task of writing and arranging most of the music for the service, deferring to Blumenthal for the singing. However, Nowakowsky's musical ideas were not fully in agreement with Blumenthal's, and to the extent that he went his own way, public recognition by his mentor was muted.

Nowakowsky's Biography

Born in 1848 at Malin, Russia, near Kiev, David Nowakowsky fled from his home as a boy "on account of his stepmother,"[16] according to Binder. To this day his descendants preserve memory of the "wicked stepmother" who drove him out of the house at only eight years old. He went to Berditchev, where, while a choirboy in the choral synagogue, he studied music theory and counterpoint on his own. At Berditchev he studied traditional cantorial style with the highly-regarded *chazzan* Jerome *Hokoton*,[17] then later worked with Spitzberg, a protégé of Sulzer from Vienna. About 1869, when only 21, he was invited to Odessa as choirmaster and assistant to the brilliant chazzan Nissan Blumenthal at the famous Brody Synagogue.

Chazzan Blumenthal advocated musical acculturation in the form of a modern "Germanic" idiom for his synagogue. One of his steps in modernizing the service was the adoption of German classics such as Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus, from the Easter portion of *The Messiah,* to synagogue use, sung to the words of Psalm 113: *"Halleluhu: hallelu avdei adonai"* ("Praise the Lord, O servants of the Lord"). Such innovations met with approval in the community of *maskilim*, who saw in German art, literature, and above all, music, the greatest achievements of the human spirit. Nowakowsky did not reject that tactic, but took a more conservative approach to using German masterworks in the synagogue. One example of the difference between the two can be seen in the younger man's substitution of Hebrew

words for German in adapting Mendelssohn's Op. 91 setting of Psalm 98 for his chorus. Blumenthal supported his young assistant in the development of what would become one of Russia's outstanding choirs; but he also saw himself as the center of musical attention and his taste as the *sine qua non* for synagogue music, so he did not encourage Nowakowsky's compositional gifts. Still, the two worked together to make worship at the Brody synagogue a musical delight, and many non-Jews frequented the services just for the beauty of the music. By the time of the Russo-Turkish war (1877-78) the larger *Bet Knesset ha-Gadol*, responding to the pressure exerted by the musical program of the Brody synagogue, was forced to break with tradition by introducing organ music into the *Chanukah* service as the Brody had already done.

There is no better experience for a composer than to work regularly with performers. In the daily grind of choir rehearsals Nowakowsky learned a great deal about writing for voices, and even while working in the shadow of the great *chazzan,* developed a personal compositional style. At least one critic could not believe that the brilliant synagogue choir included "the same choristers who had performed so poorly the week before at the Odessa opera house."[18] The high quality of Nowakowsky's choral conducting led to concerts of liturgical, paraliturgical, and secular music being given at the synagogue in the style of the *Geistliche Konzerte* of the great European churches. Such non-liturgical occasions afforded the composer opportunity to experiment with obbligato orchestral instruments. He also developed an interest in weaving themes of traditional *chazzanut* into his polyphonic compositions, a technique that would become a hallmark of his style.

In 1891 Pinchas Minkowsly (1859-1924), "a first-class cantor and original writer,"[19] replaced Blumenthal as principal *chazzan.* Minkowsky, who was an educated musician, quickly realized the gifts of his music director, encouraged his interest in the melodies of traditional *chazzanut* (which was one of Minkowsky's own interests), and began to showcase his colleague's compositions at the Brody Synagogue. Minkowsky became an ardent advocate for the composer as well as a brilliant interpreter of his cantorial music, and much of Nowakowsky's music from that time forward was written with this *chazzan's* voice in mind. It was Minkowsky who first proclaimed Nowakowsky a genius, lauding the composer as such in his own autobiography of 1924. Nowakowsky, he wrote, "never resorted to 'lemonade music,' with cadenzas from Italian opera, as they do in America."

