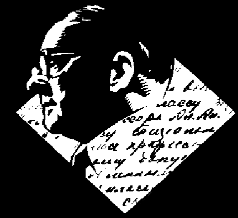


Shostakovich's Jewish Songs

By Professor Joachim Braun

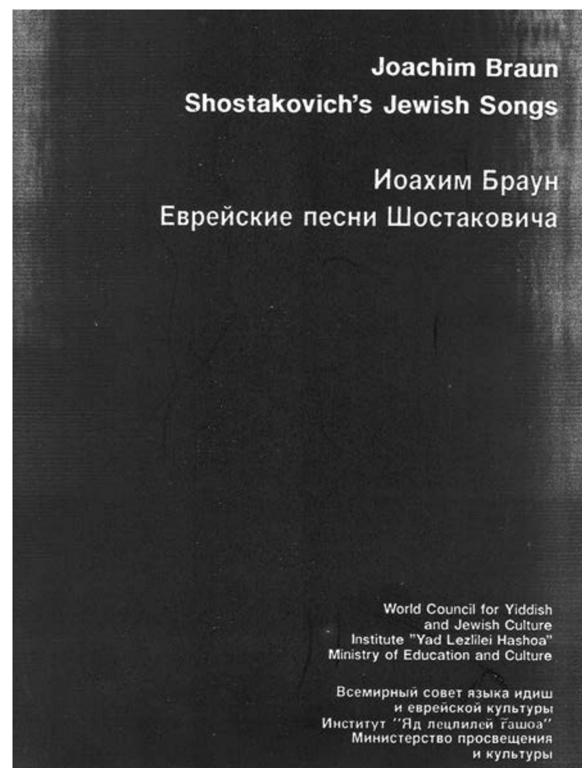
From Jewish Folk Poetry, op. 79

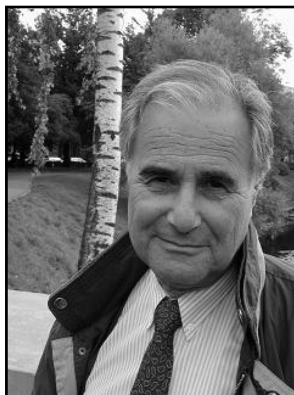
This essay is partly based on previous studies by the author – 'Shostakovich's Song Cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*: Aspects of Style and Meaning', in *Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz*, ed. M.H. Brown (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 259–286, and 'The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dmitri Shostakovich's Music', *Musical Quarterly*, LXXXI/I, 1985, pp. 68–80. It was originally published by the World Council for Yiddish and Jewish Culture and Institute 'Yad Lezlilei Hashoa' in 1989.

Dmitri Shostakovich's interest in Jewish matters – both musical and non-musical – is without precedent in the history of Russian or Soviet music. Elements of a Jewish musical idiom may be found in at least ten of his major works (see table on page 12), beginning with the Trio op. 67 (1944) and continuing up to Symphony No. 13, op. 113 (1962). He also expressed his interest in ways other than original composition: he completed Benjamin [Venyamin] Fleishman's opera *Rothschild's Violin* (1943) and served as editor-in-chief for the miscellaneous collection *New Jewish Songs* (1970).

Apart from its scope and persistence, Shostakovich's involvement with Jewish music and culture also differs from that of all earlier Russian composers in its very nature. The utilisation of a pseudo-Jewish melodic idiom by nineteenth-century Russian composers reflected little more than a characteristically Russian "interest in everything Eastern" (Vladimir Stasov). Shostakovich's appropriation of a Jewish idiom cannot be related either to the "folkloristic" concerns of a Musorgsky or a Rimsky-Korsakov or to the "philosophical" biases of a Rubinstein or a Serov.

To understand the meaning of the Jewish elements in Shostakovich's music, it is essential to recall the controversial position of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union at the time. Although the form and substance varied according to the period, the prevalent view was that the idea of a distinct Jewish people was scientifically untenable. As a result, Jewish culture, including musical culture, existed on the borderline of the permitted and the undesirable. This paradox of the permitted but undesired, the forbidden but not unlawful, created a highly ambiguous situation in Soviet culture regarding the employment of Jewish themes and motifs in art. Any exploration of a Jewish idiom or subject was fraught with risk and was potentially explosive.





