“When We Remembered Zion”
The New Budapest Orpheum Society and the Art of Commemoration

The New Budapest Orpheum Society

Kristallnacht – November 9, 2021

Special thanks to the sponsors of this event: The Department of Music, The Joyce Z. and Jacob Greenberg Center for Jewish Studies, The Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, and The Division of the Humanities

Prelude

Erich Walter Sternberg – Kuma echa / Rise, O Brethren (from Shireh chalutzim, 1938)

I – By the Waters of Babylon, there we sat down
Darius Milhaud – Three songs from Poèmes juifs, op. 34 (1916)

Chant de nourrice / Song of the Nurse
Chant de laboureur / Song of the Worker
Lamentation / Lamentation

II – Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion
Two songs from Jewish Cracow

Mordechai Gebirtig – Reizele / Rose
Mordechai Gebirtig – Drei Tecterlech / Three Daughters

III – We hanged our harps upon the willows
Two Yiddish songs of remembrance

Isadore Lillian – Dos reydele dreyt zikh / The Wheel Spins
Binem Heller and Chava Albersterin – Mayn Shvester Khaye / My Sister, Khaye

IV – How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?
Three songs by Paul Dessau

Die Freunde / The Friends (from the Chinese)
Lied des Fischweibs / Song of the Fisherwoman (from Das Verhör des Lukullus [1951], Bertolt Brecht)
Deutsches Miserere / German Miserere (adaptation of Psalm 50 [1943–1944])

**V – Sing us one of the songs of Zion**
Two songs from Shireh chalutzim / Songs of the Pioneers (1938)

Paul Dessau – ‘Ali b’er / Arise, Well of Mine
Stefan Wolpe – Tel Aviv, LaMidbar / Tel Aviv, To the Desert

**VI – They that carried us away captive required of us a song**
Two songs from postwar Polish cabaret

Zygmunt Konieczny and Agnieszka Osiecka – Chwalmy Pana / Let’s Praise the Lord
Andrzej Zarucki and Orip Mandelsztam – Skrzypek Hercowicz / The Violinist Hercowicz

**VII – If I do not remember thee…**
Two Yiddish songs of commemoration

Benzion Witler – Varshe / Warsaw
Mordechai Gebirtig and Manfred Lemm – Blayb Gezunt Mir, Kroke / Farewell, Cracow

**PERFORMERS**

The seven members of the Grammy-nominated New Budapest Orpheum Society carry on the traditions of Jewish cabaret music.

Julia Bentley, mezzo-soprano
Philip V. Bohlman, artistic director and commentary
   Stewart Figa, baritone
   Danny Howard, percussion
   Iordanka Kissiova, violin
   Ilya Levinson, piano and musical director
   Jim Cox, bass violin
   Don Stille, accordion
LYRICS & TRANSLATIONS

Prelude

Erich Walter Sternberg – Kuma echa / Rise, O Brethren (from Shireh chalutzim, 1938)
Text: Jacob Schoenberg; Tune: Shalom Postolsky

Rise, O brethren! Come, let’s go!
Round and round, and to and fro;
Ceaselessly, our steps retracing.
Hand in hand, each other facing.

The sun has set, another day
Will find us joyfully on our way,
From the town and village streaming,
In our hands the sickles gleaming.

I

Darius Milhaud – Three songs from Poèmes juifs, op. 34 (1916)

Chant de nourrice / Song of the Nurse

French

1. Dors, ma fleur, mon fils chéri;
pendant que je balancerai ton berceau,
je vais te dire le conte de ta vie.
Je commence par te prévenir que tu es un Hébreu,
Que tu as Israël pour nom et que c’est là
ton titre de nobles.
Ô mon chéri, quand tu seras avec des gens
étrangers à ton peuple,
ne sois pas honteux devant leurs insultes
mais réponds-leur bien haut.
Oh! je te prie, sois sans peur aucune, dis leur:
“Ne suis-je pas le descendant des saints,
filis du peuple éternal?”
Fils du peuple éternellement persécuté
Malheureux comme point d’autre,
glorieux quand même,
car il dure, et cela depuis des siècles
et cela pour toujours.
Ne désespère point, mon fils chéri
parceque ton peuple est en exil.
Crois plutôt que le soleil de la justice
un jour brillera sur nous.
Souviens-toi sans cesse que nous avons
un pays là-bas, très loin, que c’est vers lui
que l’âme de tout juif aspire avec ardeur.
Sur ses monts, dans ses champs délicieux
tu viendras ce que tu voudras:
vigneron, berger, planteur, jardinier,
tu vivras paisible. . . .
Dors ma fleur, mon fils chéri.

