

illustrating the various musical traditions of the ingathered Jews.

*In Israel Today*, Vols. I—IV. Recorded and edited by Deben Battacharya. (Westminster Records WF 12026-12029). Another splendid ethnomusicological work of even broader scope than the record above. Incomparable vocal and instrumental records of genuine Jewish folk musicians from Uzbekistan, Cochin, Morocco, Atlas Mountains, Tunisia, Yemen and Eastern Europe.

*Isa Kremer Sings Yiddish Folk Songs*. Settings and piano accompaniment by Vladimir Heifitz. (Collectors Guild CGY 604). Isa Kremer (1887-1956) was one of those rare trained singers (in 1908 she sang Mimi opposite Tito Schipa in a Milan production of *La Bohème*), who could sing folk songs with extraordinary understanding of their many-faceted parts. In the 1920's and 30's she was the deserving darling of both the Yiddish masses and intellectuals in America and abroad. This record recaptures her very special presence.

*Ladino Folk Songs*, "Judeo-Spanish Ballads and Songs of Love." Sung by Raphael Yair Elnadov; accompaniment by the Salonika Trio, arrangements by Richard J. Neumann. (Collectors Guild STL 605). Ladino is to the Sephardic Jews what Yiddish is to the Ashkenazic Jews. These songs have a very particular flavor that is quite engaging.

*Music of the Falashas*. Voices, drum, gong. (Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4442). This music of the Black Jews of Ethiopia was a real revelation to me when I first heard it. I was hardly prepared for its elemental power and atavistic authenticity. For a starter, listen to the excerpt from the *Passover Hallel* and see if it doesn't strike some strange, long-forgotten musical nerves.

*Sephardic Folk Songs*. Sung by Gloria Levy with mandolin, drum and guitars. (Folkways Records FW 8737). These songs are almost exclusively from the Levantine countries and the music shows a variety of influences from the folk and popular songs of Italy, France, Greece, Spain and Turkey.

*Theodore Bikel Sings Jewish Folk Songs*. Orchestra conducted by Fred Hellerman. (Elektra EKL 141). Although Bikel has an individual way with a wide assortment of folk songs, I like him best when he unbuttons his collar and strikes up a Yiddish folk song.

Then his very unique combination of dramatic and musical gifts come into full flower. This is one of his best records. Hear his splendid characterizations in such songs as "Kum Aher du Philosof" and "Sha Shtil."

*Yiddish Folk Songs*. Sung by Ruth Rubin. Five records. Privately recorded, may be ordered directly from her (180 West End Ave., N.Y.C. 10023). Ruth Rubin has made it her life task to collect, document, record and sing the Yiddish folksong as it was heard in Eastern Europe and its many variants in North and South America. These records reflect a very personal choice of her repertoire.

*A Khazendl oyf Shabbos and Other Yiddish Folk Songs*. Sung by Mikhail Alexandrovitch. Arrangements and instrumental ensemble conducted by L. Kagan. (Collectors Guild CGY 648). An album that, unfortunately, is poorly titled, since *A Khazendl oyf Shabbos* is hardly the most striking song on the disc and neither are most of the other pieces strictly folk songs. Yet this is in every other way a superior record. Cantor Alexandrovitch of the Soviet Union has an exceptionally lovely tenor voice and he sings such Yiddish ballads as "Bei a Taykhele" and "A Pastukhl, A Troymer" with touching pathos. L. Kagan's arrangements are exceptionally fine.

*Highlights from Goldfaden Operettas in Roumanian*. Orchestra and Choir of the Bucharest State Jewish Theater, conducted by H. Schwartzmann. (Electro-record 0201). Abraham Goldfaden is considered the father of the Yiddish theater. These excerpts are from such stage works as *The Witch*, *Shulamis*, *The Sacrificing of Isaac*, and *Bar Kochba*. A record worth having for these are seldom performed today.

*The High Windows*. (Hed-Arzi Ltd., Israel. Ban 49-47). An attractive rock 'n' roll group from Israel with a big beat. Quite a surprise upon its first hearing.

*Shabbat Songs*. Sung by Tova Ben Tzvi; accompanied by children's choir of Sokolov School in Jerusalem. (Hed-Arzi Ltd., Israel. AN 47-02). A thoroughly delightful performance by Miss Ben Tzvi and the children. Jewish youngsters should take to this disc with great pleasure.

*Songs of Israel*. Sung by Shoshana Damari; orchestra conducted by Moshe

Wilensky. (CBS 5633006). Excerpts from the most successful discs of the high priestess of Israeli popular song.

*The Voices Four*. Directed by David Koffman. (Monitor MFS 498). A very young American group which uses a conglomerate of Hasidic, American popular, Yiddish theater and Israeli musical styles. This eclecticism blends best in their "Ein Kelohenu" and "Adon Olam."

### Cantorial

*BERELE CHAGY, Sabbath and Holiday Compositions*. (The Greater Record Company GRC 68).