Professor Joachim Braun

SHOSTAKOVICH'S COMPOSITIONS WITH JEWISH SUBJECTS AND JEWISH COMPOSITIONS WITH HIS PARTICIPATION *

	Composition	Composed	Published	1st Performance	Jewish Subject
1	Edition and orchestration of V. Fleishman's opera *Rothschild's Violin*	1943	1965 *Muzika* Moscow	20.7.60; Moscow Soloists of the Moscow State Philharmonic Society	Entire Work
2	Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano, Op. 67	1944	1944 *Muzgiz* Moscow	14.11.44: Leningrad Author (pf), D. Tsyganov (vl), S. Shirinsky (vc)	4th mov: Allegretto
3	Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77	1947-1948	1956 *Muzgiz* Moscow	19.10.55; Leningrad D. Oistrakh, Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Y. Mravinsky	2nd mov: Scherzo
4	*From Jewish Folk Poetry* , 1948 Vocal Cycle for Soprano, Contralto, Tenor and Piano, Op. 79	1948	1955 *Muzikal'ny Fond* Moscow	15.1.55; Leningrad Author (pf), Fond N. Dorliak (s), M Z. Dolukhanova (ca), A. Maslennikov (t).	Entire work
5	Quartet No. 4 for Two Violins, Viola, and Cello, Op. 83	1949	1954 *Muzgiz* Moscow	5.12.53; Moscow Beethoven-Quartet (D. Tsyganov, V. Shirinsky, V.Borisovsky S. Shirinsky).	4th mov: Allegretto
6	24 Preludes and Fugues For Piano, Op. 87	1950 1951	1952 *Muzgiz* Moscow	23 and 28.12.52; Moscow T. Nikolayeva	Prel/Fug No. 8; Prel No.14; Fug No. 16; Prel No. 17; Fug No. 19; Fug No. 24
7	*Four Monologues* on texts by A. Pushkin for Voice and Piano, Op. 91	1952	1960 *Sov. Kompozitor* Moscow	?	No. 1: The *Fragment*
8	Concerto for Cello and Orchestra No. 1, Op. 107	1959	1960 *Muzgiz* Moscow	4.10.59; Leningrad M. Rostropovich and the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Y. Mravinsky	3rd mov: Allegro con moto
9	Quartet No. 8 for Two Violins, Viola and Cello, Op. 110	1960	1961 *Sov. Kompozitor* Moscow	2.10.60; Leningrad Beethoven-Quartet (see Op. 83)	2nd mov: Allegro molto
10	Symphony No. 13 for Bass Solo, Bass Choir, and Orchestra, texts by Y. Yevtushenko, Op. 113	1962	1970 *Leeds Music* Canada	18.12.62; Moscow Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra under K. Kondrashin V. Gromadsky (bass), and choir under A. Yurlov	1st mov: *Babi Yar*
11	*From Jewish Folk Poetry* , Version for Voice and Orchestra, Op. 79a (see Op. 79)	1963*	1982 *Muzika* Moscow	19.2.64; Gorki Gorki Philharmonic Orchestra under G. Rozhdestvensky, L. Avdeyeva (s), G. Pisarenko (ca), A. Maslennikov (t)	Entire work
12	Editor-in-Chief of Song Collection *New Jewish Songs* , compiled by Z. Kompaneyetz	?	1970 *Sov. Kompozitor* Moscow	?	Entire work

* All bibliographic and biographical sources mention 1963 and 1964 as the date of composition or this work. (Moscow, 1982)
Only Volume 31 of Shostakovich's *Collected Works* refers to October 1, 1948

Both the chronological dispersion and stylistic nature of every particular Shostakovich composition related to Jewish subjects reflects his artistic credo at the time of creation. It is therefore of the utmost interest to follow up these two aspects – the chronological and stylistic – of his creative process as regards the employment of Jewish matters.

Shostakovich used Jewish elements during three periods. The first, the years 1943–44, includes an orchestration of the opera *Rothschild's Violin* by his favourite pupil, Venyamin Fleishman (1913–1941) who was killed in the war, and the Piano Trio op. 67.

His relationship with Fleishman during 1937–41, and his contribution to *Rothschild's Violin* was Shostakovich's first encounter with the Jewish idiom. Many of the devices which set his Jewish style – certain modes, the descending "iambic prime", the klezmer "um-pa" accompaniment – may be found in embryo in Fleishman's opera. Immediately after working on the opera, Shostakovich began the Trio with its tragic and macabre Finale, in which the Jewish idiom is exploited.

It was at this time that the first information about the Holocaust began to reach the Soviet Union.

The second period, 1948–1952, includes most of the relevant works: the Violin Concerto, the Fourth Quartet, the vocal cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry,* the Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues, and the *Four Monologues.* Those are the very years of the consistent attempt by the Stalin regime to destroy Soviet Jewish culture and its institutions.

Most of the works of this period were performed for the first time with considerable delay, after Stalin's death. The reason for this was, probably, ideological pressure by the cultural establishment (Resolution of the Central Committee of 10 February 1948) not to write complex, "anti-democratic" instrumental music. This fusion of the anti-Jewish and the anti-modern was most tragically characteristic of the cultural life of that time in the Soviet Union.

The third period dates from 1959 to 1963, when Shostakovich wrote the Cello Concerto, the Eighth Quartet, the Thirteenth Symphony, and, probably, the orchestral version of the vocal cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. This was the time when a new wave of anti-Semitism struck Soviet society with force, and when the period of "stagnation" began.

Shostakovich's last contact with Jewishness can be described as a gesture of protection in a mood of sentimental reminiscence: in 1970 he appeared as editor-in-chief of a very mediocre Jewish song collection.