English

Sleep, my flower, my dear son.
While I rock your cradle,
I will tell you the story of your life.
I will start by saying that you are a Jew,
that your name is Israel, and that this
is your title of nobility.
Darling, when you are with those
who do not know your people,
do not be ashamed before their insults,
but answer them aloud.
I pray you, be fearless. Say,
“Am I not descended from the holy ones,
the son of the eternal people?”
The son of eternally persecuted people,
unhappy like no other
but still glorious,
for it has endured for centuries
and will endure forever.
Do not despair my darling son,
because your people is in exile.
Rather, believe that the sun of justice
will shine on us one day.
Never forget that we have a country
very far away, and that calls out
to the soul of all Jews.
On its mountains, in its delicious fields,
you will become whatever you want to be:
vinedresser, shepherd, planter, gardener,
you will live in peace. . . .
Sleep, my flower, my dear son.
Chant de laboureur / Song of the Worker

**French**

Mon espérance n’est pas encore perdue,
Ô patrie douce aimée,
de trouver sur ton sol
un coin pour m’y établir
avant que ma fin n’arrive. . .

Une maisonnette sur le sommet d’une colline
au milieu d’un jardin de légumes
et d’arbres fruitiers,
one vigne abondante en grappes,
one source limpide jaillissant avec bruit.

Là-bas, sous le feuillage d’un arbre touffu
je travaillerai, je respirerai légèrement.
Devant les ruines environnantes
J’épancherai mon coeur,
ej demanderai à quand la fin de la colère?

Mais lorsqu’aux confins des vallées
j’entendrai le chant de mes frères vigoureux
je dirai voilà la fin des tristesses!
Voilà la fin des malheurs.

**English**

My hope is not yet lost,
o sweetly beloved homeland,
of finding on your soil
a little corner to settle down in
before my end arrives. . .

A cottage on top of a hill, surrounded
by a vegetable garden
and fruit trees,
a vineyard of abundant grapes,
a clear spring that gushes noisily.

There under the foliage of a luxuriant tree
I shall work, I shall breathe easily.
Before the surrounding ruins
I shall pour out my heart,
I shall ask: When will the anger end?

But while from the edges of the valleys
I hear the song of my vigorous brothers,
I shall say: Behold the end of the days!
Behold the end of our miseries!

Lamentation / Lamentation

**French**

Au ciel sept chérubins
silencieux comme les rêves font la besogne.
Devant le trône de sa gloire
ils se tiennent en rond.
C’est là qu’ils préparent
des étoffes lumineuses pour le Messie.

Tout ce qui est sublime,
Tout ce qui est majestueux,
Tout ce qui est beau,
Tout ce qui est noble,
Tout ce qui est bon et pur.

Et ceci, ils le prennent avec tout
ce qui est clarté et Lumière.

Et les anges, les sept chérubins,
elèvent leurs voix d’abandonnés,
voie de sanglots et de plaintes.

Et jusqu’à ce jour
elle n’est pas encore achevée
l’âme du Messie.

**English**

In heaven seven cherubim,
as silent as dreams, are working.
Before the throne of His glory
they stand in a circle.

It is there that they prepare
the luminous materials for the Messiah:
all that is sublime,
all that is majestic,
all that is beautiful,
all that is noble,
all that is good and pure.

And they take it with all
that is brightness and light,
and the angels, the seven cherubim,
raise their voices of resignation,
voices of sobs and laments.

And until the present day,
it still is not accomplished:
the soul of the Messiah!
II

Two songs from Jewish Cracow

Mordechai Gebirtig – Reizele / Rose

In a street, in the attic of a little house
Lives my dear Reyzele.
I pass under her window every evening,
I whistle and call out, “Reyzl, come, come, come.”

A window opens, the little old house awakens.
Suddenly heard in the quiet street, a sweet voice, Reyzele says:
“Wait a little longer, my dear, I shall soon be free;
Go walk around a few more times. One, two, three.”

I walk cheerfully, singing and cracking nuts,
Then I hear her petite feet skipping down the steps.
As she comes down the last step I embrace her.
Quietly I kiss her on the head, come, come, come.

I’ll ask you, Dovidl, don’t whistle anymore.
“Listen—he’s whistling again”—says mother.
She is pious, and it upsets her.
“Whistling is not Jewish; the others do that.
Give a sign plainly in Yiddish. One, two, three.”