*JACOB GOLDSTEIN, The Vilna Chazan*. (Tikva T51).

*MORDECAI HERSHMAN, The Best Cantorial Works of Mordecai Hershman*, Vol. I. (The Greater Record Company GRC 52).

*MOSHE KOUSSEVITSKY, The Art of the Cantor*. Vol. 3. "Treasury of Immortal Performances." (RCA Victor LM 2905).

*ZAVEL KWARTIN, The Days of Awe*. (Collectors Guild CG 620).

*YOSSELE ROSENBLATT, Ninety Minutes with Yossele Rosenblatt*. (Shirim S1001).

The cantorial art is a delicately balanced combination of any number of different features—religio-dramatic practices, folkloristic, popular and improvisatory musical elements and musical high art. For long periods in the history of Jewish music the cantor was for the Jewish masses practically the only source of musical enlightenment, inspiration and enjoyment. These cantors I have listed flourished mainly in Europe and America during the first thirty or so years of this century—the period sometimes called "The Golden Age of Hazanut." In historical retrospect, they now seem to me the outstanding representatives of their era. What they all had in common was sumptuous vocal equipment, inspiration from the same musical source—Eastern European *hazanut*, and idiosyncratic manner of expression within that noble tradition, and a truly charismatic presence which could move their listeners to tears, inner serenity, exultation and great joy.

## Books & Authors

### Singer's Mastery

■ *The Estate*. By Isaac Bashevis Singer. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$6.95.

Reviewed by

Isidore Haiblum

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER'S *The Estate*, a sequel to *The Manor* (1967) is a considerable improvement over its predecessor. This condition, however, may only be temporary. Not that *The Estate*—perish the thought—is about to deteriorate, but notable changes, word has it, may be in store at *The Manor* any day now. Then again, given the vagaries of publishing, maybe not.

Titled *Der Hoyf* in Yiddish, first written between 1952-55 and appearing serially in the Jewish *Daily Forward*, the entire work—its division into two English volumes is reasonable, but arbitrary—totalled some two thousand pages in manuscript. That was about one thousand

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more than Singer could stomach. He has repeatedly stated—most recently in this very journal (Dec. 5, 1969 issue)—his objections to such copiousness: "I couldn't finish Proust. This lengthiness is against writing . . . If a novel is longer than 1,000 pages it is no longer a novel."

Obviously there was a problem here. Singer and his editor-publisher, Robert Giroux, set to work to straighten it out; their efforts, as applied to *The Manor*, guarded as they were, soon proved overzealous. Characters in the novel—those marvelous, zestful, passionate characters—were emasculated. The editors' blue pencils knew no pity, showed no mercy. Page after page was cut. Whole scenes and even chapters were summarized in one or two paragraphs.

Singer, of course, in his initial concept of this work had set himself an enormous—and lengthy task. He writes in an author's note to the first volume:

It portrays . . . the epoch between the Polish insurrection of 1863 and the end of the nineteenth century . . . All the spiritual and intellectual ideas that triumphed in the modern era had their roots in the world of that time—socialism and nationalism, Zionism and assimilationism, nihilism and anarchism, suffragetism, atheism, the weakening of the family bonds, free

love and even the beginnings of Fascism.

Quite a lot of isms, not to mention scores of characters to personify them. To get all this in under the wire—below 1,000 pages—could only mean wholesale abridgment. Some persona whisk by on the stage so swiftly that they appear more like "selected short subjects" than main characters. The ideological baggage they are meant to display suffers in turn.

SINGER HAS said: ". . . a writer should not mix the essay and fiction . . . When I tell a story I tell a story. I don't try to discuss, criticize, or analyze my characters." True enough. But nowhere does Singer come closer, under the pressure of condensation, to violating his own prescriptions. The book is still able to carry its own weight, but just barely.

What did the critics have to say about all this? David McCullough, in the Book-of-the-Month Club News wrote, "By now it is hardly news that Singer is one of America's finest writers . . . *The Manor* is Singer at his best." Joseph Epstein in the *Chicago Tribune* says, "*The Manor* is his masterpiece." The *New York Times*' Thomas Lask writes, "I. B. Singer's characters live. There isn't a false note in the book."

My admiration and affection for Isaac Bashevis Singer has always been immense, and long before he became an American success story, but these blurbs are simply way off base. What goes on? Can it be that Singer's enviable narrative pace dazzles critics by its swiftness? More likely, his settings—natural and familiar in Yiddish—seem so exotic in translation, as to cause a reviewer, working outside the tradition Singer represents, to lose his bearings. Curt Leviant, who translated Sholem Aleichem, was on the right track, when he wrote in these pages (CONGRESS BI-WEEKLY, Dec. 18, 1967), "The basic fault of *The Manor* is that it relies too much on abridged incident . . . Characters repeatedly narrate their own past histories. We are continually told, not shown." Leviant terms the book "basically unsuccessful," and concludes, "One is glad to note . . . that *The Manor* was written before *The Slave*. It is always pleasing to see fine writers getting better, not worse."

