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Yiddish Diction in Singing

Carrie Suzanne Schuster-Wachsberger
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YIDDISH DICTION IN
SINGING

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Musical Arts

School of Music
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Dissertation Approval

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ABSTRACT

Yiddish Diction in Singing

By

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The standard for classical singers in the United States to be trained in the singing diction of the German, Italian, and English languages. This sung diction varies from the spoken diction for those languages and is therefore important for singers to study in classes dedicated to singing language pronunciation. Literature is also available for the instruction in the singing diction of numerous other languages including Latin, Spanish, Czech, Russian, and Hebrew. While there is a vast scope of languages represented by vocal diction guides, there is no available singing diction guide for Yiddish songs, despite the spectrum of classical vocal genres where there is Yiddish repertoire, including art songs, cantatas, operas, operettas, and stage plays. The goal of this document is to create a manual on how to pronounce Yiddish in singing by examining the rules of spoken Yiddish diction, by comparing and contrasting how other languages differ between their spoken and sung rules, and by listening to old and new recordings of Yiddish repertoire in an effort to make this repertoire more accessible to performers.

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I am thankful for my parents, Ken and Emily Wachsberger. They have always cheered me on in all of my endeavors. Throughout the program, they have been there when I needed an ear to vent to and have helped me significantly in writing my document. Having a professional editor as a father really has its perks! Both parents have been so supportive and I look forward to the parties they have planned for when I graduate.

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to get our work done so that we could graduate together. We may have separate papers, but we are a team and I am so thankful for her advocacy and comradery along the way.

I want to thank Faustino "NJ" Solis and the members of the University United Methodist Church Chancel Choir for being so supportive of their *Yidishe meydele* (little Jewish girl). It is a joy and an honor to sing as a part of the ensemble every week. I am so appreciative of the words and prayers of encouragement that have been said on my behalf in the completion of my doctorate. I truly find this group to be a blessing.

I am grateful for Al Grand of the Yiddish Gilbert and Sullivan Light Opera Company of Long Island for his contributions to my paper and my lecture recital. The Yiddish libretti he has created of the classic Gilbert and Sullivan productions are an inspiration. It has been an honor to have his support.

Lastly, but in no way the least, my boss at Smashburger, Ryan Discipulo, has been unbelievably supportive of my graduate career. After I told him that I used work as an excuse to not do my school work, he cut my hours back significantly to where he had to work overtime himself to make up for my absence. He let me monopolize a booth in the dining room for hours on end for a solid month because I found my writing to be the most productive there. He had my back anytime I needed extra time away, always telling me he would somehow "make it work." When I first applied for this non-music job, I never could have dreamed of the support that Ryan has shown me. Aside from being a great boss, I can honestly say that Ryan has become an amazing friend whom I am lucky to have.

I do not know how I could have succeeded without an entire arsenal of encouragement behind me pushing me through to the last page. I had a world of support from teachers, family, friends, and employers, and for that I am so grateful.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

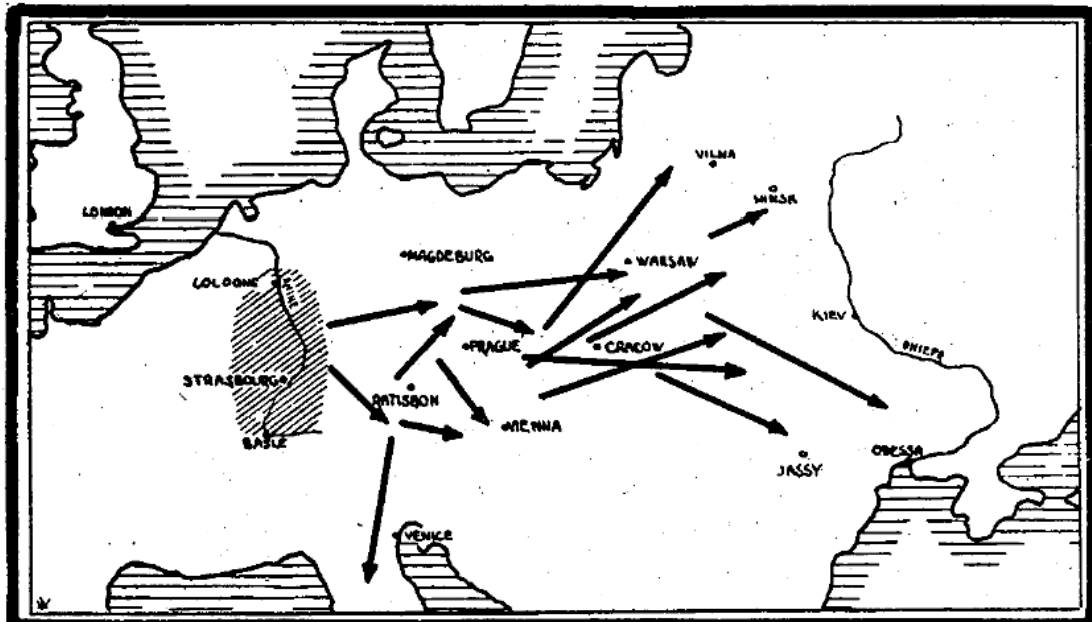
1.1 WHAT IS YIDDISH?

Yiddish is the language spoken by Jews of Eastern European descent, also known as Ashkenazi Jews. It is a language that combines Hebrew, the language spoken in the Jewish Holy Land of Israel that is an evolution of the original Aramaic language found in the Torah, with the local German and Slavic languages where the language developed in Eastern Europe. It evolved over time as a hybrid between the cultural Jewish language of its speakers and the language spoken by locals in the lands around the European Jewish settlements. While Hebrew was the more common language in religious study and worship, Yiddish was used more in secular use outside the synagogue.

Different theories exist about how Yiddish developed but, according to the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, the language originated in roughly 1000 CE as Jews were forced to leave their Mediterranean homes during the Crusades and head north toward the Rhine basin.¹ The language was nurtured by the isolation of the Jewish people, who mostly stayed within their own Jewish communities. The Jewish people continued to emigrate further southeast, heading into Bavaria, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia and then north toward Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and the Baltic lands. By the 19th century, Yiddish was the primary language spoken by most Eastern European Jews. Figure 1 shows how the Jewish people emigrated throughout Eastern Europe from the Rhine Basin.

¹ "Basic Facts about Yiddish," YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, https://www.yivo.org/cimages/basic_facts_about_yiddish_2014.pdf?c=, Accessed November 14, 2015.

