IN GEVEB A JOURNAL OF YIDDISH STUDIES

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PRAYER AND CRIME: CANTOR ELIAS ZALUDKOVSKY'S CONCERT PERFORMANCE SEASON IN 1924 POLAND

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Abstract: *In his published writings Cantor Elias Zaludkovsky established an identity as a conservative, castigating contemporary cantors for corrupting tradition through excessive commercialization and mediatization of sacred music. Cantors embracing populism and divorcing liturgical music from its ritual context, especially through making records, engendered an unregulated populist liturgical culture in which cantors served as entertainers, threatening to demean and degrade the hard-earned sense of dignity that professional cantors had struggled for over the course of the nineteenth century. Although Zaludkovsky condemned musical populism, he himself maintained an active concert career performing for a mass concert audience outside of synagogues. Through an analysis of press accounts of Zaludkovsky's concerts that he collected in his scrapbook, a nuanced picture emerges of the kinds of performance and music that Zaludkovsky valued and that he believed to constitute appropriate musical fields for a cantor to pursue. I argue that in his concert career Zaludkovsky walked a fine line between performing the sacred identity of cantor and falling into the forms of cultural crime that he himself had identified, addressing himself to multiple strands of the internally diverse Jewish community of interwar Poland while maintaining his commitment to cantorial ethics.*

"In a word—Singing had not only ceased to be an art form; it was also a crime."

—Elias Zaludkovsky[1]

This striking sentence is found in the first chapter of *Kultur-treger fun der idisher liturgye* (Culture Bearers of Jewish Liturgy), a collection of biographical sketches of leading cantors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Polish cantor and music critic Elias Zaludkovsky[2] (1888-1943). In the above quotation from his history of cantorial performance, Zaludkovsky highlights classical Rabbinical sources' restrictions on liturgical singing, but he could just as easily have been writing about his own assessment of his contemporaries. The association of sacred music with crime that Zaludkovsky draws in this passage reflects a lineage of Jewish critique of music as excessively sensual and sacred musicians as vulnerable to the temptations of secular music. A traditional interpretation of a passage in the Babylonian Talmud associates women's voices with sensuality and has been interpreted to forbid female voices from the synagogue,[3] but Jewish male singers have also been perceived as transgressing the dangerous divide between aesthetics and ritual in sacred music. Zaludkovsky saw himself as standing at an inflection point in the history of Jewish liturgical music, a moment when what he referred to as the "old patriarchal cantorial music"[4] was challenged by new forms of cantorial music that he believed threatened the sacredness of liturgical performance. Cantors (referred to in Hebrew as *hazzanim*, and in Yiddish, as *khazonim*) are synagogue prayer leaders who, until the mid-twentieth century when training institutes were established,[5] were qualified for their positions primarily by musical skill and basic Hebrew literacy, not by a system of ordination parallel to rabbis. The basis of the cantorial trade in artistry lends cantors a confusing status as vitally

[1] Elias Zaludkovsky, *Kultur-treger fun der idisher liturgye* (Detroit, Michigan, 1930), 4. All translations from the Yiddish are by the author.

[2] Zaludkovsky's name is transliterated into the Latin alphabet with a variety of spellings including: Zaludkowsky, Zaludkowski, Zaludkovski. His first name is also represented in variants including: Eliyahu, Elyohu, and occasionally anglicized to Elijah.

[3] Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 70a contains the passage "The voice of a woman is *erva,*" a term that has been translated as nakedness or licentiousness. Adin Even-Israel, Adin Steinsaltz, Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Shalom Zvi Berger, Joshua Schreier, and Rashi, *Koren Talmud Bavli = [Talmud Bavli]*, Jerusalem, Shefa Foundation, Koren Publishers, 2012

[4] Elias Zaludkovski, "*Der khazonisher matsev*," *Morgn Zhurnal*, November 17, 1926, YIVO Archives, RG 212.

[5] See Judah Cohen, *The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009, 34-40 for a historiography of American cantorial education; Geoffrey Goldberger, "The Training of Hazzanim in Nineteenth Century Germany," *Yuval* 7, 2002, 307–14, offers a history of cantorial training in institutions in the German context.

needed communal functionaries, but ones whose standing in the community is liable to speculation and condemnation on a variety of aesthetic and ethical grounds.[6]

Zaludkovsky castigated the work of his cantorial peers as representing a vulgar popular culture that embraced dangerous modern technologies. Zaludkovsky defined his musical commitments in opposition to the category *hefker* (wantonness), which he described as

> a cantorial culture in which one finds no trace of religious impression, and also no artistic form—a cantorial culture that sates itself with cold, ignorant, theatrical effects and in which eccentric gestures and clowning during *davenen* (praying) play a major role.[7]

Zaludkovsky worked in a context in which cantors were experimenting with new aesthetics and professional activities, including stage performance and making records. Critics of cantors — some of whom, like Zaludkovsky, were cantors themselves — sought to establish norms of professionalism. This proved difficult to achieve because of the diffuse nature of power in synagogue life and the commercial incentives towards performance outside of ritual contexts. Rather than rejecting performance outside of the synagogue entirely, Zaludkovsky constructed limits on the kinds of modernizations of the cantorate that he felt were appropriate. Beyond rejecting phonograph recording, the boundaries of his concept of cantorial propriety are on display in the choices he made in programming his concerts. His musical selections reveal an appeal to high minded musical aesthetics that were intended to protect his work from the demeaning influence of popular culture.

This essay is given shape by evidence drawn from a unique example of material culture that I found in Zaludkovsky's holdings in the YIVO archive in New York City.[8] Zaludkovsky kept a meticulous scrapbook of press clippings throughout his career, beginning in Poland in the first decade of the century and culminating with his pulpit positions as cantor of a prosperous synagogue in Detroit, in the United States in the 1930s. This leather-bound book is embossed in gold letter on the front cover with the words *Retsenzyes far 20 yor* (20 years of reviews), indicating that Zaludkovsky had the book professionally manufactured to hold the mementos of his concert and prayer leading career. The Zaludkovsky scrap book is a singular artifact of Jewish liturgical music history, offering a window into the working life of a popular Jewish artist.