For some fifty years Nowakowsky's choirs were widely acclaimed for their excellence. During that time he also taught music at the Odessa Orphan Asylum as well as three other music schools, and later became a Professor of Theory and Harmony at the People's Conservatory of Odessa. His music was praised by leading composers of his day. Tschaikovsky, a close Moscow friend of the Jewish-born pianist-conductor Nicolas Rubenstein and a student of his brother Anton in St. Petersburg, is reputed to have said, "It is a pity that Nowakowsky did not devote his life to secular music. Symphonic music has lost a first degree talent."

The composer had five children: Leo, Solomon, Catherina, Rosa, and Dora. The order of their birth is not known to today's family members, and nothing is known of his wife. Of the five, one daughter, Rosa, whose married name was Arbeitman, was especially gifted, and became well-known as an organist herself. The title-page of Nowakowsky's *Gebete und Gesänge* bears a dedication to her, using her Hebrew name ("*Gewidmet meiner Tochter Rachel Arbeitman*"). Rosa, as we will see, was to play an important part in preserving her father's music after his death.

Around the end of the nineteenth century Nowakowsky became active in "The Odessa Committee," a politically-oriented group of intellectuals and literary figures that supported Herzl's Zionist movement and advocated resettlement of Jews in what was then Turkish-ruled territory. Because of those connections, and at the urging of members of the committee, he was asked to contribute an original musical setting of Naftali Herz Imber's poem *Tikvateinu* for the Fifth Zionist Congress, held in Odessa in 1901. By 1933 an Eastern European folk melody that had been popular since the late 1880s was adapted to that poem as a Zionist hymn. That was the version that became by default Israel's national anthem, *"Ha-Tikvah,"* at the founding of the state in 1948;[20] but Nowakowsky had earlier provided a far more sophisticated musical setting for Imber's poem.

He published only two books of compositions during his lifetime, under the half-punning designation *Shirei David* ("Songs of David"). The first was *Schlussgebet für Jom Kippur für Cantor Solo und Gemischten Chor* ("Closing Service for *Yom Kippur* for Cantor Solo and Mixed Choir," [Leipzig?]: s. n., 1895), and the second, *Gebete und Gesänge zum Eingang des Sabbath für Cantor Solo und Chor mit und ohne Orgelbegleitung* ("Prayers and Songs for Sabbath Evening with and without Organ Accompaniment," Leipzig: C. G. Roeder, 1901). Both have been republished under the editorship of A. W. Binder in the *Out of Print Classics Series of Synagogue Music* (New York: Sacred Music Press of the Hebrew Union College, [1955]). His music integrated traditional cantorial chants into polyphonic choral settings in the style pioneered by Salomon Sulzer.

There was no pension plan for retired choir directors of the Brody synagogue, and his last years were difficult. Synagogue members had discussed a concert for his benefit, but it never materialized. At the end of his *Gebete und Gesänge* appeared, in Hebrew, an "Important Announcement for Cantors, Gabbais, and all those who take an interest in Israelite Song," stating that a second part of the series *Shirei David* ("Songs of David") would soon be coming out "on good paper," but nothing seems to have ever come of it. Nowakowsky died ignominiously on 25 July 1921, "ill and in poverty. He lay in a cold room, deserted and poor."[21] On his obelisk tombstone in Odessa is inscribed a tribute from his friend, the Odessa-born poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, later Israel's Poet Laureate: "There are many stars in the heavens, but only one shines so brightly."

After Nowakowsi's Death

Such stories are legion in the history of music: a brilliant composer, rising from obscurity to renown and devoting an entire career to his art, only to be repaid late in life with the disregard of a fickle public and anonymous poverty at the end. But the end of Nowakowsky's life was not the end of his story. The city of Odessa, particularly its Jewish community, suffered greatly in the 1905 revolution. It was to suffer even heavier damage during the Bolshevik revolution, and at the time of Nowakowsky's death in 1921, was in a state approaching chaos. This may well have been the cause for the lack of assistance, or even attention, to the sad state of the composer's last days.