FIGURE 1. JEWISH MIGRATION FROM THE YIVO INSTITUTE OF JEWISH RESEARCH'S *BASIC FACTS ABOUT YIDDISH*.²



With cultural assimilation in the 19th century, the Yiddish language lost its popularity among Jews in Western Europe, but it became more common in Eastern Europe. Towards the end of the century with mass emigration out of Eastern Europe, Yiddish traveled to the United States and around the world. Figure 2 shows how many people spoke Yiddish prior to World War II according to YIVO's study of census data.

² Ibid.

FIGURE 2. YIDDISH SPEAKERS BEFORE WORLD WAR II.³

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Eastern and Central Europe..... | 6,767,000 |
| North America..... | 2,987,000 |
| Western Europe..... | 317,000 |
| Palestine..... | 285,000 |
| South and Central America..... | 255,000 |
| Africa..... | 56,000 |
| Asia (excluding Palestine)..... | 14,000 |
| Australia..... | 9,000 |
| TOTAL..... | 10,690,000 |

After World War II, the number of Yiddish speakers was far diminished due to the deaths during the Holocaust.

Throughout centuries of emigration, the Yiddish language evolved greatly. The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research breaks down that evolution into four periods: Earliest Yiddish (pre-1250), Old Yiddish (1250-1500), Middle Yiddish (1500-1750), and Modern Yiddish (1750-Present).⁴ Tracing the development of the language is simplified by the wealth of literature in existence from Old Yiddish to Modern Yiddish, including periodicals, dramas, and poetry.

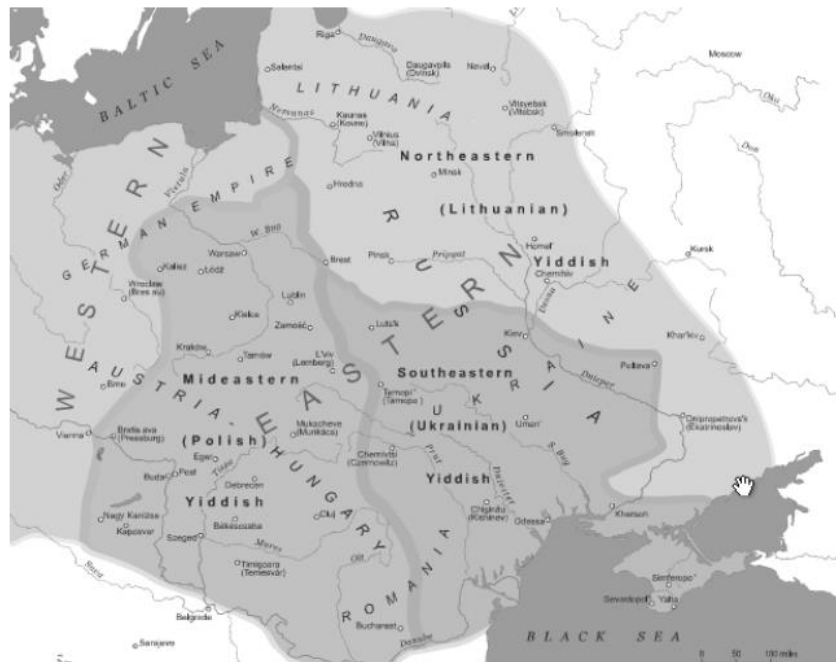
One effect of Yiddish's wide sprawl across Eastern Europe is that it has given Yiddish speakers exposure to varying linguistic influences from local languages, leading to different local dialects of Yiddish. YIVO breaks these dialects into four groups (see Figure 3):

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- Western Yiddish - as spoken in lands such as Germany and parts of Austria and the Czech Republic
- Mideastern Yiddish - as spoken in countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia
- Southeastern Yiddish - as found in the eastern portion of Romania into Ukraine
- Northeastern Yiddish - the variant found in Lithuania, Belarus, and Eastern Ukraine

FIGURE 3. MAP OF YIDDISH DIALECTS FROM THE YIVO INSTITUTE'S *BASIC FACTS ABOUT YIDDISH*.⁵



Dialects of Eastern Yiddish and the North-South Divide.
(YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe)

The scholars at the Jewish Language Research Website comment on the differing dialects of Yiddish:

⁵ Ibid.

Because it has never been the official language of a sovereign state, there is no official dialect of Yiddish. Since the end of the nineteenth century, however, a de facto literary dialect called 'Standard Yiddish' (yidishe klal-shprakh) has evolved and been adopted by many writers. It is based largely on the grammar of Southern Yiddish and the pronunciation of Northeastern Yiddish. It is the dialect usually taught today and used in most modern publications, even though it probably does not exactly correspond to anyone's native speech.⁶

Thankfully, because of the phonetic aim of transliterations, once one knows how to pronounce the transliterations, the issue of pronunciation is moot despite the different dialects. The absence of unification in this instance is comparable to the pronunciation of Italian, in that the Italian language was not unified until 1861. Despite this fact, singers perform all of the Italian language repertoire, including repertoire written before 1861, with the same standard pronunciation, with the exception of pieces specifically written in a dialect such as one of Paolo Tosti's Neapolitan songs. For this reason, the issue of dialects is not a high-priority issue when figuring out a diction guide for Yiddish.

Another argument against the importance of dialects comes from the YIVO Institute as they explain about a theoretical fifth dialect of Yiddish: American Yiddish. They discuss how the mass emigration from all over Europe to the same locations in the United States led to a Yiddish that was a melting pot of the other four dialects mixed with new English words and phrases.⁷ So even on the original stages of Second Avenue in New York where a bulk of Yiddish theatre premiered, the Yiddish would not have been unified dialectally.

Joseph Rumshinsky's 1912 song "Watch Your Step" is a comic popular Yiddish song that plays on the new English language in which an Eastern European woman

⁶ Sarah Bunin Benor, ed., "Yiddish," Jewish Language Research Website, Last Updated June 21, 2002, <http://www.jewish-languages.org/yiddish.html>, Accessed February 7, 2014.

⁷ "Basic Facts about Yiddish."

is immersed when she moves to New York City. The entire song is in Yiddish with English interjections of words and phrases that the woman keeps hearing. The refrain of the song then repeats the title phrase of "Watch your step," but is sung with an Eastern European accent so that it comes out as "Vatch your step," or [vatʃ jəR stɛp].