I won’t whistle anymore; I give you this promise
To please you I will even become pious, my modest one.
I will become observant, my Reyzl, as observant as your mother.
Every Sabbath go to synagogue. Come, come, come.

I believe you, my beloved, and so for that David
I shall knit for you a tefillin bag with a Star of David.
When it pleases them in the synagogue, say to them
“My beloved Reyzl knitted this, one, two, three.”

Thank you for your present. I love you so much, Reyzele.
I love this little street, your mother, this little old house.
I love the stones around the house, the ones you tread on.
Listen, your mother is already calling—“Reyzl! Come, come, come.”

I go cheerfully, singing and cracking nuts,
Hearing the sound of her petite feet running up the steps.
Again, the little house stands deep in thought, the little street again quiet.
Come to me in my dreams, Reyzl. Come, come, come.

Mordechai Gebirtig – Drei Techterlech / Three Daughters

English (American translation by Stewart Figa)

If I am lucky and have my health,
I will give away my eldest daughter,
Oh, will I dance, hop, hop!
Oh, will I dance, O, will I dance!
A worry will be off my head.

Play, klezmer musicians, play lively—
Today I gave away my first daughter.
We still have two girls,
Oh, how we await the same for them soon.

Play, klezmer musicians, grab your instruments!
Let the whole world share in our joy,
Our happiness is known only to God,
And to those who have daughters.

And when soon I will see the second daughter
In a white bridal gown,
I will drink and be happy,
A stone will be lifted from my heart.
I will drink, oh I will drink,
A stone will be lifted from my heart.

Play, klezmer musicians, let it rip!
We give away our second daughter with joy.
The youngest daughter we still have,
Oh, how we await the same for her soon.

Play, klezmer musicians, for us, and the in-laws,
And let the poor people live a little too,
A child is given away, dear God,
And even a girl too!

And when I hear for the last time the music,
I will perhaps sadly stand and ponder—
The last daughter, now she too is gone,
What else is there left to do?

Play, klezmer musicians, ready the bride,
They have taken all our children.
It was hard raising three daughters,
But it’s harder without them.

Play, klezmer musicians, bring out our tears,
The last bed will be empty after today,
The whole house, their closets—
Woe is me, how empty and sorrowful
III

Two Yiddish songs of remembrance

Isadore Lillian – Dos reydele dreyt zikh / The Wheel Spins

The wheel keeps turning, the wheel keeps turning and turns around and around.
The wheel keeps turning, the wheel keeps turning and doesn’t stop.
Yesterday, you were a rich man,
Today, I have all that you’ve earned.
Because the wheel keeps turning, the wheel keeps turning.
The wheel keeps turning and never stops.

I know an incredibly rich man, he has a mountain of money.
He doesn’t live, he doesn’t die, he doesn’t walk, he doesn’t stand, he thinks he owns the world.
But the day will come when he has misfortune,
And the wheel will start turning again.
What good is a life like this, just taking, no giving?
That’s why I sing this chorus to him:

The wheel keeps turning . . .

Binem Heller and Chava Albersterin – Mayn Shvester Khaye / My Sister, Khaye

My sister Khaye, her eyes were green.
My sister Khaye, her braids were black—
Sister Khaye, it was she who raised me,
In the house on Smotshe Street with tumble down steps.

Mother left the house at dawn,
When there was hardly light in the sky.
She went off to the shop, to earn
A wretched penny’s worth of change.

And Khaye stayed with the boys,
She fed them and watched over them.
And at night, when little kids get tired,
She’d sing them pretty songs.

My sister Khaye, her eyes were green.
My sister Khaye, her hair was long—
Sister Khaye, it was she who raised me.
She wasn’t even ten years old.

She cleaned and cooked and served the food,
She washed our little heads.  
All she forgot was to play with us—  
Sister Khaye, her braids were black.

My sister Khaye with her eyes of green  
Was burnt by a German in Treblinka.  
And I am, in the Jewish state,  
The very last one who knew her.

It’s for her that I write my poems in Yiddish  
In these terrible days of our times.  
To God Himself she’s an only daughter.  
She sits in heaven at His right hand.

IV

Three songs by Paul Dessau

Die Freunde / The Friends (from the Chinese)

German  
English
Wenn du in einer Kutsche gefahren kämst,  
If you were to come riding in a coach,  
Und ich, ich träge eines Bauers Rock,  
And I was wearing the clothing of a farmer,  
Und wir träfen uns eines Tages auf der Straße,  
And we met one day on the street,  
Würdest du aussteigen und dich verbeugen?  
Would you get out and take a bow?