By 1924, in the midst of that bedlam, his musician daughter Rosa (Rachel) Arbeitman managed to smuggle many of his manuscripts to safety in, of all places, Berlin, ironically rescuing the music from what surely would have been total destruction during the coming Comunist anti-religious purges and the Nazi invasion. Rosa's daughter Sophia and her husband, Boris Zeltsman, were living at that time in Berlin, where Sophia had become a successful concert pianist. They took charge of the trunks of music, possibly with the hope of eventually publishing it; but there was little question of that at first because of the expense. As National Socialism rose to power that likelihood receded first to difficulty, then to mortal danger. Nowakowsky, though dead for almost twenty years, was identified as a proscribed composer of "*entartete Musik*" ("degenerate music") in the infamous *Lexicon der Jüden in der Musik,*[22] and possession of his manuscripts would have been cause for imprisonment and death.

Boris managed to hide their Jewish backgrounds by obtaining Rumanian passports, and in that way Sophia could continue to perform. In 1937, after failing to obtain documentation to enter either the United States or Italy, Sophia spirited some 3,500 pages of her grandfather's compositions to relatives in Strassbourg. By 1938 the family was scuttling back and forth between France and Switzerland on temporary visas. Sophia escaped to Switzerland in 1940, and managed to smuggle her young son, Alexandre, across the border in 1942, but her husband Boris was trapped with the trunks of music. Rather than abandon or destroy the music, he smuggled them along with all the family documents to Archamps, in Vichy France, where a French farmer buried them in two German ammunition boxes on the farm of a Christian family that had earlier given the family shelter under the aegis of Abbé Marius Jolivet (1905-64).

Alexandre recounted the chilling story of his family's escape from the Nazis from his home outside Paris in an interview of 1955. He revealed how they had managed to preserve trunks of his great-grandfather's compositions through seven years of terrorized flight. In 1946 Boris, who had engineered the salvation of Nowakowsky's music, returned to dig up the manuscripts, and in 1952 when Alexandre won a scholarship to study at Columbia University, he brought them to New York as a gift for his great-uncle Leo, the composer's son, who had Americanized his name to Novack. In 1955, at the time of the interview, the

entire collection of approximately 3,500 pages was presented to the Hebrew Union College School of Sacred Music in New York. A second, smaller collection of Nowakowsky manuscripts had been brought to the United States earlier by Isadore Geller, formerly the composer's second organist in Odessa. After immigrating to this country Geller became the organist of the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City from ca. 1920 to 1952.

In 1988 The David Nowakowsky Foundation was established by the composer's grandchildren, David Novack (now deceased) and his brother Jack. The foundation has as its sole purpose the editing, publishing, and performance of their grandfather's music. Noreen Green, a musicologist who took interest in the composer and wrote her doctoral dissertation on him, also affiliated with the group. She has devoted a good bit of effort to the editing and performance of his work. Additional members of the foundation's board include Susan Songé (Secretary), Jerry Pollack, Gerald Caiden, David Lefkowitz, and Delores Novack. As of the summer of 2000 Donald Novack will be taking over the directorship of the foundation from his father, Jack. To date the Nowakowsky Foundation has arranged for the publication of twelve Nowakowsky compositions: *Adonai zecharanu, Al tal v'al matar*, two different settings of *Haskivenu*, *Kohanecha yilb'shu tzedek, Kol dodi, Mi chamocha, L'David mizmor l'Aadonai ha-aretz* (Psalm 24), *Lo lanu Adonai* (Psalm 115), *Shir hama'alot . . . lo yivneh bayit* (Psalm 127), and *V'shamru*. Three more are now in the process of publication: *R'tze vimnuchatenu, Tikvatenu*, and *V'eyarastich li*. All are published by Laurendale Associates of Van Nuys, California and edited by Noreen Green, except Psalm 115, which is edited by Roger Wagner.

As one of their first public acts the foundation produced a concert conducted by Roger Wagner in New York on 2 December 1989. Since then a number of concerts have been sponsored by the foundation in New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto. Cantor David Lefkowitz, of New York's Park Avenue Synagogue, has been an especially active advocate of Nowakowsky's music, as has musicologist Noreen Green, who is editing and overseeing publication of his music. The manuscripts presented to the Park Avenue Synagogue were at one point under the jurisdiction of the International Centre and Archive for Jewish Music in New York City, directed by Neil W. Levin. In the late Spring of 2000 all this material was transferred to the YIVO library in New York.