The large number of compositions containing Jewish elements and the chronology of these works are proof of a special meaning in Shostakovich's "Jewish" works. In fact, it is the fate of Soviet Jewry that is symbolised in this corpus of music.

If we examine the interaction between the Jewish elements and the style of the work from a different angle, the function of Jewish elements in Shostakovich's music is revealed. The "Jewishness" of his music increases with the heightening of the abstractness of the musical form and the deepening of its esoteric meaning. The more hidden the meaning, the stronger the ethnic colouring of the music and the more intense the Jewish musical idiom. Conversely, the more open and direct the meaning, the less Jewish is the music, and the more doubtful is its ethnic provenance. There are three different types of this interdependence:

1: The text speaks an open language of social criticism, while the specifically Jewish musical element is totally absent. This is the case in the first movement, *Babi Yar*, of the Thirteenth Symphony. There can be no doubt about the central critical concept of the composer in this work, and about his attitude to anti-Semitism. The Jewish musical idiom cannot add anything to the clear intention of the text, and is, in fact, superfluous. On the contrary, the idiom here is Russian – Russian chimes, Russian modes, Russian vocal setting.

2: Text and/or music are based on a kind of stylised East European Jewish folk idiom. The basic musical elements in those works, however, are not necessarily purely Jewish. The Jewish musical idiom mingles with other folk music elements. Apart from certain individual Shostakovichian features (flattened notes for example), the music draws on a vernacular idiom that is of a general East European nature. The structure, meter and rhythm as well as the modality are typical of the folk music of several East European cultures. The dual ethnic nature of works such as the Violin Concerto, Fourth

Quartet, and Cello Concerto, lends itself to ambiguous interpretations on several levels – on the purely musical and on the socio-cultural. In vocal-instrumental compositions with text, the critical implication of the text is supplemented by the more or less “undesirable” Jewishness of the musical idiom (for example, op. 79 and op. 91 – see table on page 12) thus creating an artistic effect of social criticism. Even in purely instrumental works, the ambiguous Jewish strains of the music were able to maintain this meaning. But again, both text criticism and dual ethno-musical idiom could be ignored by the listener, pass unnoticed by opponents and be justified by the creator. This is the *raison d’être* of the double meaning of Jewish elements in Shostakovich’s music.

3: In instrumental music with a high degree of abstractness, written in a musical language very advanced for Soviet music of its time, the most authentic Jewish idiom is employed. In those works Shostakovich drew on the sovereign power of Jewish liturgical music. To understand this music, the listener must activate the deepest layers of memory and association. For example, in the Twenty-Four Preludes and Fugues, op. 87, the meaning of the work is deeply hidden in the labyrinths of polyphonic technique. The prelude and fugue form, and the abstractness of the connotations, demanded an exploitation of sources other than a vernacular folk-song, or instrumental *klezmer* tune. In the Fugue in F minor, Shostakovich used as his model the most elevated form of Jewish musical tradition, a *hazanut* melody – the weekday morning service:

Example 1[1]

Shostakovich, op. 87/8

Weekday morning service (Eisenstein)

Lebele Alukster’s chanting (Ephros)

The use of Jewish elements in Shostakovich’s music reaches far beyond their specific and “colourful” Jewishness. The intrinsic meaning of these elements is of a deep symbolic nature. It is in fact a hidden language communicated to the listener aware of its subtle meaning. Because of its special place in Soviet culture, the Jewish element served as a perfect vehicle and “screening device”[2] for the expression of “symbolic values” consciously and, in part, unconsciously employed by the artist.

The vocal cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* for Soprano, Contralto, Tenor and Piano, op. 79, is one of Shostakovich’s most beautiful and richly symbolic compositions, a masterpiece of folk idiom stylisation.

The vocal cycle belongs to the second “Jewish period” (1948–52) of Shostakovich’s compositional career. The year 1948, when the cycle was written, was a hard one for Soviet musical culture. Shostakovich had to endure an onslaught of denunciation in the months to follow. The Central Committee Resolution of 10 February 1948 accused Shostakovich

and other leading Soviet composers of “formalism” and “anti-people” tendencies in their music. Then, the Soviet-dominated International Congress of Composers and Musicologists convened in Prague, 20 – 29 May 1948, and announced its support for the Central Committee’s resolution condemning “cosmopolitanism” in music, and in June and July, *Sovetskaya Muzyka,* nos. 2 and 3, carried a two-part article by the composer Marian Koval pronouncing Shostakovich’s music “worthless” and “fallacious”.

The source of Shostakovich’s inspiration was the collection *Jewish Folk Songs (Yevreyskiye narodniye pesni)* compiled by Y.M. Dobrushin and A.D. Yuditsky and edited by Y.M. Sokolov. The book was passed for publication on 19 March 1947.