My essay takes its cue from Zaludkovsky's curation of memory, foregrounding the aspects of his musical life that he believed to be especially valuable. I have embraced the narrow focus provided by Zaludkovsky's framing of his own experience as a welcome

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[6] See Leo Landman, *The Cantor: An Historic Perspective; a Study of the Origin, Communal Position, and Function of the Hazzan*, New York, Yeshiva University, 1972, 58-64; Mordekhai Shtrigler, "*Vi azoy darf oyszehn di moralishe geshtalt fun a khazn?*" *Di shul un di khazonim velt* 33/52 (July 1939).

[7] Elias Zaludkovski, "*Khazonim un khazones (tsu Pinchos Minkovski's ershte yortsayt),*" *Dos Naye Lebn*, Bialystock, January 23, 1925, YIVO Archives, RG 212.

[8] Elias Zaludkovsky, Archival holdings, YIVO RG 212, Center for Jewish History, New York City

guideline for this project.[9] The format of the scrapbook lends itself to selective memory—the narrow focus has its advantages towards writing a social history of cantorial concerts. A turn towards the use of "histories of the self" contained in individual life stories presents a unique window into the belief systems and social relations embedded in a moment in history, yielding testimony that a historiography grounded in published works may have overlooked.[10]

Zaludkovsky's scrapbook offers a picture of what he considered to be his successes and foregrounds the moments in his professional life that he believed to be of enduring significance. The reviews document well attended events and praise the beauty of Zaludkovsky's voice and his sophisticated musicianship. But the scrapbook reveals more about the culture of cantorial concerts than Zaludkovsky may have intended. What is surprising about his self-historiography is how broad a range of musical contexts he believed to be legitimate as representations of his professional identity as a cantor. While Zaludkovsky's writings present him as a conservative voice, an outspoken advocate for uplifting standards of ethics through an elitist aesthetic sensibility, his concert career offers a more varied picture of an artist who was willing and capable of negotiating a variety of musical forms. Flexibility was required in order to reach the diverse array of audiences representing the spectrum of Jewish political and social identities in interwar Poland.

The concert programs documented in the scrapbook demonstrate that Zaludkovsky reached his audience through multiple genres and forms of artistic self-representation that moved beyond the strict binary of sacred and profane he advocated for in his writings. In his cantorial criticism, Zaludkovsky presents an ideal of sacred music maintained in the sanctum of the synagogue and regulated by a high-minded aesthetic idealism. This ideal was constructed in opposition to recording star cantors, such as his better-known contemporary Yossele Rosenblatt (1882-1933). Rosenblatt, perhaps the most successful cantor of the era, pursued a career that unapologetically encompassed stage performance in vaudeville and popular recordings that drew on sounds of operetta and other popular music genres.[11] While Zaludkovsky does not mention Rosenblatt by name in his articles that decry immorality and vulgarity in cantorial music, his famed recording star colleagues are tacitly indicated.

Zaludkovsky's incriminations of his cantorial peers recalls contemporary debates in Yiddish literature and theater. Like cantors who set goals of protecting the aesthetic and spiritual legitimacy of synagogue music, Yiddish authors and theater artists sought to maintain boundaries between high art and *shund*, or lowbrow popular culture. There is a parallel of tone between Zaludkovsky's use of *hefker* and the more prevalent *shund*, a term of literary disparagement. For the Yiddish literary elite, attempting to create

[9] Choosing the Zaludkovsky scrap book as my framing device for this essay is also a matter of contingency and reflects the moment in which I am writing. I conducted the research that led to the writing of this essay in the summer of 2019 in the YIVO Archive, supported by the Joseph Kremen Memorial Fellowship in East European Arts, Music, and Theater. I expected to return in the summer of 2020 to continue my work. This proved to be impossible because of the closure of the archive due to the coronavirus pandemic.
[10] See Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).
[11] See Samuel Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt: The Story of His Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954).

modern Jewish art on a high level of aesthetic achievement was intended to project the legitimacy of Jewish culture, specifically in comparison to the various European national art movements emerging in the early twentieth century.[12] Zaludkovsky adds to anti-*shund* discourses a concern with preservation of the Jewish sacred and a sensitivity to the vulnerable doubleness of cantors as both artists and representatives of the intimate religious spaces of the community. Like his literary contemporaries, Zaludkovsky met serious challenges in maintaining the line between *shund* and high art in the arena of commerce.

Although his official stance, documented in his journalism and his book, may have required artistic and spiritual purity from cantors, in practice Zaludkovsky was implicated in some of the crimes he accused his contemporaries of committing. Concert performance, a commercializing and secularizing version of cantorial artistry, forced Zaludkovsky to define boundaries of taste and spiritual legitimacy as he sought to protect his standing as a purveyor of moral and spiritual uplift, while maintaining his connection to audiences. Zaludkovsky's concert programs reveal the challenges of balancing his imperative of moral uplift with the demands of addressing the diverse tastes and interests of a Jewish audience experiencing social change and shifts in communal norms on a vast scale.

In this essay I reference Yiddish press clippings from five dates in Zaludkovsky's concert schedule in 1924 that were included in the scrapbook. The dates I focus on are typical of the kinds of concerts that populated Zaludkovsky's performance landscape and represent the peak of his early period in Europe before emigrating to the United States. These reports offer a window into the cantorial circuit in Bialystok and Lodz, two major urban centers of the Jewish population. In concert and when conducting services as a guest "star" cantor, Zaludkovsky pivoted between aesthetic registers that appealed to images of modernity and traditionalism, moving between sonic worlds imagined as representative of the Jewish sonic past and present, and accessing the high culture forms of European classical and contemporary Jewish art music. Zaludkovsky walked a fine line, concertizing to mass audiences while maintaining allegiance to a conception of moral comportment derived from discourses of anti-populism and preservation of purity.

