"Yiddish Art Song as a Musical-Poetic Hybrid Genre: The Influence of American Yiddish Poets on Jewish Composer, Lazar Weiner, and Weiner's Musical Impact on Yiddish Poetry"

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AJS Conference
Washington, D.C.
December 19, 2011

# Beyond the Poetry: Musical Interpretation of Poetic Texts An Exercise in Mindfulness

**Reminders:** Some things to think about when listening to and analyzing Yiddish Art Songs

- a) Musical Elements: Extra-Textual Parameters that can impart meaning
- b) Composers such as Lazar Weiner have many musical variables at their disposal
- c) Always remember: even if a piece is a solo art song, there are always at least two voices, i.e. the vocal part and the piano part

#### **Musical Elements – the Composer's Toolbox - to think about:**

### 1) Melody

F 75- 9

- How does the vocal melodic line move? In what direction? Higher or lower? By step? Arpeggiated? By leaps? Are pitches repeated? If words are repeated, are they repeated musically in the same way?
- Where is the climax of the music? Does it conform to the climax of the poem?

## 2) Rhythm

- Does the rhythm of the vocal melody follow the meter of the poetry? How does Weiner utilize the poem's structure to shape his musical form?

#### 3) Range and Tessitura

What is the range of the vocal pitches overall? Does the ambit of range, i.e. tessitura, shift during the song? Where? What's happening in the text then?

# 4) Dynamics

-How do the composer's indicators of sound volume influence the text's meaning? Where is 'f' or 'ff' indicated? Where is 'p' or 'pp' indicated? Where are there *crescendos*, *decrescendos*, or *sforzandos*?

# 5) Piano Accompaniment and Texture

-Is there a piano introduction? Does it mimic the opening vocal melody? If not, how is it shaped? What feeling is the accompaniment creating musically to prepare the listener for the text that's coming?

-How does the piano accompaniment interact with the vocal part? Is it call and response, is it simply harmonization, or is there a particular 'other voice' that is speaking through the accompaniment, e.g. alter ego, another person, a group?

# 6) Piano Accompaniment and Harmony

-Is the accompaniment homophonic (chordal) or polyphonic (multiple melodies within the accompaniment moving at different times and in different directions? What in the text might account for that choice?

-Is the harmony tonal or atonal?

# 7) Word Painting in Music

-Are there shapes to the melodic line or accompaniment in conjunction with rhythm, dynamics and tessitura that, working together, signal the world outside of the perceiver, the vocalist?

The Big Question: And finally, how does the composer capture the mood and intention of the poet's text and how does how does the composer move beyond it to perhaps his/her own interpretation, i.e. 'the multi-layered complication'?

#### IKH HOB FAR DIR A SOD

(I Have a Secret for You)

Poet: Nahum Baruch Minkoff (1893-1958)

ikh hob far dir a sod a zisn a vort, an eyn un eyntsik vort.

in virvar trogstu zikh farrisn un ikh vayt fartrogn fun dayn ort.

ikh her nit oyf khaloymes tsu dir shpinen, geheyme labirintn durkh mayn troym;

bay tog vert alts tserunen, vu zol ikh dikh gefinen?

ot bist du do un shoyn farshvundn in dem tifn thom.

ikh hob far dir a sod a zisn a vort, an eyn un eyntsik vort.

loykhst uf, es haltn dayne oygn zikh in shlisn. un ikh, ikh zukh nokh alts um dayn geheylikt ort. I have a sweet secret for you, A word, a one and only word.

In the chaos you carry yourself haughtily And I am carried off far from your place.

I do not cease to spin dreams for you, Secret labyrinths through my dream;

When the day arrives, it all vanishes. Where shall I find you?

Now you're here, And suddenly you've vanished into the deep abyss.

I have a sweet secret for you, A word, a one and only word.

You light up, your eyes are closing. And I, I still seek Your hallowed place.

# To Naomi-Sarah 316 A ICH HOB FAR DIR A

3. MINKOFF aglish Adaptation by

LAZAR WEINER









# **SHTILE TENER** (1893–1958)

(Hushed Tones)

Poet: Nahum Baruch Minkoff

shtile tener, khmurne himl, feygl raysn tsu di volkns zikh, es vet regenen, mayn kroyn. feygl veln ergets vu farflien mit farbenkte fligl.

mate tener, mayn farvolknt harts un du, mayn benkshaft, rayst zikh tsu di volkns hoykh. es vet regenen, mayn kroyn, un du, mayn benkshaft, vest farflien ergets vu mit farnetste fligl. Hushed tones, Gloomy sky. Birds ascend toward the clouds. It will rain, my precious one. Birds will fly off somewhere With longing wings.

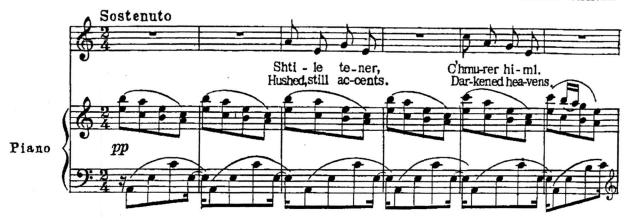
Dull tones,
My overcast heart—
And you, my longing, aspire to the clouds above.
It will rain, my precious one.
And you, my longing, will fly off somewhere
With soaked wings.

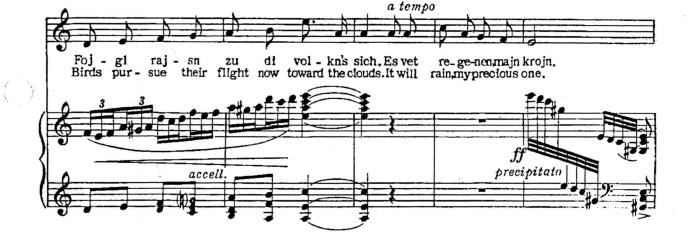
# Shtile Tener

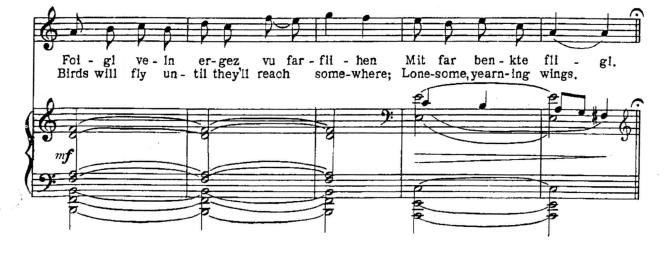
From the Yiddish of N.B. MINKOFF English Version by CHASYE COOPERMAN

Hushed, Still Accents

LAZAR WEINER









# **YIDISH**

Poet: Yakov-Yitskhak Segal (1896–1954)

yidish mayn goldene brunem, fun dir hot der balshemtov getrunken, der mezsheritser magid hakodesh, der bratslaver, barditshever un azoy fil prost, poshete, orime yidn, in vogl durkh vegn un lender, in eybikn velt unter vegns vu s'tsindt zikh di vor un legende. yidish mayn likhtiker brunem! Yiddish, my golden well,
From you did the Ba'al Shem Tov drink,
The holy Mezhirecher Maggid,
The Bratslaver and Berditchever rebbes,
And so have many plain, simple, poor Jews
In their wandering through different lands and territories.
Forever in a world of journeying
Where truth and legends are fused.
Yiddish, my bright source!

J. L. SEGAL
English Adaptation by
OLGA PAUL



opener?