According to the testimony of Natalia Mikhoels, the daughter of the great Jewish actor Salomon Mikhoels, who was a close friend of the composer, it was May 1948 when Shostakovich for the first time raised questions in her presence about the pronunciation of certain Yiddish words and about the rhythmic flow of the original folk texts, which he knew only in Russian translation[3]. Natalia was also present for the first home performance of opus 79 on Shostakovich’s birthday, 25 September 1948. (It was his habit to have new music performed at his birthday parties.) On this occasion Shostakovich, rubbing his hands together nervously, introduced the recently written songs with the words: “I have here, you might say, some new songs.” At this home performance only the first eight tragic songs were performed. This fits well into the chronology of the composition of the vocal cycle presented in volume 32 of Shostakovich’s Collected Works (Moscow 1982): the first eight songs of op. 79 are dated 1–29 August 1948, while the last three are dated 10–24 October of the same year.

There is some confusion as to the dating of the orchestral version of this vocal cycle, listed by the composer as op. 79a. All sources for this work mention the year 1963 or 1964. Only in the Collected Works, vol. 31, does the date 1 October 1948 appear. This is surprising: did Shostakovich finish the orchestral score before the last three songs of the piano version? How could it be that he simultaneously used different versions of texts, and song titles, as a comparison of op. 79 and op. 79a shows? Why did the orchestral version never appear before the year 1964?

All the eleven songs Shostakovich selected from Dobrushin’s and Yuditsky’s Russian edition of *Jewish Folk Songs* are translations from the original Yiddish edition published by the same compilers in 1940[4]. The translations are literal for the most part, except for some minor changes, as for example, “engineers” to “doctors” in the eleventh song. Shostakovich adhered essentially to the order of the songs as they appeared in both the Russian and Yiddish editions. He did invent titles of his own for the individual songs. It is difficult from this vantage point to speculate about Shostakovich’s reasons for assigning titles in the first place – state-censorship? Self-censorship?

In three cases Shostakovich’s alterations of the original folk texts have certain implications. The change in the first song seems to be of artistic significance, and replaces the somewhat mystical atmosphere of the folk text by a more down-to-earth poetry – the folk text was probably not “realistic” enough for the year 1948:

Folk Text	**Shostakovich**
The sun and the rain,	The sun and the rain,
The bride had a baby,	The shine and the mist,
The groom arrived,	The fog is low,
The bride floated away	The moon has darkened.

Two changes, however, are of social significance. In the third song Shostakovich added the line “The Tsar holds him in prison” following the line “Your father is in Siberia” in the original – surely an attempt to avoid any possible misinterpretation. In the sixth song, the words “has converted” were replaced by “left with the police officer”, thus substituting a religious issue for a social one.

Song No. 3

Folk Text	Shostakovich
	My little son is the most
Sleep, my child, my beautiful	beautiful in the world,
Sleep, my little son,	A light in the darkness,
Your father is a young	Your father is in chains in
Siberian,	Siberia,
Sleep, -	The Tsar holds him in prison

Song No. 6

Folk Text	Shostakovich
Elye, the innkeeper	Elye, the junkman
Has put on his robe;	Has put on his robe;
His daughter has converted,	It is said
	His daughter has left
So he was told,	with the *pristav* (police
	officer).

Of great implicit significance are the changes initiated in the orchestral version of the cycle, all of which, in fact, amount to restorations of the original texts from the Russian edition of *Jewish Folk Songs.* Shostakovich dropped his invented song titles, returned to the unaltered folk text of the first song, and removed the cautious reference to the Tsar in the third song. This suggests how strongly he cared for the genuine folk texts.

Opus 79 was not released by the author for public performance until two years after the death of Stalin. These first public performances took place on 15 January 1955, in Leningrad, and five days later in Moscow. The performers were Nina Dorliak (soprano), Zara Dolukhanova (mezzo), Alexei Maslennikov (tenor), with the composer at the piano. In June the same year, the cycle was published by the Musical Fund of the U.S.S.R. (Moscow) in an edition of 3000 copies. On 19 February 1964, under the baton of Gennady Rozhdestvensky, the composer presented an orchestral version of the cycle in Gorki on the occasion of the Second Festival of Contemporary Music.

It has been suggested that the postponement of the first performance was the result of Shostakovich's reluctance to present at that time works of a "complex idiom", and his desire to postpone the premiere until the artistic climate was more relaxed[5]. If this is plausible for the Quartet No. 4 and the Violin Concerto written at the same time and performed for the first time only in 1953 and 1955, it does not make sense for the vocal cycle.

From Jewish Folk Poetry is an example of stylised urban folk art. The text is genuine folk poetry, and as such should have been regarded by Soviet aesthetic standards as raw material *par excellence* for musical setting. The music is written in complete accordance with the features of a popular genre: couplet form, a predominance of simple melody lines, and a folk-type accompaniment. This was the sort of music required by the Resolution of February 1948 – "democratic", "melodious", and "understandable for the people" – as was pointed out by many Soviet musicologists. Why should a work written in complete accordance with the artistic requirements of the Party Resolution be withheld by the composer?