Cantor Zaludkovsky – an outline of a life in music

Born in 1886, Elias Zaludkovsky was raised in Kalish where his celebrated father, Noah Zaludkovsky, was cantor for many decades. There, Elias was "brought up in the traditional-national spirit" according to the biographical entry in the lexicon of musicologist Issachar Fater, the key memorialist of Polish Jewish music.[13] In addition to

[12] See Jolanda Mickute, "The Vilner Trupe, 1916-30: A Transformation of *Shund* Theater - For the Sake of National Politics or High Art?" *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2017), 98-135; Justin Cammy, "Judging The Judgment of Shomer: Jewish Literature versus Jewish Reading," in *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon*, eds. Justin Cammy, Dara Horn, Alyssa Quint, and Rachel Rubinstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 85-127.

[13] Isaschar Fater and Binem Heller, *Yidishe muziḳ in Poyln tsvishn beyde ṿelṭ-milḥomes* ` (Tel Aviv: Ṿelṭ-Federatsye fun Poylishe Yidn, 1970), 302.

the inherited cantorial legacy foregrounded by Fater, Elias was also involved with populist Yiddish theater, the very style of *shund* culture he would later come to excoriate in his criticism. In his early teens and into his twenties, Elias wrote music for local Yiddish theater troupes, sometimes adapting his father's liturgical compositions for the stage. A musical prodigy, he garnered early success at the age of twelve with his score for *Di royber-bande*, an operetta that played in Kalish for many seasons.[14] Zaludkovsky continued to keep one foot in the world of Yiddish theater, working as a choir director and composer for the stage as a side job while attending conservatory in Berlin. In his autobiographical sketch included in the cantorial lexicon he wrote, his successes in Yiddish theater are completely omitted.[15] Zaludkovsky's career trajectory followed a conventional cantorial path that encompassed a cantorial familial lineage, musical education and voice study in conservatories in Italy and Germany,[16] culminating in a celebrated career as a cantor, performer of European art music, pedagogue, and music critic in the Yiddish press.[17]

Zaludkovsky served as the cantor at the Sinai Synagogue in Warsaw from 1909-1913. This prestigious synagogue was known for its choir, a musical stylistic signifier that was adopted by synagogues of the economic elite.[18] Zaludkovsky later held prestigious cantorial positions in Rostov-on-Don, Vilna, Bialystok, and Lodz. He emigrated from Poland in 1925, first to England for a brief time, where he led services and concertized, and then to the United States in 1926. Zaludkovsky spent the rest of his career in the US, from 1926-32 serving as cantor of a large Conservative synagogue in Detroit, Temple Shaarey Zedek, as well as holding positions in New York and Pittsburgh, where he died in 1943.[19] Zaludkovsky's career illustrates the hectic heterogeneity in Jewish musical life. His work was driven by both commercial and aesthetic concerns; these sometimes conflicting motivations seem to have fed his anxieties about the moral content of musical choices. Synthesis, change, and commercialism were deeply personal and ethically contentious subjects both for Zaludkovksy and generally within the professional lives of cantors.

Zaludkovsky's writings and performances were situated within a period of rapid modernization and intellectual foment, but one in which religious affiliation was still the norm for most Polish Jews.[20] As musicologist Sylwia Jakubczyk-Ślęczka notes in her

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[14] See Zalmen Zylbercweig and Mestel Jacob, *Leḳsiḳon fun Yidishn ṭeaṭer* (New York, Elisheva, 1931), 745.
[15] See Zaludkovsky, *Kultur-treger*, 290-3.
[16] Far from being an outlier, vocal training with non-Jewish pedagogues was common among cantors and the fame of their teachers was frequently cited in the biographical sketches of cantors included in Zaludkovsky's *Kultur-treger*.
[17] See Fater, op. cit.
[18] For discussions of the "choir synagogue" see David Harry Ellenson, *After emancipation: Jewish religious responses to modernity*, Cincinnati; Hebrew Union College Press, 2004; V. Levin, "Reform or Consensus? Choral Synagogues in the Russian Empire." *Arts*, 9, 72, 2020.
[19] See Joshua Fogel, "ELYOHU ZALUDKOVSKY (ELIAS ZALUDKOVSKY)," Yiddish Leksikon. Web resource. Accessed August 13, 2020 http://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2016/07/elyohu-Zaludkovsky-elias-Zaludkovsky.html
[20] See Samuel Kassow, "Communal and Social Change in the Polish Shtetl: 1900–1939," In *Jewish Settlement and Community in the Modern Western World*, Edited by Ronald Dotterer, Deborah Dash Moore, and Steven M. Cohen, Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1991, 56–92; Gershon Bacon, "Poland: Poland from 1795 to 1939," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2011,

recent essay on Jewish musicians in Polish Galicia in the interwar period, Jews had a variety of modernizing political identities to choose between: assimilation, Zionism, socialism, and liberalism were all well-represented elements in the public discourse of Jewish life in Poland.[21] Each of these identities were associated with musical structures and sonic habits. Jakubczyk-Ślęczka's sensitively argued portrait of music and Jewish identities, however, neglects religious traditionalism in her list of Polish Jewish social movements. Historian Glen Dynner, whose work focuses on Jewish religious traditionalists in modern Poland, warns against a binary approach to religion and modernity that presumes religions to have been immutably in retreat in the modern era.[22] The cantorial music of Polish Jews in the interwar period offers a picture of interlocked political and religious world views. Music listening habits crossed divisions of political and religious affiliation and point to the instability of defining behaviors as "religious." The concert career of Elias Zaludkovsky illustrates how modern Polish Jewish identities were woven into Jewish religious life through musical performance. Zaludkovsky, a cantor who identified as both a modernist and a traditionalist, was able to paint multiple pictures of himself as a performer by manipulating the sonic associations with varied contemporary categories of Jewish identity. With each of the musical contexts he referenced, Zaludkovsky sought relevance for liturgical music, striving to walk the fine line between achieving a popular audience and compromising with "vulgar" forms of music that might veer into forbidden forms of popular culture.[23]