Und wenn du Wasser verkaufstest, und wenn du,  
And if you were to be selling water, and if you,  
Wenn du Wasser verkauftest,   
if you were to be selling water,  
Und ich käme spazieren geritten auf einem  
And I traveled by, riding on a horse,  
Pferd,  
Und wir träfen uns eines Tages auf der Straße,  
And we met one day on the street,  
Würde ich absteigen, absteigen vor dir?  
Would I alight, alight for you?

Euch kennend dacht ich, und ich denk es noch,  
Knowing you, I was thinking, am still thinking,  
Und ich gehör nicht zu den blinden Lobern:  
And I don’t belong to those singing praises blindly:  
Ihr seid zu mehr gut als zum Welterobern,  
You’re better than one conquering the world,  
Zur Knechtschaft am Joch oder unterm Joch.  
Than bound to the yoke or suffering under the yoke.

Lied des Fischweibs / Song of the Fisherwoman  
(from Das Verhör des Lukullus [1951], Bertolt Brecht)

German  
English
Ich verstehe ihn.  
I understand.  
Mein Sohn ist im Kriege gefallen.  
My son has fallen during the war.  
Ich war Fischweib auf dem Markt am Forum.  
I was a fisherwoman, laboring at the market.  
Eines Tages hieß es, daß die Schiffe  
It was on a fateful day, that the ship  
Der Zurückgekommen aus dem Asienkriege.  
Bringing back the soldiers from the Asian wars  
Eingelaufen sei’n. Ich lief vom Markte,  
Arrived at port. I ran from the market  
Und ich stand am Tiber viele Stunden,  
And stood for many hours on the Tiber shores,  
Wo sie ausgebootet wurden, und am Abend  
Where they disembarked, and on that evening  
Waren alle Schiffe leer. Mein Sohn war  
All the ships were empty. My son  
Über ihre Planken nicht gekommen.  
Did not come down the gangplank.
Faber, mein Sohn Faber,
Den ich trug und den ich aufzog,
Mein Sohn Faber.
Da es zugig war am Hafen, fiel
Nachts ich in Fieber. Und im Fieber suchte
Ich nun meinen Sohn und tiefer suchend
Fror ich mehr, und dann gestorben, kam ich
Hier ins Schattenreich und suchte weiter.
Faber! rief ich, Faber! denn das war sein Name.
Und ich lief und lief durch Schatten
Und vorbei an Schatten hin zu Schatten
Faber! rufend, bis ein Pförtner drüben
In den Lagern der im Krieg Gefallnen
Mich am Ärmel einhielt und mir sagte:
Alte, hier sind viele Faber. Vieler
Mutter Sohne, viele, sehr vermißte.
Doch die Namen haben sie vergessen.
Dienten nur, sie in das Heer zu reihen
Und sind nicht mehr nötig hier.
Und ihren Müttern wollen sie nicht mehr begegnen
Seit die sie dem blutigen Kriege ließen.
Faber, mein Sohn Faber,
Mein Sohn Faber.
Und ich stand, am Ärmel eingehalten,
Und mein Ruf blieb weg mir im Gaumen.
Schweigend kehrt ich um,
Denn ich begeherte nicht mehr
Meinem Sohn ins Gesicht zu sehen.

Deutsches Miserere / German Miserere (adaptation of Psalm 50 [1943–1944])
Psalm 50 (King James Version)

1 The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.
2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.
3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.
4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.
5 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.
6 And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.
7 Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.
8 I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.
9 I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.
10 For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.
11 I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.
12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.
13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

14 Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?

17 Seeing thou hatest instruction, and casteth my words behind thee.

18 When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.

19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.

20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.

21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

**V**

Two songs from *Shireh chalutzim / Songs of the Pioneers* (1938)

**Paul Dessau** – ‘Ali b’er / Arise, Well of Mine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Ali b’er,</td>
<td>Arise, my well,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’er ali!</td>
<td>My well, arise!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utz’ki meipaz</td>
<td>And pour clear water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’toch had’li.</td>
<td>Into my bucket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seh tzach v’ rach,</td>
<td>A white and tender lamb,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seh tza’meili.</td>
<td>A thirsty lamb have I;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yavo v’ yesht</td>
<td>Let him come and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi mei had’li.</td>
<td>From the water in my bucket.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stefan Wolpe** – Tel Aviv, LaMidbar / Tel Aviv, To the Desert