1.2 WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF YIDDISH THEATRE AND MUSIC?

Theatre in the Yiddish-speaking community began as a way for male students to act out stories of biblical themes and were often laden with klezmer music and singing. The plays were performed around the Purim holiday because, in the predominantly orthodox culture, women were not allowed to sing for men for reasons of modesty and men could not dress in women's clothing to play female roles except during Purim.⁸

In the early 19th century, reformation of the Jewish religion allowed for theatrical groups to form within various Jewish communities. Jeffrey Veidlinger writes in his *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater; Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*, "by 1912 there were sixteen Yiddish theatrical troupes in Russia; according to one estimate, by World War I there were a total of 600 Jewish actors and chorus members, 90 percent of whom lived in poverty."⁹ Some of the shows would remain of a religious nature, while others were completely secular, but potentially with culturally Jewish themes. For example, Boris Thomashefsky's *Der Yeshiva Bokher*, or *The Yeshiva Boy* (1899), told the story of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but instead of the lead character being the son of a king, he is a rabbinical student and the son of a rabbi. Likewise in 1923, Joseph Rumshinsky's *Di*

⁸ Joel E. Rubin and Rita Ottens, *Di Eybike Mame (The Eternal Mother): Women in Yiddish Theater and Popular Song, 1905-1929*, Mainz, Germany: Wergo, 2003, CD Liner Notes, 2.

⁹ Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater; Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000, 27.

goldene kale told the story of a woman in Romania who inherits massive wealth from her estranged father in America and suddenly has to deal with the frenzy of men trying to marry her for her new money.

According to Joel Rubin and Rita Ottens in their liner notes for the CD compilation of *Di Eybike Mame; The Eternal Mother; Women in Yiddish Theater and Popular Song 1905-1929*, a CD named for an operetta of the same name which pokes fun at the overbearing worrywart that is the stereotypical Jewish mother:

The productions of the Yiddish art theater developed alongside the more formulaic operettas and melodramas (often referred to as *shund*, literary trash). The productions of the Yiddish art theater, too, relied upon incidental music and song as important ingredients, and it wasn't uncommon for the star of a serious drama to step forward in the middle of the action to deliver a song.¹⁰

Early Yiddish operetta was based on the Viennese and Parisian models, even though it drew large doses of its musical inspiration from synagogue chant, folksong and, to a lesser extent, instrumental klezmer music. As such, women tended to specialize in roles typical of the operetta, such as soubrette, grande dame, prima donna, mother and character roles. The style ranged from comic to dramatic and melodramatic.¹¹

The plays of the Yiddish theatre gained popularity in the late 19th century with the development of the railroad systems in Eastern Europe.¹² The new means of transportation allowed for theatre troupes to travel and share their productions and music with other communities. The first formalized troupe is often credited with having

¹⁰ Joel E. Rubin and Rita Ottens, *Di Eybike Mame (The Eternal Mother): Women in Yiddish Theater and Popular Song, 1905-1929*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 5.

¹² Mark Slobin and Michael Ochs, "Two Lectures on Yiddish Sheet Music and the Yiddish American Musical Theater," YouTube, Yale University: April 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jtv-vIUPH3w>, Accessed January 19, 2016.

materialized in Romania in 1876 by Abraham Goldfaden, one of the major composers of the Yiddish stage.¹³

At the same time that the railroads were bringing Yiddish theatre music throughout Eastern Europe, Jews there were fleeing to the United States in search of less impoverished lives. This emigration brought a large number of Jews to places like New York City. In the city known for its theatrical productions and follies on Broadway, Yiddish theatre gained huge popularity, but on Second Avenue on a side of town that was largely Jewish. The Jewish cultural center in this neighborhood not only fostered Yiddish theatre, but also created a market for published scores of Yiddish theatre, popular songs, and art songs, which would have been heard on Yiddish radio stations at the time. One of these songs was "Churbon Titanik, oder Der naser keiver," or "The Titanic's Disaster," by Henry A. Russotto. The song laments the events of the famous Atlantic shipwreck and is listed by the Library of Congress both as an art song for high voice and piano and as a popular song.¹⁴

Today, Yiddish theatre music is mostly unperformed with the exception of a few select ensembles. One troupe that actively performs Yiddish music is the Gilbert and Sullivan Light Opera Company of Long Island. The group performs their own Yiddish renditions of the operettas of the famed English musical duo William Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan. The Yiddish libretti, mostly adapted by one of the founders, Al Grand, place a Jewish spin on the classic comedic G&S stories. For instance, instead of the *H.M.S. Pinafore* line "For he is an Englishman," *Der Yiddisher Pinafore* includes the line "Er iz a

¹³ *Di Eybike Mame*, 2.

¹⁴ "Churbon Titanik, oder Der naser Keiver = The Titanic's disaster," *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2009543160/>, Accessed February 8, 2016.

Guter Yid," meaning "He is a good Jew."¹⁵ Likewise, many of the character names have been changed. So, for instance, in *Di Yam Gazlonim*, the Yiddish rendition of *Pirates of Penzance*, "Malke" is the name of the leading soprano, instead of the original "Mabel."

1.3 WHY IT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO LEARN YIDDISH DICTION IN SINGING

Yiddish music spans a variety of vocal genres, both popular and classical. Traditionally, popular music follows the vernacular way of pronunciation. In American popular country music songs, one can hear a twang created by the use of nasality and a classically untraditional use of diphthongs recorded by the artists, like in Hank Williams's "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" (1949).¹⁶ One can hear the idiomatic dropping of the final "r" in hip hop songs like OutKast's "Ms. Jackson" (2000).¹⁷ In French music, this vernacular can be exemplified with the velar "r," or [R], recorded by the popular cabaret artist Édith Piaf in her "La Vie en Rose" (1945)¹⁸ and by the French pop artist Jenifer in her "Tourner Ma Page" (2007).¹⁹ Just as classical English singing diction aims to delay diphthongs, abstain from nasality, and not drop consonants, and as classical French singing diction uses a flipped, lateral [r] instead of the velar [R], so it would be assumed that classically sung Yiddish would differ from the spoken Yiddish.

¹⁵ "Gilbert and Sullivan Yiddish Light Opera Company," *Gilbert and Sullivan Yiddish Light Opera Company*, <http://gsopera.com/company/gilbert-and-sullivan-yiddish-light-opera>, Accessed February 8, 2016.

¹⁶ Hank Williams, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry: The Best of Hank Williams*, Vol. 3, 2008 Marathon Media International, ASIN B00UVNMYFU, Compact Disc.