Nowakowsky's Music

Nowakowsky was a uniquely talented musician, but talent, as every good artist knows, is only a first prerequisite for professional achievement. Discipline, diligence in the shaping of inspiration into finished compositions, hard work in the daily grind of practice and rehearsal, study of the masters, and intimate knowledge of one's medium, are the ingredients of a composer's success. Nowakowsky was well grounded, if self-taught, in music theory, and as a choirboy from an early age, came to know the liturgy better than most people. He found his strength in writing music that wove themes from traditional *chazzanut*

into a mid-nineteenth century choral texture harmonized in four or more voice parts, employing all the techniques of romantic harmony and counterpoint to achieve what he felt was a truly appropriate Jewish liturgical music, originating in cantorial song rather than classics of European church, opera, and concert stage. Idelsohn calls him "the most Europeanized synagogue composer in the East,"[23] and indeed, the overall effect is often as much—or more—German than Russian. He makes use of Bachian cantata-like structures, employs contrapuntal artifices such as fugue, or more frequently, fugato, and often weaves the organ, and sometimes even orchestral instruments, into his compositions as independent contributions, not simply accompaniment or voice-doubling. As he became accustomed to the organ after its introduction into the Brody synagogue, his use of the instrument became increasingly skillful over the years. It is his melodic material and its harmonization, though, that is most strongly identifiable to modern ears as "Jewish," as it blends Eastern European characteristics with elements of traditional synagogue modes.

To reconstruct the forces for which this music was written, the choir of the Brody synagogue, as would be expected, was made up of men and boys, with boys singing the soprano and alto parts. Nowakowsky confirms this by marking short-score choral entries, in which the ambiguous treble clef is used for all but the bass voice, with the words "*Männer*" (men), "*Knaben*" (boys), or for full choir, "*Coro.*" A picture reprinted as the cover of a program for the dedicatory concert in Los Angeles[24] shows the *bimah* (stage) of the Brody Synagogue in Odessa with the cantor and his choir lined up facing the camera. At the left are fourteen boy sopranos in the front row, with another group of thirteen slightly older-looking boys, probably altos, at the right. Behind each row of boys stands a group of adult male singers. On the left are four men, on the right, five. If the choir was placed with the usual positioning of tenors behind the sopranos and basses behind the altos, one arrives at a choir of thirty-six male voices: 14 boy sopranos, 13 boy altos, 4 adult tenors, and 5 adult basses. That would produce a well-balanced sonority, taking into account the relative weight of mature men's voices to those of young boys. Add to that the presence of a professional organist (David Geller, at least in the last years) playing an instrument of late Romantic proportions, and one can picture a rich instrumental-choral sonority as the vehicle for Nowakowsky's music. In addition Nowakowsky wrote obbligato parts for violin and cello for concert performances at the synagogue (i.e., not within a worship service), or at the orphanages where he taught. He is known to have orchestrated at least one composition himself: *Al tal v'al matar* ("Let there be neither rain nor dew"), with text by Mendele Mocher Seforim (1835-1917), probably intended for use at the orphanage.

The Nowakowsky Foundation has spared little effort to make this music heard again, as it well deserves, and has underwritten a number of concerts of Nowakowsky's music in several major cities of the United States and Canada.[25] From a musicological point of view, the foundation may have taken an unfortunate step in commissioning orchestrations of the organ parts for many of the performances, probably partly in order to facilitate performance in venues where an organ was not available and partly to make the music more colorful for a

modern audience. Though well-intentioned, that may have been a disservice to the composer, as the orchestral accompaniment distances the music from its liturgical setting in most cases, and sometimes has the effect of devaluing, rather than ennobling, the music. Their logic may have been based on Nowakowsky's own use of instruments in paraliturgical circumstances, but the orchestrations add nothing of consequence to the music, and are often intrusive. A truer sense of the music might best be gained from its performance with the organ accompaniment conceived for it, and if possible, with the ethereal voices of boys, rather than women, singing the upper parts.