Zaludkovsky and *hefker khazones*: establishing a category of crime

The conception of prayer as a potential site for crime was not unique to Zaludkovsky, but rather was an outgrowth of debates about the appropriateness of aesthetics or entertainment in prayer that have roots in the Middle Ages.[24] As Zaludkovsky himself noted in his introduction to *Kultur-treger*, rabbis and communal leaders long held cantors in suspicion of excessive sensuality in their musical exploits.[25] The new technology of the Gramophone exacerbated tensions in cantorial discourse about the limits of appropriate ethical practices in cantorial performance. In 1910, Pinkhos Minkovsky, the cantor of the Broder Synagogue in Odessa, published *Moderne liturgiye in unzere sinogogn in rusland* (Modern Liturgy in Our Synagogues in Russia), a vitriolic diatribe against cantors performing concerts outside the synagogue and the technological innovation of recording cantorial music. To support his claim that

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accessed September 23, 2020,
https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Poland/Poland_from_1795_to_1939.

[21] See Sylwia Jakubczyk-Ślęczka, "Musical Life of the Jewish Community in Interwar Galicia. The Problem of Identity of Jewish Musicians," *Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów*, UJ nr 34, 2017, 135–157.

[22] See Glen Dyner, "Jewish Traditionalism in Eastern Europe: The Historical Gadfly," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Vol. 29, 2017, 286.

[23] The conception that popular music degraded listeners by interpolating them into reductive identities as consumers, thereby "regressing" the experience of music listening, was later crystalized by Theodor Adorno in "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," *Essays on Music/Theodor W. Adorno*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002 [1938]

[24] See Leo Landman, *The Cantor*, 43-44.

[25] See Zaludkovsky, *Kultur-treger,* 3-4.

cantorial records are a profanation of the sacred, Minkovsky relates how a young man confided to him that he had heard a record by international recording star Cantor Gershon Sirota (1874-1943) played while visiting a Warsaw brothel.[26]

Minkovsky's scandalous anecdote reveals his fears about the possibilities of cantorial sound becoming implicated in unregulated sensory experience. Unyoked from its usual contexts, the emotional power of Jewish prayer music is liable to take on illicit expressive power. Minkovsky couches his criticism of recording cantors in specifically erotic terms, echoing Talmudic dictums that associate heresy with immoral sexual behavior[27] while at the same time invoking popular discourse that takes a punitive attitude towards new technologies and youth culture. In a recent article, James Loeffler locates Minkovsky's critique of recorded cantorial music in a larger discourse about the appropriateness of capitalist appropriation of national cultural resources. Loeffler compellingly situates conflicts about technology and cantorial innovation in a larger story about the role of music in establishing modern Jewish forms of identification modeled on European nationalism.[28]

Although he presented himself as a voice of conservation, Minkovsky was in fact a leading cantorial innovator. Minkovsky was an early adopter of western European influenced choral music into synagogues in the Russian Empire. His anti-innovation stance speaks to the tendency of cantors to deflect their own anxieties about authenticity onto the next generational cohort. The heatedness of his rhetoric suggests that the experience of sonic change in synagogue sound is a traumatizing experience that each generation of cantors is destined to experience, repress, and then project accusingly onto the next generation.

Zaludkovsky cited Minkovsky as an authoritative source in his writings, rehashing Minkovsky's view that vulgarized cantorial music was an aberration that threatened to lower the status of cantors to circus novelty acts.[29] Indeed, Yossele Rosenblatt was active as a performer on the vaudeville circuit in the United States.[30] Zaludkovsky appears to have coined the term "*hefker khazones*" (wanton cantorial music) to describe the commercialism of the cantorial music of his contemporaries. *Hefker* is a term derived from Talmudic legal discourse that connotes property that has

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[26] See Pinchas Minkovsky, *Moderne liturgia in unsere synagogen (Modern Liturgy in Our Synagogues in Russia)*, 1910, reproduced in Akiva Zimmermann, *Perakim Be-Shir: Sefer Pinkhas Minkovski (Pinchas Minkovsky Book)*, Tel Aviv, Shaʿare Ron, 2011, 223-4.

[27] For example, in Talmud Bavli Sotah b, a classical Rabbinic text that interweaves ritual acts, sexual immorality and heretical denial of sacred law.

[28] See James Loeffler, "The Lust Machine: Commerce, Sound, and Nationhood in Jewish Eastern Europe" *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry*, 2020.

[29] See Elias Zaludkovski, "*Der khazonisher matsev*," *Morgn Zhurnal*, November 17, 1926, YIVO Archives, RG 212 (page number missing). In the first sentence of this article, Zaludkovsky paraphrases the beginning of Minkovski's *Moderne liturgiye*, to make his claim about the connection between cantorial music and the shifting moral norms of urban modernity. Zaludkovsky's posthumous reputation was somewhat impugned by accusations of plagiarism in some of his essays. See Max Wohlberg, "The Subject of Jewish Music," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 6 no 2 (October 1975), 50.