At the time of the work's completion in autumn 1948, it had not been Shostakovich's intention to delay public performance – otherwise his having arranged a home performance in September would have been a risky move in itself, given the political climate during 1948. By way of contrast, he seems to have told no one about the existence of the Concerto or the Quartet, because he must have intended these works to be concealed from the beginning. By the autumn of 1948, the shock waves of the February events had subsided. Shostakovich might now have thought of going ahead with a public performance. This would help to explain the choice of texts, the popular musical idiom, and the addition in October of the somewhat propagandistic songs that end the cycle. Soviet Jewish culture, although endangered, had not yet been anathematised. Even in January 1949 Shostakovich wrote to a friend, the well-known composer Kara Karayev:

> Dear Karik! Thank you for your letter. I am not very well... I have not yet presented my Jewish songs. I will do this in some ten days. As their fate is of interest to you, I will write you more about this presentation[6].

But, during December 1948 and February 1949, only some months after the home performance, the situation changed drastically: many Jewish intellectuals, including the compilers of *Jewish Folk Songs,* Dobrushin and Yuditsky, were arrested; the entire Jewish cultural elite was under suspicion, and cultural institutions were closed down. At a Composers' Union session, and in the press, leading, mostly Jewish musicologists were accused of "anti-patriotic activities" and "cosmopolitan errors".

There was now no chance for any public performances whatsoever of a Jewish work, even in a musical style completely in accordance with official requirements. Conceived and composed as an expression of human desperation, *From Jewish Folk Poetry* had been turned overnight into a work of potentially nationwide social significance – a remarkable case of the sudden change in value and meaning of an artistic work due to circumstances which occurred after the creation of the work and independent of its creator. Only years later did *From Jewish Folk Poetry* become an organic part of Soviet music.

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The eleven songs of op. 79 are clearly divided into two groups: the so-called eight tragic songs composed in August 1948, and the three "happiness" songs, added by the composer in October after the home performance.

From Jewish Folk Poetry

Summaries

1: The song – a question and answer rhyme – tells of Moyshele, a baby who is born, rocked in a cradle, nourished with bread and onions and buried in a little grave.
2: A lullaby. Daddy will go to the village and bring us an apple (or chicken, nuts, etc.) to make the head (or tummy, hand, etc.) strong.
3: A cradle song about an exiled father: Sleep; your father is in Siberia, and my grief is great… Hush-a-by.
4: Parting with the beloved. The refrain "Oy, Abram, how can I stand being without you?!" alternates with reminiscences about the lovers' first meetings.
5: "Listen, Khasya! You mustn't go... with anyone! Else, you will weep..."
6: Zirele, the daughter of an innkeeper, has converted; the desperate father offers her dresses, jewellery, etc. but she repels him and asks the *pristav* (police officer) to "drive out the old Jew".
7: A dance refrain, "Hop, hop, hop," alternates with the description of a baby in the cradle, hungry and "naked without diapers".
8: A song about abject poverty: My Shayndl is in bed with her child, there is no fire, and the wind blows: "Oy, children, weep; the winter is here again!"
9: In the past I had only sad songs, and the fields did not blossom for me; now the kolkhoz is my home, and I am happy.
10: Shepherdess's song: I play my little flute, and admire my country. Little flute, don't cry, do you hear; I am happy, and you have to play more cheerfully.
11: The old shoemaker's wife goes to the theatre with her husband. She recalls the blessings that surround her, and wishes to tell the whole country about her happiness: "The star shines above our heads... our sons have become doctors."
The three "happy" songs lumped together at the end of the cycle obviously stand apart from the main body of the work. The subject matter changes abruptly from texts about poverty and misery to texts inflated with optimism, quite unlike the transition provided in Dobrushin's collection *Jewish Folk Songs,* where texts about work, fighting, and war form a bridge between the "tragic" and the "happy" songs. Distinct topical and formal features also divide the two song groups. The first (nos. 1–8) presents genre scenes, the second (nos. 9–11) presents pronouncements and slogans; the text of the first is based on folkloric elements and uses folk lexemes, that of the second exploits features of art song and uses the vocabulary of Soviet mass songs; the first uses the dialogue form typical of Yiddish folk poetry, with ample use of "speech intonations", while the second reflects a mixture of the conventional *melos* of the Soviet mass song and the Russian art song. All of these differences create the sense that these two groups of songs are independent of, indeed alien to, one another.

Nearly every song of the cycle exploits the elliptical and connotative language characteristic of Jewish folk poetry in order to suggest certain half-hidden meanings. Dobrushin, one of the great experts on Jewish folk songs and the editor of *Jewish Folk Songs,* wrote in this connection:

> Here [in Jewish folk songs] maximal concreteness and exactness often turn into reticence. When two persons talk about things well known to them, they can speak in hints… In Jewish folk poetry, phrases and verses of this kind, built on innuendo, are very often present[7].