Nowakowsky's music employs a largely chordal texture for four or more voice parts with syllabic text setting for the choir, against which virtuoso solos for the cantor are projected like colored lights flashed on a neutral screen. The model for his choral style seems to have been the Lutheran chorale as filtered through the nineteenth-century secular men's choral songs of Zelter, Schubert, and Mendelssohn. Two generations after Sulzer and infused with Russian sensibility, Nowakowsky's music is more chromatic than his predecessor's four-square settings. It is a post-Mendelssohnian chromaticism that is more German than his Russian contemporaries, but more Russian than the Germans. One style feature that marks this music with individuality is the composer's use of conventional Romantic harmony in a way that mildly shakes the listener's sense of harmonic center. Though his tonality might hover unanchored for a brief moment here or there, the large-scale tonal movement always turns to a related key, maintaining the conventions, but with momentary, idiosyncratic departures from the expected.

Descriptions of a composer's harmonic language make for dry reading at best, but even so, it is worthwhile to look closely at Nowakowsky's harmony, because what might seem at first to be *gaucheries* turn out, on further acquaintance, to be consistent practices that impart a unique flavor to his compositions. His B-flat Major *Adonoy Moloch*[26] provides a good example. It opens *Moderato maestoso* with a grand explosion of sound from the full choir, *fortissimo*. Hearing those first ten bars is more attention-getting than one might expect from their conventional appearance in the score, for they leap so precipitously into unexpected regions that for a moment one loses the sense of what key the piece is in. The next cadence restores some sense of tonality, but it is followed by a surprising succession of chords called a "retrogression," one of the hallmarks of a quite different musical style: the blues. Only after the last two cadences re-establish the true key can the listener relax into the comfort of a solid tonal center. None of this steps outside the bounds of Romantic style, and the disturbances to the listener are quite minor; but they are distinctly present, and serve to make an otherwise formulaic statement striking. A slower, more contrapuntal section for the solo cantor follows, accompanied by choir, then plunges without transition into a new key where the voice of the chazzan is woven through the choir. The harmony gradually moves through a series of ambiguous modulations never entirely conventional, yet never straying far afield, until new thematic material is introduced, consisting of a dramatic fugue exposition. Another cantorial solo, echoed by the choir, leads to a closing section, first for

men's voices alone and then the full choir, ending with a cadence that has a church-like "amen" quality.

Thus Nowakowsky melded originality with harmonic predictability. The overwhelming impression is of a stolid pre-Wagnerian style more reminiscent of mid-nineteenth century German music than Russian. Yet within that predominantly German texture one finds certain "Russianisms"—quirks of individualism, if you will—that move the music's center of gravity East of Berlin and Vienna. Even when the harmony becomes momentarily obscure, it quickly returns to clarity and certainty, so it poses no problem to the listener's tonal orientation. An example of his harmonic writing can be seen in the *Hashkivenu No. 1* in A Minor,[27] which might be compared to that of Tschaikovsky. There is an especially lovely final cadence featuring the cantor solo hovering on a high a^1, *morendo* (dying away), above sustained chords in the choir on the final words, *me'ata v'ad olam* (now and forever).

Nowakowsky's "Processional for the High Holidays" for Organ confirms the nature of the liturgy at the Brody Synagogue. Merely to conceive a need for such a composition implies a non-traditional service, for in orthodox tradition the use of instrumental music in the synagogue is forbidden— unthinkable for the high holidays. If any gradations existed in that ban at all (and none did) the organ would have been the least acceptable of all instruments because of its long association with Christian worship. But it was precisely that association that made the organ so attractive an accoutrement to Odessa's *maskilim* in their ultimately futile drive to make Jewish practice more acceptable to their Christian neighbors. For this Processional Nowakowsky created a hymn-like texture comprised of regular two-measure phrases marking a dignified ritual entry for the principals conducting the service. The piece takes the shape of eighteenth-century Lutheran chorale variations on High Holiday motives, increasing in both chromaticism and polyphony as the music progresses. Traditional *Rosh ha-shanah* and *Yom kippur* motives are gradually brought to the fore, coming into play sequentially with such classical treatments as variation, fugue exposition, re-harmonization and free counterpoint. The music confirms its debt to church style in a final plagal cadence, the "Amen" formula of the Protestant hymn.