[30] Jeffrey Shandler, *Jews, God and Videotape: religion and media in America* (New York, New York University Press, 2009), 28-30; Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer!: Jewish music from Old World to our world* (New York, Schirmer Books, 1999), 85-89.

been abandoned.[31] Like the English word "abandon," the Yiddish word can also signify erotic excess, recalling Minkovsky's condemnation of cantorial pop culture. Literary critic Anna Elena Torres suggests that the word *hefker* was used by Yiddish poets to connote a state of freedom and longing suggestive of borderlands and aesthetic experimentation.[32]

Zaludkovsky rejects explicit markers of eros and populism in liturgical music and the celebrity culture of cantorial performers. Instead, he traces a history of cantorial degradation, away from the purity he locates in his father's music and in elite chorale music.

> In the time of the World War, when the stream of life flowed in the direction of death, and everything was wild, abnormal, wantonness was also introduced into khazones in general and the lives of cantors in particular. The old patriarchal khazones and the modern cultured khazones were gradually dying, and their place was taken by "hefker" (wanton) cantorial music. [33]

This excerpt outlines a periodization of cantorial music into three eras: 1. a pre-modern state of "purity," 2. a period of high-minded reform associated with the innovative choral music of Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890), and 3. a time of dissolution associated with out-of-control technologies and moral degradation. This history is presented as being a process of change over generations, but in fact Zaludkovsky had experienced all three periods within his own life: as a choir singer with his father, the "patriarch," his career as a cantor in elite "choral" synagogues, and his interactions with the show business world of Yiddish theater and cantorial concerts. Furthermore, the traditionalism represented by Noah Zaludkovsky, the father, was undoubtedly shaped in part by the choral music of Sulzer that was ascendant in much of the cantorial world during his lifetime.[34] Sulzer, cantor in Vienna for much of the nineteenth century, initiated a style of choral music for the synagogue influenced by European Romanticism. Sulzer's "Vienna Rite" was seen as a major breaking point in the development of Jewish liturgical music and was adopted throughout the urban centers of Jewish Europe as part of a social program of adaptation to the terms of life in modern nation states.[35] The historical narrative Zaludkovsky offers reflects his desire to associate himself with the aesthetically elitist "middle period" and the achievements of Sulzerian reform, in opposition to the degraded populism he accused his own generation of succumbing to.

By embracing Minkovsky's standards and rejecting recording, Zaludkovsky distinguished himself from peers such as Rosenblatt, Sirota, and Zawel Kwartin

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[31] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Hefker," (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter Pub. House, 2007). Accessed March 28, 2022. https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/hefker

[32] Anna Elena Torres, "The Horizon Blossoms and the Borders Vanish: Peretz Markish's Poetry and Anarchist Diasporism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 110, no. 3 (2020), 458-490.

[33] See Zaludkovsky op. cit.

[34] See Tina Frühauf, *Salomon Sulzer: Reformer, Cantor, Icon*, Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich Verlag, 2012; A.L. Ringer. "Salomon Sulzer, Joseph Mainzer and the Romantic a Cappella Movement," Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 11, 1969.

[35] See Philip Vilas Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

(1874-1952), the early cantorial stars of the Jewish record business. In this way, Zaludkovsky was able to avoid the most blatant crime of *hefker* but nonetheless participated in a musical culture in which cantors worked as entertainers on the stage. Cantorial concerts in secular sites had been an important part of the culture of liturgical music since at least the nineteenth century.[36] Halina Goldberg's essay on religious reform in nineteenth century Poland demonstrates that cantors in Warsaw performed sacred music in secular concerts, bringing art music and sacred music into closer dialogue as part of a program of communal education through aesthetics, in pursuit of the ideal of *Bildung*.[37] Recording star cantors of the early twentieth century "golden age" period performed frequently in theaters, but for reasons that unambiguously embraced commercial purposes.

Likely informed by the precedent of Polish reformer cantors in the nineteenth century, Zaludkovsky did not extend Minkovsky's anti-Gramophone ethical paradigm to his own engagement with the concert stage. Zaludkovsky's investment in cultivating multiple styles of concert program indicates a dedication to making cantorial stage performance viable within his system of cantorial ethics. Mindful of his commitment to eschew *hefker*, and intimately knowledgeable about the workings of the "low" culture he derided through his years in Yiddish theater, Zaludkovsky developed forms of cantorial presentation that reflected his fluency in multiple contemporary Jewish musics. In concert settings, Zaludkovsky had license to experiment with musical forms that each bore their own political and social associations and their own power to hail subsets of the internally diverse Jewish community. His concert programs reflect the embeddedness of cantorial performance in interwar Polish Jewish life.

Musical-conceptual frameworks in Zaludkovsky's performance season in 1924

In this section I will offer an analysis of some of Zaludkovsky's performances in the year 1924 based on clippings of reviews in the Yiddish press collected in his scrapbook. Zaludkovsky's choices of repertoire at these events reflect a range of engagement with Jewish communities, political stances, and forms of cultural consumption. Rather than being sealed off from discourses of political and social change, cantors played a public role as musical spokespeople for projects of modernization and reform. In my reading of Zaludkovsky's performances, I propose a rubric of social and aesthetic movements that cantors interacted with and responded to musically. Zaludkovsky performed choral music and opera, invoking the aspirations of Jews toward inclusion in aesthetics that were either elite or broadly popular, but that in both cases sonically connected Jews to the majority society. In other contexts, Zaludkovsky performed pieces associated with socialism and Zionism, demonstrating that cantors could speak to political projects oriented towards sustaining Jewish collectivity and nationalism. Zaludkovsky walked a fine line between promoting the notion of a cantor as an emblem of aesthetic achievement or spokesperson for Jewish

[36] See Samuel Vigoda, *Legendary Voices: The Fascinating Lives of the Great Cantors*, (New York: S. Vigoda, 1981), 264.
[37] See Halina Goldberg, "'On the Wings of Aesthetic Beauty Toward the Radiant Spheres of the Infinite': Music and Jewish Reformers in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw," *The Musical Quarterly* (2019), 427.

political modernity, and his role as a *kultur-treger* (culture bearer). Throughout his musical pursuits, returning to a set of sounds that were legible to Jewish audiences as traditional and representative of the liturgical past was key to tying his multiple musical personas back to his identity as a professional cantor and a preserver of the ethics of a prayer leader.