This innuendo possesses concrete meaning only for the initiated – in the case of Shostakovich's song cycle, for those acquainted with a particular social and artistic climate. For example, an implicit reference to the millions exiled to Siberia by the Stalin regime is obvious in the third song of the cycle, although the text itself refers to events during the 1905 Revolution. The third song is also related to the fourth song, with its recurrent, desperate outcry, "Oy, Abram, how shall I live without you? / I, without you – you, without me / How shall we live apart?" The dramatic situation enacted here is clearly a consequence of the Siberian banishment depicted in the third song.

Another aspect of Jewish folk poetry employed in *From Jewish Folk Poetry* is the use of "musical speech", a type of recitative imitating speech intonations, which originated from two quite different sources – the Dargomyzhsky-Musorgsky approach to text setting in art music and the ancient practice of cantillation in rendering Hebrew liturgical texts.

Songs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 of Shostakovich's opus 79 all employ the device of "musicalised speech". Although the Musorgskian strains in Shostakovich's music in general are well-known, his "Musorgsky-ism" [*"musorgskianstvo"*] is of special significance for his "Jewish style". Writing about his interest in "musical declamation" Musorgsky says that his point of departure was "the conviction that human speech is strictly controlled by musical laws", and that he considered "the mission of the art of music to be the reproduction in musical sounds of not only the nuances of the emotions but, even more important, the nuances of human speech"[8]. Dobrushin, speaking about the East European Jewish folk song, wrote that what "vividly stands out [as] the one most characteristic folksong feature [is] the fundamental connection with spoken language, with the manner of speaking of the Jewish masses."[9] Thus, we see in Shostakovich a case of overlap between principles cultivated in Russian art music and traditional features found in Jewish folk art.

The genre-scene character and subject matter (*"zhanrovost", "siuzhetnost"*) of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* also reflect Shostakovich's conjuncture of Russian classical tradition and Jewish folk tradition. Musorgsky's "folk-scenes" (*narodnye kartinki*) characteristically dealt with the fate of the "little man" or the "humble man", a familiar figure in Russian literature and art from the time of Gogol. The comic and the tragic converged in the "little man's" everyday life, with the tragic perhaps predominating. Similarly, the miniature genre-scene is also found in Jewish folk song where it stems to a great extent from the Jewish folk theatre (*Purimshpil:* Purim-games), and particularly from the art of the *badkhan* (Jewish folk comedian, jester). "The Jewish folk song is always inclined towards a genre-scene character [*"siuzhetnost"*], towards a story", wrote Dobrushin[10].

So far we have discussed only the Yiddish folk poetry in Shostakovich's opus 79. The composer, however, also made use of Jewish folk melodies which he naturally transformed for his own artistic purposes. Let us mention some examples.

Song No. 2 is a version of the folk song "Are rushing, are flowing. . ." (*S'loyfn, s'yogn…*), which appears in Emil Seculetz's collection, and, in fragmentary form, in a collection by Moshe Beregovsky and Itzik Fefer[11]. It is of interest that the original text of the melody in the Seculetz collection reads: "Black clouds rush, and flow / The wind whistles and growls / From far away your father / Sends you greetings, my child! / The wind brings us greetings / From the cold country… And he [the father] digs deeper, and deeper / Digs the grave for the lie..." Can this text have been unknown to Shostakovich? Can his choice of a melody associated with a Siberian subject have been purely accidental?

Ex. 2

FP Shostakovich: From Jewish Folk Poetry

ES Seculetz: Yiddishe folks-lider fun Rumenie

Allegretto

FP No. 2

Ruhig

ES No. 84

transposed

Song No. 5 is a version of a Jewish *freilekhs* (dance tune transcribed in 1935 by Beregovsky from performers at the Moscow Jewish Theatre[12]. A similar fragment appears in Mikhail Gnessin's symphonic piece, *The Jewish Orchestra at the Ball of the Town Bailiff* (1926), a classic of Soviet Jewish music, and widely known among musicians in Moscow (see Ex. 3).

Ex. 3 Moshe Beregovsky : Yevreiskiye narodniye pesni
Mikhail Gnessin: The Jewish Orchestra at the Ball of the Town Bailiff

Allegretto ♩=92

FP No. 5

B62 No. 111

♩=80

B62 No. 113

transposed

G Bdr 33

Yet another example is provided by the melody of the folk song "Oy, Abram"[13], which can be regarded as a primitive prototype of Shostakovich's Song No. 4. The descending fourth *e'-b* provides the skeleton of both melodies.

A Hassidic tune from A.Z. Idelsohn's *Melodienschatz* is also closely related to Shostakovich's song[14].