Psalm 115, "*Nicht uns, Herr"* ("Not for our sake, O Lord"), is one of the composer's largest compositions, numbering 382 measures. The eighteen verses of the Psalm are set in German rather than Hebrew, using a cantata-like structure that alternates between solo and choir. Its length, complexity, and use of the German all language suggest that it was not written for liturgical use, but for one of the concerts the composer was noted for giving at the synagogue. That may have been the rationale for the Nowakowsky Foundation commissioning an orchestration of the organ part for their introductory concert conducted by Roger Wagner.[28] This is one of Nowakowsky's most demanding compositions, employing tonal ambiguity, fugue, and some of his most chromatic writing in an extended, multi-movement dramatic cantata. For those seeking acquaintance with Nowakowsky's

music, this piece should be a high priority. A modern edition is published in its original version (for cantor, SATB choir, and organ) edited by Roger Wagner.[29]

Nowakowsky himself used instruments in his paraliturgical music for concerts at both the synagogue and the orphanage at which he taught. One such piece would have been his setting of *Psalm 24* ("The earth is the Lord's"), another large work (249 measures) featuring violin and cello with cantor, choir, and organ. In this piece Nowakowsky uncharacteristically wrote out the pedal voice of the organ in full, suggesting that it would have been more likely to have been played on the synagogue organ, which would have had a full pedal-board, than at the orphanage, which would have been less like to be so equipped. "*Al tal v'al matar* appears to have been composed for performance at the orphanage, as it was written for boys alone (SSA) with chamber orchestra accompaniment.[30] A setting of *Kol Nidre* for violin & organ is an arrangement of the traditional East European cantorial melody with the violin featured, concerto-like, in the role of *chazzan*. *Shehecheyanu* for Chanukah was written for accompanying violin, cello, and piano, with Baritone (i.e., cantor) solo. Nowakowsky's setting is intimate chamber music in the style of a nineteenth-century art song. The solo voice, supported by instruments, sings a through-composed melody in a lilting six-eight meter interspersed with instrumental interludes, perhaps recalling the structure of Psalms performed by the Levites in the days of the Temple.

Ribono shel olam (Lord of the Universe) was also crafted for concert rather than liturgy. Set in C minor with accompaniment for violin, cello, and piano, it is an effective dramatic solo cantata of some eight minutes in length. The format makes it doubtful that it was ever intended for synagogue use, but it would make an effective recital piece. The soloist soars up to a concert b-flat^1 at the climax, while at other points it descends to a baritone c, fully exploiting the wide range of a cantorial *heldentenor*.

Nowakowsky handles voices admirably, with sensitivity to their color and blend, so that in spite of an occasional surprising chord his music, which may have been challenging to the nineteenth-century choristers of Odessa, is well within the capabilities of any good modern synagogue choir. Ears that have heard Igor Stravinsky and George Crumb have nothing to fear from Nowakowsky. His melodies are suave and conventional within the nineteenth-century style, and generally flattering to the singer. He wrote his cantorial solos specifically for Minkowsky's heroic tenor, primarily using the range from written e^1 to a^2, with an occasional excursion as much as a tone higher. While his music demands a polished technique for the soloist, he displays the voice to good advantage, exploiting its high range with a careful balance between the endurance of the soloist and the drama of the text. One example of his sensitive vocal writing is the lovely setting of *Hashkivenu* in C Minor,[31] the second of two that he wrote, which features a lyrical baritone solo set against an a capella four-part choir that provides a quiet backdrop in a fashion evocative of Russian Orthodox church music. Another, perhaps more lyrical, illustration can be heard in his *Avinu Malkenu* for the closing of the Yom Kippur service. A more virtuosic treatment of the voice would be the last section of his *Hashkivenu No. 1*,[32] beginning at the words "*V'haser*

satan milfanenu. . . " ("Remove the adversary from before us"). Nowakowsky's cantorial effusions are, for the most part, less acrobatic and excessive than can be found in, say, Rosenblatt or Koussevitzky; but then, we do not know the extent to which Minkowsky improvised or elaborated on the written music.