In this section, I include both concerts and guest star synagogue appearances in my discussion of Zaludkovsky as a "concert" artist. Not unlike his stage performances, Zaludkovsky's prayer leading also reflected strategies of musical code switching between sounds of cantorial chant and European art music, a fact that was noted in the Yiddish press accounts of his synagogue services. Reflected in both his venues of performance and his choice of repertoire, Zaludkovsky walked a line between identities as a sacred singer and a professional artist. Singing both secular and sacred music, he accessed his skills in Western art music in ways that sought to enhance and elevate the professional status of the cantor. For cantors, integrating new political mindsets into their musical lives created attractive musical opportunities, but also complicated the endeavor of maintaining the image of the cantor as preserver of appropriate cantorial ethical comportment.

For cantors working under the lineage of influence of Solomon Sulzer, choral music written in the vein of Church and European art music styles was an important aspect of cantorial expertise. The music offered a rarified aesthetic experience and simultaneously represented the aspirations of Jewish people for participation in the social and political life of the nation-states in which they resided. The role of choral music in cantorial performance is discussed in an anonymous review of Zaludkovsky's Bialystok concert that was published the day after the end of the Passover holiday on April 27, 1924.

In the review, Zaludkovsky is described presiding over a service in the Bialystok Choir Synagogue that blurred the line between ritual and concert performance. As was typical in the Yiddish press, the guest star cantor appearance was covered in the style of a concert review. The report in *Dos naye lebn* read in part, "The attentiveness of a Jewish audience was on display this past holiday in the Choir Synagogue, the only shul with a cantor and choir…Not only a beautiful heartfelt prayer leader with a sweet voice to swoon for, even more he (Zaludkovsky) is a pure, well trained interpreter of solo classical singing."[38] In this account, the overlap between impact as a prayer leader and aesthetics is made explicit as a source of the excellence of Zaludkovsky's performance.

The concert featured a composition for the *Sefira* (an important liturgical element of the season between the Passover and *Shavuot/Shavues* holidays that has been set to music by many cantors and Jewish composers) composed by Jakub Berman (1865-1935). Berman was the choir director at the Choir Synagogue in Bialystok and a composer, voice teacher, music pedagogue in Jewish Schools and well-known local figure in the Bialystok music scene.[39] For urban Jews advocating for enhanced social and economic interaction with the non-Jewish majority, choral music in the synagogue acted as a symbol of Jewish integration. Supported by the efforts of the well-trained

[38] No author listed, "*Pesakh in korshul*," *Dos naye lebn*, No. 99: 5, Bialystok, April 27, 1924, YIVO Archive, RG 212, Box 4 Folder 31

[39] See Fater and Heller, *Yidishe muziḳ in Poyln*, 261

choir, Zaludkovsky's "prayers were transformed into a veritable superb concert," according to the news account. Zaludkovsky drew on the Sulzerian tradition of choral music — which borrowed from Church music styles as a means of achieving sublimity in religious music — and leveraged his classically trained voice as an emotive device, drawing his listeners into a hybrid sacred-aesthetic experience.

Choral music was not the only interface between cantors and European art music. Opera was an stylistic referent for cantors both in terms of establishing norms of vocal training and offering cross-over potential for performance outside of the Jewish community. Although opera was a signifier of assimilation in cantorial lore,[40] in practice, many cantors took jobs as opera singers, sometimes — as in the case of Zaludkovsky holding cantorial positions while at the same time performing roles in the theater. In the 1910s, during his stint as cantor in Rostov-on-Don, Zaludkovsky sang roles in the city opera house.[41]

Yossele Rosenblatt famously made his rejection of an opera role a central aspect of his public relations image, affirming his status as an upholder of traditional piety. As Jeffrey Shandler has shown in his work on cantors and mass media, the cantorial "star" persona was carefully constructed, and in Rosenblatt's case, cultivating an image of piety was part of his outreach to the public.[42] For Zaludkovsky, including opera repertoire in his performances seems to have been an acceptable element of his cantorial persona that did not violate his conception of ethical behavior. On February 7, 1924, Zaludkovsky performed in Bialystok, presenting a benefit concert for *Linas Hatsedek* (Hebrew, place of righteousness), a mutual aid society for the protection of orphans and widows, accompanied by a pianist. The concert was described positively as offering "pure chamber music".[43] Among the selections Zaludkovsky performed was a rendition of the popular aria from the Bizet opera "*Perlzukhers*," (The Pearl Fishers).

The hardline stance against opera maintained by some cantors and critics in the Yiddish press was not reflective of the more fluid role of opera performance in the careers of Jewish liturgical artists. In a prominent example, Moshe Koussevitzky, Zaludkovsky's most famous Polish cantorial peer, also sang opera roles, notably finding employment during World War Two by singing in the Tiflis National Opera Company in Georgia under the name Mikhail Koussevitzky.[44] In contrast to what has become an entrenched trope in cantorial lore through the story of Rosenblatt's rejection of a lucrative opera contract, Zaludkovsky seems to have framed singing opera as a means to reject *hefker* by elevating the status of the cantor to the level of sophistication of classical vocal artists.