In Williams's recording, he drops the diphthong on the word "I'm" so that instead of the normal transcription of [aɪm], it would be written as [am]. Then for the word "lonesome," instead of dropping the diphthong like he does with the word "I'm," he sustains it and it is heard as the closed [u] vowel. So instead of the traditional transcription of [loʊnsəm], the word is heard as [lounsəm].

¹⁷ OutKast, "Ms. Jackson," *Stankonia*, 2000 Arista/LaFace Records, ASIN B0013D8942.

This vernacular is demonstrated throughout the song in lines like "Never meant to make your daughter cry," which is heard as "Neva meant to make yo' daughta cry," where the final rs of the sentence become the [ə].

¹⁸ Édith Piaf, "La Vie en Rose," *La Vie en Rose; Edith Piaf*, 2001 Stage Door Records, ASIN B006H3DEIE, Compact Disc.

¹⁹ Jenifer, "Tourner Ma Page," *Lunatique*, 2007 Mercury France, LC 00268, Compact Disc.

From this standpoint, popular Yiddish songs would have the same diction as spoken Yiddish, for which there is already an abundance of available information. In the meantime, there are art songs, oratorios, operas, and operettas by composers like Maurice Ravel, Lazar Weiner, Joseph Rumshinsky, and Viktor Ullmann which, fitting into the classical realm of vocal literature, necessitate a formalized method of pronunciation aimed at promoting a vocally healthy and resonant, beautiful sound.

1.4 STATEMENT OF INTENT

In this paper, I intend to create a formalized guide to classical Yiddish singing diction in order to make the repertoire more accessible to classical singers and in the hopes of revitalizing some of this forgotten vocal literature. Although I do not intend for this paper to act as a catalog of Yiddish vocal works, it is important to acknowledge the vast scope of pieces in existence in order to emphasize the importance of a Yiddish singing diction guide. For this reason, I have included an appendix at the end (Appendix C) to list a sample of Yiddish works. As part of my research, I will discuss the challenges created by the use of transliterations, which are all written with different combinations of letters to create the same phonemes.

The bulk of my paper will be the written conclusion that I draw from comparing the available sources on Yiddish diction with the classical singing rules of other languages. I will use models like *Diction for Singers*, by Joan Wall, Robert Caldwell, Tracy Gavilanes, and Sheila Allen; and *The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal*, edited by Duane Richard Karna, both for formatting my text and for comparing Yiddish with the singing diction of its related languages of German, Hebrew,

and Russian. The guide's aim will be to promote vocal wellness and efficiency during phonation while staying true to how the words are supposed to be pronounced.

The aim of this paper is not to imply that other methods of pronunciation are incorrect. Due to the vast sprawl of Yiddish speakers across Eastern Europe and the melting pot of Yiddish pronunciation caused by mass emigration to the United States around the early 19th century, the Yiddish diction heard on the Yiddish stages would not have been consistent to begin with. This factor is acknowledged in the CD liner notes of *Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn: Great Songs of the Yiddish Stage*, Vol. 2 as Neil W. Levin specifies:

Pronunciation in these recordings expressly avoids consistency with standard literary (YIVO) Yiddish and follows the mixture of Volhynian, Galician, and southern Polish dialects prevalent on Second Avenue stages. The variety of performers' backgrounds and geographical origins in the heyday of Second Avenue, however, also yielded occasional words sung in northern Polish and Ukrainian dialects - without consistency even in the same song. This too is deliberately reflected here.²⁰

The quote on the Yiddish theatre CD exemplifies a lack of priority on diction rules as it purposefully aims to be inconsistent with its pronunciation. Although this may be historically accurate to what would have been heard in Yiddish theatre productions, this lax attitude will be to the repertoire's demise in a musical culture where singers are meticulously coached not to sing closed vowels where there should be the open equivalents and vice versa. In a culture where singers are critiqued for singing [u] where there should be [ʊ], having options of phonemes to sing comes off as foreign and too informal to be a good choice for performance despite their classical artistry and appeal. Modern operatic and choral productions strive for unity and consistency amongst their ensembles in all languages. This applies to other languages no longer in common use today like Latin, a

²⁰ Neil W. Levin, "About American Yiddish Theatrical Songs," *Bay mir bistu sheyn: Great Songs of the Yiddish Stage*, Vol. 2, CD Liner Notes, Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 2005, 5.

language which also sprawled throughout Europe and has many different styles of pronunciation. Despite the different ways people pronounce Latin, there are accepted rules to its articulations. These phonological rules are what I aim to specify in my document for Yiddish diction in singing.

CHAPTER 2: READING YIDDISH

2.1 READING MUSIC WRITTEN IN THE ORIGINAL ALPHABET

As singers, we must coordinate many areas of brain activity at one time in order to accomplish feats like counting, remembering texts and text translations, and watching where we step as we retrace our blocking, meanwhile keeping an eye on the conductor. Reading Yiddish scores written in the original Yiddish alphabet takes brain coordination in that the music reads left to right, but the alphabet reads right to left. In order to accommodate for the contrary directions, the words are broken up into syllables and each syllable is read from right to left, but the syllables are ordered from left to right. So while reading in Yiddish with the original alphabet, one must read both forward and backward at the same time.

Because of this confusing complication with reading scores printed with the Yiddish alphabet, and to appeal to a wider audience of people who do not read the Yiddish alphabet, the bulk of published Yiddish songs are printed with Roman alphabet transliterations. Although this is far simpler to read, it comes with its own set of complications.

2.2 DECIPHERING TRANSLITERATIONS

One of the more challenging aspects of creating a phonology guide to Yiddish is that most of the Yiddish repertoire is written in transliterated Yiddish with characters from the Roman alphabet instead of the original Hebrew alphabet. In 1937, the YIVO Institute created a standardized orthography for Yiddish transliterations which has mostly been used in songs since then, as well as in Yiddish language classes and Yiddish

literary publications. Unfortunately, not only does this unification take place after a wealth of Yiddish repertoire has already been written, but many publications have maintained a more Germanic means of transcription.²¹

An example of the inconsistencies in transliterative spelling can be shown in Viktor Ullmann's setting of David Einhorn's "Berjoskele." In this one setting, the spelling for the word meaning "small" is written both as "klein" and "klejn" in different lines of strophes that are otherwise identical.²² Likewise, the spelling of the song's title is altered to "Beryozkele" in the editorial notes at the end of the anthology.²³ Although these inconsistencies may seem like an issue of poor editing, they clue into the pronunciation of the words. For instance, in the word "berjoskele" the matter of how to pronounce the "j" is confirmed as [j] by the "y" in the spelling of "beryozkele." In this setting, the only other logical sound available for the "j" would be [j] or [dʒ], while the "y" would only have the other practical option of being pronounced as a rare version of [u], if not the common [j]. The overlap of possible sounds for the consonant, therefore, helps us to confirm that the correct pronunciation is [j].²⁴

Another example of inconsistent transliterations is seen in the Abraham Goldfadn song "Shabbos Yom Tov un Rosh Chodesh," from the operetta *Shulamith*, as published in *A Treasury of Yiddish Song*, compiled by Velvel Pasternak. In the published anthology, the words "Yom Tov" from the title can be seen in the first measure written as

²¹ "Basic Facts about Yiddish."