Evaluation and Appreciation

A careful weighing of Nowakowsky's position in the history of synagogue music is long overdue. Binder, in his enthusiastic article introducing the composer to an American audience in 1928, wrote that he was "the greatest composer of music for the synagogue,"[33] and he seems to have been so regarded by many of his contemporaries. My own evaluation would not go quite that far. He is certainly a composer of merit, whose music richly deserves to be heard; but we should not allow justifiable pride and appreciation for his outstanding accomplishments to replace keen critical judgment. Nowakowsky is an admirable composer, but of the second rank: a Salieri, to be sure, but not a Mozart; Smetana, most certainly, but not Beethoven. That should in no way be construed as denigrating his admirable compositional gifts; however, it is important not to lose critical perspective.

For twenty-first century listeners his music suffers a bit from covering ground already plowed by his predecessors. Such over-familiarity is not the composer's problem, but the listener's. We have heard these sounds before, and for many, that precludes wanting to hear them again, which is a shame. In a way, Nowakowsky is the victim of his own success in saying so well what had already been said. Listeners who can hear this music afresh will find themselves well rewarded. "One of the great traits of Nowakowsky," wrote Binder, "was the fact that he was able to express the Jewish soul in harmonies that were truly Jewish . . . they glow with the radiant spirit which prevailed in the traditional synagogue."[34] A moving tribute, that, but one must observe parenthetically that Odessa's *Broder Shul* was hardly a "traditional synagogue."

The preceding descriptions are pallid substitutes for hearing the music, just as describing a banquet is an unsatisfying replacement for eating it. Still, they provide a portrayal of the musical experience, if not the experience itself. I hope that the frustration of trying to picture Nowakowsky's music from that portrayal will move some to seek out the music itself. To do so would be well worth the effort. The outburst of polyphonic composition for the synagogue liturgy that blossomed in the nineteenth century produced only a handful of really fine music when compared to the flood of magnificent compositions for the Christian liturgy in that same period. Only in the twentieth century did art music for the synagogue begin to come into its own in a way that musicians—and congregations—applauded. Whatever direction this movement takes in the future, it can only profit by looking to its past for strength.

David Nowakowsky was a composer with a rich, individual voice. His music—Russo-Germanic, Romantic, steeped in Jewish tradition and Jewish Enlightenment—was

conceived for the *maskilim* of Odessa and reflected their tastes as well as their religious practice. He spoke to the heart, employing solid musical craftsmanship that bore the mark of a particular time and place, with music that deserves our attention and appreciation today. In return, the discerning listener will be repaid with beautiful melodies, rich harmonies, intense passion, and deep religiosity.

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Notes

[1]Joshua Leib Ne'eman, "Nowakowsky, David," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), 12: 1243.

[2]Bruno Nettl, "Introduction: Studying Musics of the World's Cultures," *Excursions in World Music*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 11.

[3]Jacob Adler, *A Life on the Stage: A Memoir by Jacob Adler*, trans. with added commentary by Lulla Rosenfld (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 58.

[4]Steven J Zipperstein, The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 35.

[5]Zipperstein, 33.

[6]*The [London] Times,* "The Persecution of the Jews in Russia," No. 30 (11 January 1881): 401. Cited by John D. Klier in "The Times of London, the Russian Press, and the Pogroms of

1881-82," paper #308 of *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, ed. William Chase and Ronald Linden (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 7.

[7]See Jacob P. Adler and Lulla Rosenfeld. *A Life on the Stage: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 33-35.

[8]Klier, 4.

[9]Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 179. Weinberg is here quoting from a report on the pogroms by Senator Aleksander Kuzminski.