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[40] E.g. Yitskhok Hirsh Halevi Heylpern, "*Khazanishe shmuesen: 1. Oytobiografye. Yitskhok Hirsh Halevi Heylpern z"l*," *Di khazonim velt*, Vol 13, Warsaw, November 1934, 16;
[41] Fater and Heller, *Yidishe muzik in Poyln*, 302
[42] Shandler, *Jews, God and Videotape*, 26-50
[43] No author listed, "*Musikalishe notits*," *Dos naye lebn*, Bialystok. February 7, 1924, No.33: 4, YIVO Archive, RG 212, Box 4, Folder 31
[44] See Neil W. Levin, "Moshe Koussevitzky," Milken Archive of Jewish Music (website), Accessed September 23, 2020, https://www.milkenarchive.org/artists/view/moshe-koussevitzky/

Although religious and leftist elements of the Jewish community are positioned by historiography on opposing ends of the Jewish political spectrum,[45] the picture of cantorial culture that emerges from a close reading of Yiddish press and cantorial trade periodicals shows a more nuanced intertwining of political and religious perspectives. The sound of cantorial prayer music was a favored form of aesthetic experience for a broad swath of the Jewish listening public, including secular leftists. [46] Cantorial music's popularity transcended boundaries of religious observance, and in fact non-religious Jews were among the most devoted fans of the music.[47] Socialist political discourse was part of the intellectual life of the Jewish community and Zaludkovsky invoked these signifiers freely, as is demonstrated in his program for a concert and lecture on January 29, 1924, at the synagogue Beys Am in Bialystok.

According to the anonymous journalist who was in attendance on this date, the concert "was a great success. The hall was full, with a serious and intelligent audience who had come to hear news about the musical domain." His lecture was on synagogue and folk music, but "unfortunately, Herr Zaludkovsky shared very little of his knowledge. His lecture was only a form of context for the musical examples drawn from different periods…But his examples were not organized systematically and did not adequately orient the public, imparting only general impressions."[48] Fortunately, Zaludkovsky's beautiful singing saved the day. One highlight of the concert was a setting, apparently by Zaludkovsky, of *Fartsveyflung* (Despair), the 1898 Yiddish poem by the secular leftist poet Morris Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld's popular "sweatshop" poetry documented the hardships of the Jewish immigrant experience in the United States.[49]

Not enough is known about Zaludkovsky's political commitments to ascertain to what extent he was engaged in trans-national Jewish conversations about labor rights. Yiddish socialist poetry as a signifier of aesthetic achievement resonated with the goals of his concert programs as art experiences that could engage a variety of Jewish social identities. Zaludkovsky also seems to have used his musical performances to reference the Zionist political movement, a not unusual juxtaposition with socialist political leanings during the period.

Zionism, the ideology that promoted a modern Jewish identity rooted in state-based nationalism, took on a number of musical forms; one important strand of musical Zionism employed the European classical canon as a means to embody the

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[45] For example, see Glen Dyner, "Jewish Traditionalism in Eastern Europe: The Historical Gadfly," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 29 (2017).

[46] For example, see a discussion of cantorial concerts at socialist events in Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt*, 233

[47] For example, see a discussion of a "maskil" fan of cantorial music in Boris Kader, "Di shul un der tempel," Yehoshua Weiser, ed. *Khazones: zamelbukh aroysgegeben tsum fertsig yorigen yubal* (New York: Agudat hahazanim deratsot habriot v'kanada), 56-58.

[48] No author listed, "*Musikalishe notits, a lektsie mit ilustratsies*," *Dos naye lebn*, Bialystok, January 29, 1924, No. 25, 4, YIVO Archive, RG 212, Box 4 Folder 31.

[49] See Marc Miller, *Representing the Immigrant Experience: Morris Rosenfeld and the Emergence of Yiddish Literature in America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

ambition for Jewish political sovereignty.[50] Zionist classical composers sought to establish the legitimacy of Jews as a "national" group by following in the footsteps of European composers who accessed elements of folklore in their composition. Musical Zionism was intent on producing a Jewish high culture, closely modeled on the perceived superiority of European musical achievements.[51]

Zaludkovsky starred in a performance of Haydn's "The Creation," produced in Lodz on May 11, 1924. The piece was rendered as *Ma'aseh bereshit* in a translation into Hebrew.[52] This same version of the Haydn oratorio in Hebrew translation was featured in a performance in 1935 at Hebrew University, famously documented in the early Zionist propaganda film "The Land of Promise."[53] For this performance in Lodz, Zaludkovsky sang the role of the Angel Uriel. In the words of the anonymous newspaper critic who wrote about the performance for the *Lodzher Togesblatt*, "The premiere of Haydn's *Ma'aseh bereshit* was a true holiday (*yontif*) for the music lovers of our city." The concert was directed by Yisra'el Feyvishes, with the Hazomir Choir. The choir was conceived as a Zionist cultural organization, and under the direction of Feyvishes took an ideologically purist approach, performing only Hebrew language repertoire, with a focus on European classical works with new Hebrew lyric translations.[54]

Through performances of classical works translated into Hebrew, Zionist musicians married their love of European art music with their language ideology that favored modern Hebrew over their native language, Yiddish. Modern Hebrew, in contrast to the Ashkenazi liturgical Hebrew that Zaludkovsky and other cantors employed in prayer leading, was firmly associated with a secular political ideology. In a variant on the divide of Yiddish and Hebrew as languages of respective domestic and public spheres,[55] Zaludkovsky used Yiddish as the practical language of communication in his career as a public musical intellectual, publishing in newspapers and writing his book about cantorial history in Yiddish, but looked to Hebrew to express aspirations for participation in the "universal" realm of European classical music. His major compositional achievement was a Hebrew language opera, *Bat Yiftakh* (Jephthah's Daughter), that premiered in Detroit in 1929.[56]

While the above-mentioned concert dates reflect engagement with European art music and transnational political movements, it was Zaludkovsky's role as a