²² Viktor Ullmann, "Berjoskele," *Sämtliche Lieder für Singstimme und Klavier*, Mainz; Schott Music GmbH & Co., 2004, 207.

²³ *ibid*, 238.

²⁴ It is also possible for both "j" and "y" to be written for [i]. But in conjunction with the accented [o] that follows, the preceding vowel acts as a glide and can therefore not be considered as the separate [i] vowel in this instance.

"jomtow," the Germanic spelling of the same word.²⁵ This inconsistency parallels the same predicament in Ullmann's "Berjoskele," but with the additional component of the "w" in the spelling of "jomtow." In this instance, the possible phonemes confirm the pronunciation as [v] based on how the "w" would be pronounced in the German alphabet. While listening to a recording made by the Polish actress Bertha Kalish in 1925 (titled "Shabes, yontef un roshkhoydesh" on the CD cover for *Di Eybike Mame*), one can hear that the words "mein" and "alein" from the score both sung with the [ai] sound like in German pronunciation and as contrary to the "ai" and "ay" spelling of most Yiddish transliterations for the same sound. In order to clarify the discrepancy without knowing Yiddish or having a reliable recording of a previous performance, one would need to narrow down the options of how to pronounce each word in order to confirm its meaning and pronunciation in a dictionary. For the words "mein" the two most likely pronunciations would be:

- [men] - as is the pronunciation with YIVO spelling and would be spelled as (מײַן) with the Hebrew characters and translated into English as "intent;" or
- [main] - as would be the pronunciation with German spelling and would be spelled (מײַנ) with the Hebrew characters and translated into English as "my."

The spelling discrepancies then make translating the song even more important in order to verify how the words are to be pronounced. For instance, if someone sees the word "mein" and pronounces it the wrong way, the sentence can have an entirely different meaning, just

²⁵ Abraham Goldfaden, "Shabbos Yom Tov un Rosh Chodesh," *A Treasury of Yiddish Song*, Velvel Pasternak, ed., Tara Publications: 2013, 103.

as words in Italian or German can have different meaning depending on whether or not a singer pronounces a single or double consonant correctly.

As tedious as it may sound to have to double check the means of transliteration in a given song in order to pronounce it correctly, once a few choice words are verified, the rest of the words can be pronounced with less trouble. Thankfully, if a word is transcribed into Roman characters, the word will most likely be written with only English or German spellings.

The French melody in Yiddish of Maurice Ravel's "L'énigme éternelle" from *Deux mélodies hébraïques* (see Figure 4) is written with Germanic spelling. The biggest clue to the orthography in the Ravel is the use of the umlaut in the word "frägt." This orthography acts as a clue to its phonology because transliterations with YIVO spelling do not include umlauts. In this piece, translating is key to the transliteration because, although the "ä" produces the [ɛ], as it does in German, the "v" of the word "Velt" is not pronounced as [f] as it would be in German, but is the phonetic [v] instead. This phoneme can be verified as a [v] by opening a dictionary and confirming the original spelling of (וועלט), or [vɛlt], meaning "world." The same folk poem is set by R.J.

Neumann under the title "Di Alte Kashe" (see Figure 5). In his arrangement, the text is written as "Fregt di velt an alte kashe." The two pieces exemplify the contrast in how the same words can be transliterated differently and can be used as a tool to uncover the true pronunciation of the words by comparison.

FIGURE 4. MAURICE RAVEL'S "L'ÉNIGME ÉTERNELLE," FROM *DEUX MÉLODIES HÉBRAÏQUES*," MM. 1-10.²⁶

II. L'Enigme Eternelle

MAURICE RAVEL

Tranquillo ♩ = 92

CHANT

Frägt die
Mon - de

PIANO

pp

Velt die al - te Ca - sche Tra la tra la la la
tu nous in - ter - ro - ges: Tra la tra la la la

²⁶ Maurice Ravel, "L'énigme éternelle," *Deux mélodies hébraïques*. Paris: Durand et Cie., 1915.

FIGURE 5. R.J. NEUMANN'S "DI ALTE KASHE," MM. 1-6.²⁷

Di Alte Kashe

Folksong
Arr: R. J. Neumann

Lento moderato

Women *mf* Fregt di velt an al - te ka - she

Men *p* Far - vos__ far - vos__ far - vos far - vos? Far - vos__ far - vos__ oy

tra - la ra - di - ri - di - rom ent - fert men oy__

tra - la ra - di - ra - di - rom far - vos ra - di - ri - di - ra - rom oy__

2.3 EXISTING PHONOLOGY GUIDES FOR YIDDISH SINGING

In my initial quest to learn about Yiddish diction in singing, I was fortunate to come across two existing guides specifically for singing. Although they were helpful in determining how my songs were to be pronounced, they were not fully inclusive of all the phonemes of the Yiddish language, lacked specificity concerning the sounds they included, and left many diction questions unanswered.

Figure 6 shows the full pronunciation guide as it is shown on the website for URJ Books and Music.

²⁷ R. J. Neumann, "Di Alte Kashe," *A Treasury of Yiddish Song*, 115.

FIGURE 6. YIDDISH TRANSLITERATION PRONUNCIATION GUIDE FROM THE UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM BOOKS AND MUSIC.²⁸

| |
|--|
| Yiddish |
| Vowels |
| a as in father |
| ai as in a isle (= long i as in i ce) |
| e = short e as in bed |
| ei as in e ight (= long a as in a ce) |
| i as in p izza (= long e as in be) |
| o = long o as in go |
| ' = unstressed vowel close to or unstressed short e |
| u (between consonants) = u as in put |
| u (at end of word) = long u as in lunar |
| Consonants |
| ch as in German Bach or Scottish loch (not as in cheese) |
| g = hard g as in get (not soft g as in gem) |
| tz = as in boats |

The benefit of this guide is that it applies specifically to the music books that the website distributes. Where this guide falls short:

²⁸ "Pronunciation Guides for Hebrew, Ladino & Yiddish Transliterations," URJ Books and Music, <https://urjbooksandmusic.com/pages.php?pageid=45>, Accessed February 25, 2016.