[10]Weinberg, 180.

[11]Zipperstein, 75.

[12]Zipperstein, 4.

[13]Zipperstein, 66.

[14] Ibid.

[15]Peretz Smolenskin, *Ha-toeh be-darkei ha-chayyim*, 4 vols. (Vienna, 1876), 4: 112; quoted by Steven J Zipperstein in *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 56.

[16]Abraham Wolf Binder, "A Forgotten Master," *The Jewish Tribune* (11 December 1928), 7.

[17]A note on transliteration: *Hokoton* here is the Ashkenazic pronunciation of *Ha-katan*: ("the small"). I have specifically retained the old spelling because that is the way one would find this name listed in historical discussions of *chazzanut*. Throughout this paper I have tried to use Ashkenazic or Sephardic transliterations of Hebrew words according to their original use; i. e., for modern words or translations, I have used the Sephardic. This approach was complicated, though, by the fact that Noreen Green's editions of Nowakowsky's music modernize the pronunciation, while his original scores use German spellings in the Roman alphabet for Ashkenazic pronunciations. By the same token, books and reference sources are not consistent in using one or the other, and romanized spelling of either is highly variable. The resulting spelling inconsistencies are (hopefully) not errors, but attempts to remain faithful to the sources.

[18]Program notes written when the Jewish Theological Seminary acquired some additional Nowakowsky manuscripts in 1979.

[19]Eric Werner, "Prolegomenon," *Contributions to a Historical Study of Jewish Music* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 11.

[20]It is, perhaps, worth noting parenthetically that, to this day, Israel has never formally adopted *Ha-Tikvah* or any other song as a national anthem. I am indebted to Israeli scholar David Halperin for calling my attention to Carl Schrag's article, "The Hope of a Wandering Poet: The Story Behind Israel's National Anthem" (*Israel Review* (Vol.21 No.2) April 1996,

Issued by the Embassy of Israel in Singapore), with this, as well as a great deal of other valuable information about the history of *Ha-Tikvah* previously unkown to me.

[21]Binder, 7.

[22]*Lexicon der Jüden in der Musik; mit einem Titelverzeichnis Jüdischer Werke* (Lexicon of Jews in Music, with a Title Index to Jewish Works) (Berlin: Nernhard Hahnfeld Verlag, 1940). This pernicious work was an icon of Nazi musicology, identifying Jewish musicians and their works for annihilation.

[23]Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1929), 308.

[24]"The Music of 'A Forgotten Master' David Nowakowsky," program booklet for the concert of 2 December 1989 at Royce Hall in Los Angeles, CA.

[25]Correspondence with Jack Novack, who served as president of the foundation until the summer of 2000, produced an envelope generously stuffed with material, including tape recordings of three of their concerts, which I happily added to another already in my collection. A meeting with the Novack family in Los Angeles was rewarded with seven of the scores published by Laurendale Associates and photocopies of several pages of the composer's manuscript along with bits and pieces of related material from a photocopy archive kept at the Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church. All of this was accompanied by my becoming acquainted with a delightful and dedicated group of people who understand that they are the repositors of a treasure of Jewish liturgical music.

[26]*Gebete und Gesänge*, 36-40

[27]Ed. Noreen Green (Van Nuys, CA: Laurendale Associates, 1995).

[28]The orchestration, in characteristic nineteenth-century style, is by Grieg McRitchie. It should be parenthetically noted that a scribal error at m.147 of McRitchie's MS score changes the title to Psalm 415, an error that appears on every page from that point forward.

[29]Van Nuys, CA: Laurendale Associates, 1998.

[30]The modern edition by Noreen Green (Van Nuys: Laurendale Associates, 1999) provides only a keyboard reduction, marked "Piano or Organ."

[31]Ed. Noreen Green (Van Nuys, CA: Laurendale Associates, 1995).

[32]*See Gebete und Gesänge, 46*. This is a different piece from the *Hashkivenu #1 in A Minor* mentioned previously.

[33]Binder, "A Forgotten Master."

[34]Ibid.