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[50] See Jascha Nemtsov, *Der Zionismus in Der Musik: Jüdische Musik Und Nationale Idee* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008); Philip V. Bohlman, *The World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine, 1936-1940: Jewish Musical Life on the Eve of World War II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
[51] See Jakubczyk-Ślęczka, "Musical Life of the Jewish Community in Interwar Galicia," 146.
[52] No author listed, "*Teater un Musik*," *Lodzsher Togesblatt*, Lodz, May 11, 1924, YIVO Archive, RG 212, Box 4, Folder 31.
[53] See Hillel Tryster, "'The Land of Promise' (1935): a case study in Zionist film propaganda," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15 no. 2 (1995), 187-217.
[54] See M. Jacobson, "Music: Communal Organizations and Social Movements," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (2010), Web resources. Accessed July 21, 2020, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Music/Communal_Organizations_and_Social_Movements.
[55] For a discussion of the gendered resonances of Yiddish and Hebrew, see Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[56] See Philp A. Adler, "Biblical Play is All-Detroit," *The Detroit News*, April 8, 1929.

kultur-treger that undergirded all of his musical activities. Like many of his "star" cantorial peers, Zaludkovsky's musical career was decidedly modern and urban. Yet throughout his career ritual sounds rooted in the Jewish past and connected to the musical tradition represented by his father provided him with a legible cantorial pedigree and set of musical skills tailored to a popular conception of cantorial voice.

On June 2, 1924 we once again find Zaludkovsky in Lodz, performing a service that blurs into a concert.[57] On this date, Zaludkovsky was engaged as a soloist for *Yom Kipur Katan*, a special service that marks the new month in the Hebrew calendar and is frequently employed as the occasion for elaborate cantorial performances. The service on this date was a memorial to a recently deceased member of the synagogue, Eliezer Magazanik.

The anonymous journalist who covered the event for the *Lodzer Najer Folksblat* praised Zaludkovsky for his rendition of the afternoon prayer service, "mesmerizing the thousand-person audience assembled for the memorial concert with his remarkably sweet voice and soulful bearing." In contrast to his performance at the Bialystok Choir Synagogue, this "traditional" cantorial service drew on his role as a *kultur-treger*. Here, the emphasis was not on classical training or the universal sublime, but rather on a conception of Jewish prayer rooted in traditional cantorial virtues such as the sweetness of timbre and the spiritual impact of the voice.

Approaching tradition as a stylistic form located in the past and ripe for reinterpretation is typical of modernist engagement with folklore. As musicologist Joshua Walden has noted, urban Jewish composers utilized ethnographic materials to access what they believed were "the vestiges of the originary, organic relationship between its people."[58] As has been discussed by Paula Hyman, among others, the use of signifiers of traditionalism helped create a literary representation of Jewish tradition, often centered geographically on the margins, in villages, and in the past.[59]

Cantors rendered a similarly nostalgia-tinged framework in sound, cultivating a repertoire of Jewish vocal techniques and melodic forms partially based in memory that served as a recognizable touchstone of communal identity for a broad range of Jewish listeners. For Zaludkovsky, fluency in his father's style, recast through the lens of his modern musical education, enabled him to communicate to his audiences a sound that was perceived as a transmission from the Jewish liturgical past. This kind of effort in musical traditionalism helped secure Zaludkovsky's status as a conservative force in the world of cantorial music and obscured the modernist and contingent nature of his engagement with sacred folklore.

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[57] No author listed, "*Di hazkora R. Eliezer Mogazanik z"l*," *Lodzer Najer Folksblat*, Lodz, June 5, 1924. YIVO Collection. RG 212. Box 4 Folder 31.

[58] Joshua Walden, "'Music of the "*Folks-neshome*": "Hebrew Melody" and changing musical representations of Jewish culture in the early twentieth century Ashkenazi diaspora," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8 no. 2 (2009), 153.

[59] See Paula E. Hyman, "Traditionalism and Village Jews in Nineteenth-Century Western and Central Europe: Local Persistence and Urban Nostalgia," in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 191-201.

Conclusion: the cantorial concert as defense against the "crime" of *hefker*

Zaludkovsky's performance schedule from 1924 illustrates the multiple musical forms cantorial concerts could take at a key moment in the music's popularity. His focus on projects that foreground artistic rigor, prestige, and collaboration with classical musicians speak to his concern with cultivating a cantorial culture that was highbrow in its aesthetic ambitions and geared towards a concept of communal *Bildung*. Zaludkovsky's fluency in the public discourse of his day allowed him to speak to multiple audiences. He could engage with socialists, Zionists, liberals, and assimilationists, meeting them on their level with accomplished performances of musical repertoires that were associated with the needs of their political and social identities.

In the 1920s, cantorial music reached its ascendancy as a popular art through its mediated form as a recording phenomenon and a style of stage performance. Zaludkovsky saw the sacred art form as vulnerable to corruption through the influence of populism. He took on the challenge of constructing a forward-facing public identity as both a popular performer and an upholder of cantorial ethics. As his 1924 concert schedule reveals, Zaludkovsky utilized the fluidity of the cantorial concert, a setting where heterogeneous political and social identities within Jewish society could interact, to construct a performance persona that spoke to multiple audiences. Zaludkovsky utilized performance on the concert stage, one of the sites of cantorial crime in the view of his fellow conservatives, as a means to combat the degradation of tradition. From the perspective of the present day, Zaludkovsky's achievement appears sadly misguided; his work has all but disappeared whereas the recording star cantors he considered to be *hefker* have retained an indelible hold on the Jewish liturgical landscape. However, Zaludkovsky's sensitivity to the contested nature of liturgical ethics and his strategies for constructing effective outreach to the diverse Jewish listening public remain relevant, even as the stylistic language of his musical aesthetics has been lost to time. His concerns about the appropriate ethics and musical choices of cantors reappear in the formation of the professional cantorate in the United States in the post-Holocaust period, which was influenced by the anti-*hefker* discourse of earlier conservative critics, and again in the contemporary American synagogue liturgical music scene, in which embracing sounds from outside of historical Jewish sources has become the typical means of outreach to congregational audiences.