- It does not list any information on how to pronounce consonants aside from the "ch," "g," and "tz."
- It does not use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to describe its phonemes to avoid the issue of allophones.
- It does not address other vowel combinations, final consonants, or other vowel modifiers.
- It does not follow the standard created by YIVO.
- Despite its intent to apply to the books it distributes, it does not succeed in its guidelines.

Anthology of Jewish Art Song, Vol. IV; The Lazar Weiner Collection; Book 1: Yiddish Art Songs, 1918-1970 is an example of a book distributed on the URJ Books and Music website that does not adhere to the same system of pronunciation. Within the pages of the book is a pronunciation guide that cites the YIVO standard as its method of transliterative spelling. This method is shown in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7. LAZAR WEINER ANTHOLOGY PRONUNCIATION GUIDE.²⁹

| PRONUNCIATION GUIDE | |
|--|---|
| <u>Yiddish transliteration</u> | <u>English equivalent</u> |
| Vowels | |
| a | father |
| e* | bed |
| i | tin (in closed syllables), bee (in open syllables and before r) |
| o | mother (in closed syllables), paw (in open syllables and before r) |
| u | full (in closed syllables), too (in open syllables and before r) |
| (*always sounded; there is no "silent e" in Yiddish) | |
| Diphthongs | |
| ay | sky |
| ey | they |
| oy | toy |
| Note: other than in the above diphthongs, adjacent vowels are always pronounced separately, e.g. "tayere" = "tay-e-re" | |
| Consonants | |
| g | good (never as in gentle) |
| h | hot (never silent) |
| kh | Bach |
| r | au revoir (lightly flipped French r) |
| s | such (never as in lose) |
| sh | shoe |
| y | yes |
| zh | measure |
| Note: "n" may occur in Yiddish, alone or in combination with other consonants, as the final syllable of a word. It is treated as a semi-vowel, and in singing it should be sustained without the interpolation of any additional vowel. Examples: "oy-gn", "ge-le-rnt"; compare the German "Au-gen", "ge-lernt". | |
| Consonant clusters | |
| dz | sounds |
| dzh | fudge |
| ts | cats |
| tsh | touch |

²⁹ Yehudi Wyner, ed., "Pronunciation Guide," *Anthology of Jewish Art Song, Vol. IV; The Lazar Weiner Collection; Book 1; Yiddish Art Songs, 1918-1970*, New York: Transcontinental Music Publication, 2011, iv.

As is problematic with the URJ Books guide, the Weiner pronunciation key does not list all of the letters found in the transliterations it presents. Also, despite the book's rules being intended to apply to art songs, some of the pronunciations it dictates are colloquial. These colloquialisms can be considered appropriate for the folk texts in many of Weiner's songs and certainly offer a Yiddish, Hasidic flare, but they do not apply to a broader spectrum of classical Yiddish songs and arias outside the folk realm. One of these rules concerns the "r" description. The guide specifies the use of a flipped "r," which is a typical change that the velar "r" undergoes when sung classically. But the description in the book uses the example of the French *au revoir*, which gives the impression that the "r" should be velar as in colloquial French [R]. Even the singers in the recording *Lazar Weiner; The Art of Yiddish Song* made by the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music sing with a truly flipped [r].³⁰ The other colloquialism that I question is the rule regarding "n," which I will address below.

An additional transliteration guide from David C. Gross's *English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary* (see Figure 8) is not specifically meant for singing but is worth mentioning purely based on how contrary it is to the rules listed above. Although the book is a great resource for confirming translations of songs due to the fact that there are no Yiddish characters through which to navigate, the rules seen in the book regarding transliterations do not fully align with YIVO standards or German standards of pronunciation and are not typically used in songs anyway. I mostly include it to show the

³⁰ Neil W Levin, *Lazar Weiner; The Art of Yiddish Song*, With Robert Abelson, Re'ut Ben Z'ev, Ida Rae Cahana, Meir Finkelstein, Raphael Frieder, Harold Orbach, David Ossenfort, Elizabeth Shammash, Susan Davenny-Wyner, Yehudi Wyner, and Barry Snyder, 2006 Milken Family Foundation., Naxos American Classics 8.559443, Compact Disc.

spectrum of sounds available with Roman-letter spellings and how confusing and problematic it can be.

FIGURE 8. DAVID C. GROSS'S PRONUNCIATION GUIDE FROM *ENGLISH-YIDDISH, YIDDISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY*.³¹

The transliteration of the Yiddish follows this code:

"a" as in *far*.

"ai" as in *main*.

"e" as in *bed*.

"ei" as in *my*.

"i" as in *fit*.

"o" as in *for*.

"u" as in *foot*.

"ee" as in *meet*.

"ooh" as in *school*.

There are no sounds in Yiddish for "w" or "j" or "th." Many words use the "ch" sound (as in the German word, *ach*), the "ts" sound as in *bis*, and the "zh" sound as in the word *pleasure*....

The letter "g" in English is either soft (as in *gem*) or hard (as in *get*). In Yiddish it is always hard. It is transliterated in all cases with an extra letter ("u"), as in the word, *guard*.

Aside from not using IPA, this short guide has the same problems as the other two in its lack of specificity of consonants and adherence to the YIVO standard. What is useful about its orthography is that it clears up confusion regarding open and closed vowels. If ever there was a question about whether an "i" was open or closed in a given word, the dictionary's spelling with "i" or "ee" would answer that question.

As stated above, the Gross guide is included due to its existence in the realm of published Yiddish literature. However, it will not be used as an orthographical

³¹ David C. Gross, *English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary*, Romanized, Expanded Edition, New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1997, viii.

contributor to the rules written below due to the rarity of songs that follow the Gross dictionary rules.