But it wasn't Singer the writer

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who had lost his touch, here; it was Singer the editor. Whatever faults the original Yiddish version may have had, abridgment was not one of them. (It is only necessary to go through the second volume of this work, *The Estate*, now that it is before us, to realize that Singer was at the top of his form.)

SINGER HIMSELF saw soon enough that he had slipped up in his handling of *The Manor*. There was some talk that Farrar, Straus and Giroux would reissue both volumes, the first considerably amplified. If this is still the case, the restored version should be along almost any day now; if for some reason the plan has been scrapped, the publisher ought to reconsider. It would be a disservice both to Singer and to his English-reading public if this work—one of the author's major achievements—were not presented in its best possible form.

In *The Estate* the old characters from *The Manor* are back. Calman Jacoby's role is somewhat reduced (he's getting on in years, after all), but Clara, Zipkin, Ezriel, Olga, Lucian and the rest, all operate at full steam. Two thousand pages of original manuscript is still quite a bundle. There are cuts (many); plot summations are still in evidence; some characters appear for a suspiciously short duration (cut out, cut down in their prime, alas). But, basically what a difference! We are given so much more of the main actors in the drama. They have come into their own, are allowed to travel at their own speed. We get to know each one in the round, and the result is a sense of immediacy that was quite lacking in the first volume.

Singer's people remain Singer's people: the victims of their own disordered passions (like Clara) or (like Ezriel) beset by endless philosophical doubts and torments. While it is true that the Marshinov rabbi, after some initial soul-searching, attains a measure of tranquility (and perhaps even sainthood), the price is an almost total renunciation of "this world." Singer seems to be saying that most of us, in a time of disintegrating traditions, are condemned to stumble along—in accord with our diverse temperaments—as best we can in our quest for truth and self-fulfillment. He gives us no answers. But he describes the terrain brilliantly.

All those isms that Singer listed were taking shape at this time. Yet we are given none of the "great men" of these movements. His tales depict no world-shakers, no super-achievers. Singer has said, "While the ideologists sounded very attractive I was close enough to see who was preaching them and how these people fought for power among themselves."

FOR SINGER, the basics of the human condition transcend achievement. We are all alike, the moved and the so-called movers—only the latter are probably worse. He gives us a cross-section of "ordinary people" caught

up in the currents of their day; even among these, however, the party-liners, the secular true believers are—impatiently—given relatively short shrift. And yet, in the end—and this is a measure of his greatness—we are made to feel that we've been there, that we are at one with *all* these people.

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ple, that we have lived, loved and suffered through their times.

What more can be asked? Not much. And yet, with all this, there are certain elements present in the original Yiddish that fail entirely to surface in English. Irving Howe has written:

“... no translation . . . could possibly suggest the full idiomatic richness and syntactical verve of Singer's Yiddish . . . [he] has developed a style that is both swift and dense, nervous and thick . . . His rhythms coiled, intense, short-breathed . . . And at the base of his prose is the oral idiom of Yiddish . . . What is most remarkable . . . is

his ability to unite rich detail with fiercely compressed rhythms.”

Here—as with Hemingway and Salinger—style and language are half the show. Now, Singer has always supervised his translations, and in their own way they are remarkable creations: polished, sedate, balanced, in short, just the opposite of what Mr. Howe describes. Yet a pleasure to read. Singer is far from unaware of the hazards of this kind of second birth; by this time he's become an expert in the field. He says, “it is true that in every translation the author loses—you do not gain . . .” Singer has placed the loss at, “at least 40 percent.” And while the merits of his English renderings are of a very high order, the joy of language that characterizes, say, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and that Singer also possesses, are absent in the translation.

IN BRIEF, here is what is missing from *The Estate*: Singer took pride in his collection of 19th century Yiddish idioms; he called *Der Hoyf* a Treasure Chest. In English, the chest is empty.

Singer's ear for dialogue is uncanny. Yiddish linguists marvel at it. His works are symphonies of speech-styles and dialects. In translation, the link between language and personality has been all but severed.

Singer creates environment through enumeration of its sounds, sights and smells. These paragraphs are familiar to all of his readers. They work well in English. In Yiddish, however, they are marvels: explosions of words and phrases—many antique, almost forgotten—that evoke the wonders of worlds long since gone.

There you have it. This is not meant as a brief for better translations; Singer's, as a rule, are among the best. It is, however, a sorry fact that the original Yiddish version of *The Manor-Estate* is still languishing in the back files of the Jewish *Daily Forward*; it has never been published in book form. Indeed, only five Singer books have appeared between hard covers in Yiddish, and two of these are now out of print. Something should be done—and quickly—to preserve the works of our greatest living Yiddish prose master in the language in which they were initially composed. The situation, as it now stands, is simply a disgrace.

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