**LaMidbar / To the Desert**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lamidbar saenu al dab’shot g’malim.</td>
<td>O take us to the desert, On camels’ backs aloft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al tzav’reihem y’tzaltz’lu paamonim d’dolim.</td>
<td>On their backs will ring the bells in cadence soft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalila lachem t’chalelu haro’im namim.</td>
<td>Don’t play upon your flute, for the shepherds sleep,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uvaleilot al hashvilim hakochavim rom’zim.</td>
<td>While on the paths, the winking bright stars their vigils keep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saenu, saenu lamidbar saenu.</td>
<td>O take us, o take us, o take us to the desert. . . .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tel Aviv

Hebrew
Tel Aviv hi ir y’hudit.
Shekula yisrael.
Yiyu ba gam heashir,
V’gam hapaol.
Tov l'ichyot b’Tel Aviv
B’eretz yisrael.
Tov l'ichyot u-l’chakot
L’v'iat hagoel.
Shab’chu v’ hodu l’Tel Aviv,
Hachaviva lanu Mikol chaviv
Osher v’ oneg mi saviv.

English
Tel Aviv is a Jewish city.
Only Jews are living there.
Rich and poor men live together;
Working men as well.
It’s good to live in Tel Aviv
And to live in Eretz Yisrael.
To live and patiently to wait
Until the redeemer comes.
Let your voice with praise resound,
For Tel Aviv wherein abound
Delight and pleasure all around!

VI

Two songs from postwar Polish cabaret

Chwalmy Pana / Let’s Praise the Lord
Zygmunt Konieczny and Agnieszka Osiecka

Polish
Dzięki Ci, Panie, za ten świat,
dzięki Ci, Panie za dzikich zwierząt śpiew
Za Twoją sprawą kwitnie kwiat
I rodzi się człowiek, pisklę i lew.

Gratmy Panu na harfie,
gratmy Panu na cytrze,
chwalmy śpiewem i tańcem
Cud ate fantastyczne.

Grajmy Panu w niebiosach,
grajmy Panu w dolinach,
z Jego światłem we włosach
Każdy życie zaczyna.

Och, och, to radości szloch, och
Aj, aj, dziękczynienia maj, aj

Och Ty, który chronisz biedne domki ślimaków
I wielkie góry obu Ameryk.
Ty, który śledzisz tajne drogi ptaków
I krzyki nasze, języ i szmery.
Dzięki, że dalek nam czas,
dzięki, że słuchasz i oglądasz nas.

Grajmy Panu na harfie,
grajmy Panu na cytrze,
chwalmy śpiewem i tańcem
Cud ate fantastyczne.

English
Thank you, Lord, for this world,
Thank you, Lord, for the wild animals’ song
By your will the flower blossoms
And man, chick, and lion are born.

Let’s play to the Lord on the harp
Let’s play to the Lord on the zither
Let us praise with song and dance
These fantastic miracles

Let’s play to the Lord in the heavens
Let’s play to the Lord in the valleys
With His light in their hair
Each one begins their life.

Oh, oh, these are sobs of joy, oh
Ay, ay, the May of thanksgiving, ay

Oh You, who protect the poor houses of snails
And the great mountains of both the Americas
You, who follow the birds’ secret paths
And our cries, moans and murmurs
Thank you for giving us time
Thank you for watching and listening to us

Let’s play to the Lord on the harp
Let’s play to the Lord on the zither
Let us praise with song and dance
These fantastic miracles
Grajmy Panu w niebiosach,  
graśmy Panu w dolinach,  
z Jego światłem we włosach  
każdy życie zaczyna.  

Let’s play to the Lord in the heavens  
Let’s play to the Lord in the valleys  
With His light in their hair  
Each one begins their life.

• English translation by Tul’si Bhamtry •

Skrzypek Hercowicz / The Violinist Hercowicz  
Andrzej Zarucki and Osip Mandelstam

Polish

Był sobie skrzypek Hercowicz,  
Co grał z pamięci jak z nut.  
Z Schuberta on umiał zrobić—  
No brylant, no istny cud.

Dzień w dzień, od śluży po wieczór,  
Zgrana jak taliast kart,  
Tę samą sonatę wieczną  
Wciąż pieścił jak jaki skarb.

I co pan powiesz, Hercowicz?  
Za oknem ciemność z śnieg . . .  
Dałbyś pan spokój, Sercowicz!  
Takie jest życie, nie? . . .

Niech harmonijka-Cyganka,  
Jak długo ściska mróz,  
W ślad za Schubertem na sankach  
Zawija kreskami płóz.