Although Figures 6-8 show very incomplete guides to Yiddish pronunciation, they set a solid foundation for discovering the phonemes that exist in Yiddish phonology. The rules they spell out will be expanded upon in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: DICTION

As mentioned in Chapter 2.2 on the issue of transliterations, how to pronounce a given letter varies depending on how the publisher chose to transliterate the original Yiddish text. As a result, some texts will require investigation into the context and definition of certain words in order to most accurately pronounce them. For this reason Appendix A offers the Yiddish letters arranged in Yiddish alphabetical order from top to bottom so that someone not familiar with Yiddish can more easily look through a Yiddish-English dictionary or spell out a word into Google Translate, which can translate into Yiddish. Appendix A gives possible letters used in Roman-letter transliteration of that Hebrew symbol and an English word with the specific sound underlined to exemplify the desired phoneme. The symbol is then transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet to unquestionably describe the sound produced by each letter to avoid discrepancies in how people might pronounce the example words.

In this chapter specifically, there will be detail describing each letter, but in terms of the Roman symbols. It will be useful to have a comparable guide to use with Appendix A, based on the Roman characters since the majority of music in Yiddish will be written with Roman characters.

3.1 SPECIFICATIONS OF VOWELS

Vowels are a particular challenge when deciphering transliterations because they are the most common letters found within words (think of how often one finds an "e" in a word versus a "b"). Likewise, in the realm of classical singing, the vowel is the sound that is sustained on a given pitch, while consonants are taught to be short (see Chapter 3.3

for how "n" and "l" are treated in Yiddish). Another challenge pertaining to vowel transliterations is that the YIVO method of spelling varies greatly from German orthography, giving the letters below the possibility of being audiated in either method.

A [a] - The letter "a" by itself is always [a] and is written in the Yiddish alphabet as (אַ). Where "a" becomes confusing is when it is used in conjunction with other vowels to produce a diphthong or glide. For instance, the combination of "a" + "i," "j," or "y" is normally [ai], which would be written in Yiddish characters as (אַי), but can also be meant to sound as [e], which would be written in Yiddish as (ע).

E Letter "e" is the most fickle of the vowels to decipher because it spans such a wide range of sounds depending on its syllabification and combination with other vowels in addition to whether it is being pronounced à la Deutsch or YIVO.

[ɛ] - This is the most common sound for e. If an e is presented by itself in an accented syllable, it will be this sound, as in the English word "set," and would be spelled in the Yiddish alphabet as (ע).

[ə] - When an "e" is presented by itself in an unaccented syllable, it should be transcribed as the schwa. This includes when "e" concludes a word and in prefixes like the "ge-" also found in German. But just as the schwa is typically shaded towards [œ] in French singing diction or [ʊ] in German

singing diction, it should almost always be shaded towards [ɛ] in Yiddish.

Most often, when double checking in a Yiddish-English dictionary, the syllable in question will be written with (ײ), the letter that reads as [ɛ].

[e] - If an "e" is followed by the letters "i," "j," or "y" and uses the YIVO method of transliteration, or is followed by the "h" using Germanic spelling, it will be pronounced as [e] and would be written as (ײ) in the original alphabet. Goldfaden's "Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen," as found in *A Treasury of Yiddish Song*, distinguishes the [e] sound by writing an *accent aigu* over the appropriate letters ("é"). If there is no specification that the vowel is closed, either with an accent or one of the letters written above, the "e" will be an open [ɛ].

Diphthong:

[ai] - If an "e" is followed by the letters "i," "j," or "y" and follows a more German-centric method of transliteration, it will be pronounced as [ai] and would be written as (ײ) in the original alphabet.

silent - "E" is only silent when written with German-centric spelling following an "i." The "i" + "e" combination is then sounded as [i] as it would be in German pronunciation and the "e" would not be pronounced separately. Although there is a Yiddish letter for a silent symbol, a silent "e" would never be derived from (ײ) because the Yiddish letter only appears as the first letter in a word, while the "e" after "i" would be mostly used to distinguish between an [i] and [ɪ].

I The rules concerning letter "i" in Yiddish follow with how to read "i" in German song diction. For this reason, although there are many rules regarding the letter's pronunciation, they are consistent between Germanic and YIVO spellings.

[i] - The vowel is pronounced as the closed [i] in accented syllables where it is followed by a single consonant. It is also pronounced as [i] when followed by [h], [r], or [x] or is on the end of a word like in the word "di." In the Yiddish alphabet, this is written as (ײ).

[ɪ] - If "i" is followed by a double consonant, is in a one-syllable word not ending in "i" (or "ie"), or is unaccented and not followed by "h" or "r," it is pronounced as the open [ɪ]. In the Yiddish alphabet, this is written the same way as the [i], as (ײ).

Diphthongs:

[aɪ] - When an "i" follows an "a" with YIVO spellings or follows an "e" with Germanic spellings, the resulting sound is [aɪ] with the "i" acting as a diphthong.

[ʌɪ] - When an "i" follows an "o," the resulting sound is [ʌɪ].

The pronunciation of "o" is the most conflicted among my available sources.

The respective opinions are shown in Table 1, as quoted from their individual sources.

TABLE 1. OPINIONS OF THE PRONUNCIATION OF "O."

| <u>Diction Source</u> | <u>Quoted opinion on "o" pronunciation</u> | <u>IPA Symbol</u> |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Al Grand of the Gilbert and Sullivan Yiddish Light Opera Company | "Uh' as in 'love' or 'but'" | [ʌ] |
| Adrienne Gusoff's <i>D!rty Yiddish; Everyday Slang from "What's Up?" to "F*%# Off!"</i> | "Similar to the 'au' in 'daughter'" | [ɔ] |
| David C. Gross's <i>English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary</i> | "o as in 'for'" | [o] |
| URJ Books and Music | "Long o as in 'go'" | [o] |
| Uriel Weinreich's <i>Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary</i> | "Phonetically between the <i>aw</i> of <i>dawn</i> and the <i>o</i> of <i>done</i> " | Between [ɔ] and [ʌ] respectively |
| Yehudi Wyner's guide in <i>The Lazar Weiner Collection</i> | "Mother (in closed syllables), <i>paw</i> (in open syllables and before <i>r</i>)" | Between [ʌ] and [ɔ] respectively |
| YIVO "Yiddish Alef-Beys (Alphabet)" | "O as in <i>ore</i> " | [o] |

Out of the seven sources shown in Table 1, three say [o], one says [ɔ], one says [ʌ], and two say it is between [ʌ] and [ɔ]. From the three [o]s, the only reputable source is YIVO. Although Gusoff would not seem like a choice source for formalized pronunciation based on its being a book of informal slang, it is a further argument in favor of the "o" being somewhere between [ɔ] and [ʌ], as is stated by the table's more reputable dictionary, the vocal anthology, and the active member and founder of a Yiddish opera company. These sources combined with listening to the early 20th-century women of the *Di Eybike Mame* CD conclude the following:

O The pronunciation of "o" floats between [ɔ] and [ʌ]. It is essentially the same [o] vowel that one finds in other languages but without the necessary lip rounding. The only source that specifies when to use which shade of the unrounded "o" is the Weiner diction guide. The Weiner rules make linguistic sense because they parallel the rules of the German "o." From listening to the *Eybike Mame* compilation and from a vocal pedagogical perspective, the only stipulation to add to the Weiner rules is that elongated and sustained notes should be the rounder [ɔ] because it resonates better than the neutral [ʌ].