The Jewish sources of opus 79 do not suggest themselves purely through musical parallels. Most of the songs are written in genres typical of Jewish folk music: lamentation (nos. 1 and 8), lullaby (nos. 2 and 3), *freilekhs* (nos. 4 and 7), and genre scenes (nos. 5 and 6). The ethnically unmarked genres of lyrical song (nos. 9 and 10) and of processional march music (no. 11) appear in the last group of "happy" songs, thus once again underlining their alien nature.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of East European Jewish folk music is its tendency to an "extrapolation of mood"[15]. This peculiar trait is richly explored in opus 79: a single, bright dance-motif develops into ecstatic,

self-obsessed automatism (nos. 4 and 7); a lyrical, melancholy subject turns into tragic music, bordering on a state of catharsis (nos. 1 and 8); a calm piece of everyday advice concludes in a deliriously whispered warning (no. 5). Only in the last three songs, where the mood is constant and unequivocal, do we miss this sort of change.

Throughout the cycle, rhythmic patterns and formulas of articulation characteristic of Jewish folk music are used extensively. Subdivisions of the strong beat, syncopations, and the "iambic prima" occur in all eleven songs. Often, identical rhythmic structures can be found for the melodies in opus 79 and for folk melodies (e.g. Song No. 7 and the folk song, "Good evening, Brayne")[16]. In eight songs Shostakovich has used the "um-pa" accompaniment (mostly on a pedal bass) typical of *klezmer* bands.

Shostakovich's use of modality is the most complex feature of his music. The various investigations of his melodic-harmonic system suggest a multitude of possible interpretations, from a relatively conventional major-minor approach to those stressing the Western and Eastern folk roots of his highly individual and modal style. From our perspective, the melodic harmonic system on which opus 79 is based should not be construed as a major-minor system, but as a distinctive modal system with a strong affinity for the Jewish *shteiger* (a modal row, in traditional Jewish music).

One of the most striking structural devices utilised in opus 79 is the leitmotive. Its significance here is certainly not purely musical. Although the basic structure of the motive remains constant enough, and it clearly dominates the entire cycle, it never appears twice in the same form. Nonetheless, its integrity as a motive is secured by both Jewish modal and rhythmic-melodic features.

In its most complete form the leitmotive appears in No. 3, the Siberian song, which seems to embody the idea of the cycle *à toute outrance.* The entire motive appears four times, and the melodic subject of the song itself is a variation of the motive (or *vice versa).* In Songs Nos. 2, 4, and 6, only fragments appear, while the motive is absent from Songs Nos. 7, and 8. In Song No. 6, the motive appears for the last time in the first and principal part of the cycle (nos. 1–8). Here, at the height of tragedy, the moment of ideological collapse, the motive sounds on the words "Come back, Zirele, my daughter!" after the converted daughter shouts, "Drive out the Jew!" Although its basic structure is preserved, there is a radical transformation of the leitmotive and a breakdown of a tradition.

Following the climax in Song No. 6, the leitmotive does not appear for two songs. No further spiritual devastation is possible: only physical well-being can deteriorate, and this indeed happens in Songs Nos. 7 and 8. With Song No. 9, the motive rapidly loses its ethnic character as well.

The transformation, indeed the destruction, of a spiritual world has been accomplished.

There can be no doubt concerning the Jewish character of the vocal cycle op. 79. The text is pure Jewish folk poetry; the music is based on Jewish traditional folk elements. During the process of composition, Shostakovich showed a special interest for the genuine sounding of the Yiddish texts. Years later, Maxim Shostakovich, conductor and son of the composer, confirmed that it was his father's wish "to have the actual Yiddish poems sung in his op. 79", and that Shostakovich was very fond of the authentic Yiddish idiom[17].

During the years 1980–82, at the time of my research on the Jewish elements in the music of Dmitri Shostakovich, I discovered all the original Yiddish texts used in op. 79. It immediately became clear that the Yiddish texts would fit Shostakovich's music excellently, and more, that they would even enable one to experience Shostakovich's "Jewish music" in a new, pure, idiomatic light of folk art.

The idiom of Yiddish, like any vernacular, has its special flavour. The untranslatable expressions, the lexicology and phonology of Yiddish are of great semantic richness. The differences between the Yiddish original and the Russian translation are obvious. Let me quote, for example, the following lines from Song No. 1:

Yiddish	Russian
Oy, yingl in gribl, In gribl, Moyshele, in gribl	Oy, mal'tchik v mogile, V mogile Moyshele, v mogile

Oy, little boy in the grave, in the grave, Moyshele, in the grave

The entire atmosphere of suffering, of misery and hopelessness, created by "yingl in gribl" cannot be reproduced by translation. The absence of the typical Yiddish diminutive in itself deprives the sentence of its special rich meaning. "Gribl" is not just a "grave" (*mogila*), but rather a small pit, or even more, a hole dug in the earth by hand. The poly-semantic Yiddish "Oy", is even less subject to translation, and acquires a farcical character in any other language. This is especially felt in say, Song No. 11, where in the final "happiness" song we listen to:

Oy, zvezda gorit nad nashey golovoy, Oy!
(Oy, the star is shining above our heads, Oy!)