Nam z muzyką, tak bliską,  
Niestraszny i nagły zgon,  
A potem—z wieszaka zwisnąć  
Jak płaszcz z oskubanych wron.

Dawno już, panie Secowicz,  
Wszyto skońował śnieg . . .  
Dałbyś pan spokój, Scherzowicz.  
Takie jest życie, nie? . . .

English

There was once a violinist called Hercowicz  
Who played from memory as if from music.  
What he was able to do with Schubert—  
Well, it was brilliant, a true miracle in fact.

Day by day, from dawn until night  
He would caress, like a treasure,  
That one eternal sonata  
Neat like a deck of cards.

So what do you say, Mr. Hercowicz?  
Outside the window are darkness and snow . . .  
Come on, give me a break, Heartsowicz!  
This is life, is it not? . . .

Let the harmonica “Gypsy girl”  
When the frost has been biting for some time,  
Follow in Schubert’s traces on a sled  
And draw curvy lines with our skates.

With the music that is so close to us  
We don’t fear sudden death  
And then—to hang from a hanger  
Like a coat made from plucked crows.

It’s been a while, Mr. Heartsowicz,  
Since the snow confused everything . . .  
Come on, give me a break, Scherzowicz.  
This is life, is it not? . . .

• English translation by Tul’si Bhamtry •

VII

Two Yiddish songs of commemoration  
Varshe / Warsaw  
Benzion Witler

Yiddish

In hartsn do bay mir brent a fayerl  

English

In my heart there burns a flame
Oyf dem vos iz ave—
Krokhmalne un di Nalewki,
Un di Smocza un di Lazienki.
Khasidimlekh, nigidimlekh, Tsionistelekh,
Bundistelekh
Geshraybt hobn dorn gor un an ek.

For that which is no longer—
Krochmalne and Nalewki Streets,
And Smocza and Lazienki.
Hasidim, the wealthy, Zionists,
Bundists
All struggling without an end.

‘Khken nisht fargesn nokh biz haynt
Vos hot tsu dir geton der faynt,
Defar zog ikh tsu dir
Mit veytig on a shir:

I can’t forget to this day
What the enemy did to you,
And so I say to you
With profound sorrow:

Varshe mayn, di vest dokh geveyn a yidishe shtot, oy vi sheyn.
Varshe mayn, di vest dokh geveyn fil mit yidshn kheyn.

My Warsaw, you were a beautiful Jewish city.
My Warsaw filled with Jewish charm and grace.

Unter grininke boymelekh
Flegt Moyshelekh un Shloymelekh
Lebn un shtrebn un a shir.
Fabrikelekh, melikhelekh,
Khadorimlekh un shilekhlekh
Oyfgeboyt hobn mir.
Khokhme un kultur
Vi sheyn dayn yidish lebn iz geven!
Varshe mayn, di vest dokh geveyn
Fil mit yidshn kheyn.

Under green trees
The Moishes and Shlomos
Lived and reached for the sky.
The factories, workshops,
Schools and synagogues
That we built!
Wisdom and culture abound
How beautiful was your Jewish life.
My Warsaw, filled
With Jewish charm and grace.

Far mayne oygn zey ikh itster
Di Varshe fun a mol
Mit di geseleh di krimeh
Di hayselekh di shtimeh
Un Yidishe kinderlekh vi vinderlekh
Gelaybt dokh, geshtraybt dokh
A nakhes iz gevayn du un a tzul

(I cannot forget . . .)

• English translation by Stewart Figa •

Mordechai Gebirtig and Manfred Lemm – Blayb Gezunt Mir, Kroke / Farewell, Cracow

Farewell, Cracow!
Farewell to you.
The carriage stands ready before my home,
The enemy is in hot pursuit
As one would chase a dog,
He’ll cruelly drive me away.

Farewell, Cracow!
Today, I’ll perhaps see you
For the last time, with all that’s dear to me.
On my mother’s grave
My heart is emptied of tears,
So painful was my departure from you.

My eyes have wept so fully
Until no tears are left,
Bound to you by my father’s stone . . .
I could no longer find
My grandfather’s grave,
The gravestone must have turned to sand . . .

Farewell, Cracow!
Your soil is sacred,
Father, mother, rest peacefully in you.
It is not my fate
To lie next to you,
A grave far away from here awaits me . . .

Farewell, Cracow!
Farewell to you.
The carriage stands ready before my home,
The enemy is in hot pursuit
As one would chase a dog,
He’ll cruelly drive me away . . .