It is practically impossible to translate the Yiddish idiom "zunenyu" (Russian "sinok") which is a special form of diminutive from "zun" (son), with a suffix implying not only a small son, but also "my son", "darling son", etc.

Often the Yiddish text fits the music much more smoothly than the Russian, as, for example, in Song No. 6 with the sigh on "mir":

kum | zhe tzu | mi - ir, kum | zhe tzu | mi - ir!
ver- | nis' k ot- | zu - u, ver- | nis' k ot – | zu - u!

The underlay of the authentic Yiddish texts was done with only minor changes and adjustments[18]. Presented here this underlay exemplifies the potential of Shostakovich's music with the original folk texts and may yield a new, more genuine interpretation of this work[19]. From a concert piece, often performed with full symphony orchestra, and operatic parade, it may be turned into a deep and sincere piece of folk art stylisation. With the Yiddish texts, full use can be made of such folk art characteristics as "musicalised speech", "speech intonations", dialogues, phrases built on innuendo, vernacular musical and textual devices.

With the insight of a genius Shostakovich grasped the socio-ethnic nature of these folk-songs, and created one of the most striking works of Jewish art music. As such, this work, written in 1948, should be considered the first, and one of the greatest examples of the 20th century "New Folklore Wave", which actually emerged in both West and East European music only in the sixties.

From Jewish Folk Poetry stands as striking evidence of the complexity and ambiguity characteristic both of the culture in which the composer lived and created, and of his own life. It seems to me that the work's uniqueness, its special place in Soviet music, and perhaps in world music, is secured by its distinctive style and language, its remarkable intermingling of the obvious and the latent, which constitutes its real meaning and its symbolism. The fate of the Soviet peoples, the complications of Soviet life, were expressed by Shostakovich through a Jewish musical idiom that, because of its special status in Soviet society, was able to serve at the time of its creation as an ideal vehicle for the composer's artistic and ethical self-expression.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, *Heritage of Music* (New York, 1972), Ex. 14; Gershon Ephros, *Cantorial Anthology,* IV (New York, 1953), p. 368.
[2] Edward E. Lowinsky, *Secret Chromatic Art in the Netherlands* (New York, 1946), p. 169.
[3] N. Mikhoels, personal interview conducted by the author on 12 March 1981, Tel Aviv.
[4] *Yiddishe folks-lider,* comp. and ed. Y. Dobrushin and A. Yuditsky (Moscow, 1940), pp. 18, 45, 84, 99, 227, 325; 327, 388, 432, 433 and 460.
[5] Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia:* 1917–1981 (Bloomington, 1983), p. 244.
[6] Dmitri Schostakovitch, *Erfahrungen,* ed. Christoph Hellmundt and Krysztof Meyer (Leipzig: *Reclame*, 1983), pp. 215-216. Shostakovich is probably speaking about a presentation at the Composers' Union.
[7] *Yevreyskiye narodniye pesni,* comp. and ed. Y. Dobrushin and A. Yuditzky (Moscow, 1947), p. 9.
[8] *Musorgsky: In Memoriam* 1881–1981, ed. M.H. Brown (Ann Arbor, 1982) p.2.
[9] Dobrushin, *loc. cit.*
[10] *Ibid*, pp. 1–12
[11] E. Seculetz, *Yiddishe folks-lider fun Rumenie* (Tel Aviv, 1970), p. 147; *Yiddishe folks-lider,* comp. M. Beregovsky and I. Fefer (Kiev, 1938), p. 318.
[12] M. Beregovsky, *Yevreyskiye narodniye pesni* (Moscow, 1962), nos. 111 and 113.
[13] Seculetz, *op. cit,* no. 37
[14] A.Z. Idelsohn, *Hebraeisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz* (Leipzig, 1932), v. 9, nos. 153 and 560.
[15] M. Gnessin, *Stati, Vospominaniya, Materiali* (Moscow, 1961), p. 201.
[16] Beregovsky and Feder, *Yiddishe folks-lider*, p. 284
[17] Letter from Maxim Shostakovich to J. Braun, dated 12 June 1986, Ridgefield, CT, USA; Programme Notes for the concert at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts on 23 April 1987, Washington, D.C.
[18] I am deeply indebted to my wife Aviva for her help in the shaping of the Yiddish text, and to Dr. Guenter Marwedel (Institute for the History of German Jewry, Hamburg), for solving some linguistic problems.
[19] Eight songs *From Jewish Folk Poetry,* op. 79, with Yiddish texts (piano version) were performed for the first time at the Bar-Ilan University, Israel, on January 24, 1980 (P. Ainbinder, M. Waldman, L. Garb, and R. Waldman); the orchestral version of the same songs was performed for the first time under Y. Aronowich by the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, with L. Tuneh, M. Zakai, and N. Jenkins (Jerusalem, June 2,1985); the entire cycle of the orchestral version was performed under M. Shostakovich by the National Symphony Orchestra, with M. Shearer, S. Greenfield and R. Nolan (Washington, D.C., 23, 25 and 28 April, 1987).