[ɔ] - The vowel is pronounced as the open [ɔ] in accented syllables except when followed by double consonants or [ɪ] diphthong. It is also pronounced as [ɔ] when followed by [h], [r], or [x], or is on the end of a word. For singing purposes, it is appropriate to sing elongated and sustained notes on [ɔ] at the singer's discretion unless followed by a double consonant or diphthong. In the Yiddish alphabet, this phoneme is written as (֡)

[ʌ] - This phoneme is used on unaccented syllables, when followed by two or more consonants, and/or before the [ɪ] diphthong. The Yiddish letter would be (֢), just as it is for [ɔ].

Diphthongs:

[ʌɪ], [ɔɪ], and [oɪ] - This commonly known sound of Yiddish, written as "oy," "oi," or "oj" in transliterations, is best sung as [ʌɪ]. Logic would dictate

that the rules for when to use either vowel cluster would be the same as the rules for "o" without the diphthong. The new and old recordings all include the gamut of [ʌɪ], [ɔɪ], and [oɪ] syllables. All three vowels are legitimate choices for singing. It is my personal opinion that [ʌɪ] sounds the most Yiddish of the three choices since the common singing languages of German, Italian, and French do not include that sound. For purposes of exaggerating the novel qualities of Yiddish, [ʌɪ] should be the choice sound for "oy." This opinion is supported by the comparison of transliterative spelling with the Yiddish spelling of (ױ). In the Yiddish orthography, the spelling of "oy" is derived from the combination of the vov, which alone sounds as either [u] or [ʊ], with the yud which sounds as either [i], [j], or [ɪ]. The choice to use the [ʌ] then makes sense as a pronunciation since it is a slightly more open version of [ʊ]. One could argue that [o] makes equal sense because it is the more open version of [u], but [u] is not as common of a phoneme as [ʊ] in the Yiddish language, making the open [ʌ] more common as well and, therefore, the [ʌɪ] with the diphthong.

U The rules concerning letter "u" in Yiddish are in line with how to read "u" in German song diction. For this reason, although there are many rules regarding the letter's pronunciation, they are consistent between Germanic and YIVO spellings.

[u] - The vowel is pronounced as the closed [u] in accented syllables where it is followed by a single consonant. It is also pronounced as [u] when followed by [h], [r], or [x] or is on the end of a word. In the Yiddish alphabet, this is written as (ױ) or (ױ).

[ʊ] - If "u" is followed by a double consonant, is in a one-syllable word not ending in "u," or is unaccented and not followed by [h], [r], or [x], it is pronounced as the open [ʊ]. In the Yiddish alphabet, this is written the same way as the [ʊ], as (ױ) or (ױ).

3.2 SPECIFICATIONS OF CONSONANTS

B "B" is almost always [b], although in rare cases it will be [p] when it ends a word using Germanic spelling. In Yiddish spelling, this is (ב).

C Typically, "c" is only used followed by "h" and sometimes followed by "k." The two sounds "c" creates by itself in English, [k] and [s], are mostly referred to in transliterations as "k" and "s" respectively.

Ch This sound is comparable to the [x] of the German ach-laut and is also found in Hebrew, Russian, and other Eastern European languages. It is never pronounced as the German ich-laut (ç). This sound is particularly difficult for native English speakers who did not grow up attending Hebrew school or speaking a second language that uses the phoneme. Joan Wall instructs on how to pronounce the sound as such:

Produce [x], the back *ach-laut*, - literally, "ach-sound" - by directing an energetic air stream between the velum and the arched back of the tongue. You may think of the sound as a *fricative* [k]. Try pronouncing the velar-plosive [k] several times [k k k k], then prolong the sound of the attack, [kxxx]. Finally, remove the initial [k], attacking and sustaining the sound of [x]. The Ach-Laut is always an aspirated sound. It is never pronounced as the plosive [k].³²

In the Yiddish alphabet, this sound is produced with (ך), (כּ), or

(ק) at the end of a word.

- Ck When "ck" is presented in a piece, as in English or German, the resulting sound is [k]. See letter "k" below for more details.
- D "D" is almost always pronounced as [d]. Only in Germanic spellings will the "d" be pronounced as [t] if it is on the end of a word. "D" is a dentalized consonant. In Yiddish letters, this is spelled as (ד).
- Dzh When "d" is followed by "zh," the sound it creates is [dʒ] like in the word "Jew." In Yiddish letters, this is spelled as (װײַז).
- F When "f" is presented in a transliteration, it is pronounced as [f], the same labiodental fricative consonant as English, no matter whether the spelling follows YIVO rules or Germanic orthography. In the Yiddish alphabet, this is written as (פּ), or (ף) when at the end of a word.
- G "G" is pronounced as an unaspirated [g]. It is never [dʒ], [ʒ], or [ç]. When it is followed by a "t," the effect becomes like the voiceless equivalent of [k]

³² Joan Wall, Robert Caldwell, Tracy Gavilanes, and Sheila Allen, *Diction for Singers; A Concise Reference for English, Italian, Latin, German, French, and Spanish Pronunciation*, Redmond, WA: Caldwell Publishing Company, 1990, 141.

due to the voiceless assimilation from the following voiceless [t]. But this loss of the vocal phonation on the [g] is so minute due to the unaspirated nature of the phoneme that it is best to still think of the consonant as a [g] and not worry about whether it maintains its voiced quality or not when followed by an unvoiced consonant. In the Yiddish alphabet, this sound is written as (ג).

H "H" serves multiple purposes depending on its placement within a word. It can act as the consonant [h], written in the Yiddish alphabet as (ה). But it can also be used as a modifier to the vowels and consonants that it follows. When following a "c" or "k," "dz," "s" or "sc," "ts" or "tsc," or "z," the resulting sound becomes [x], [dʒ], [ʃ], [tʃ], or [ʒ] respectively. The rules for the specifics of those phonemes are written alphabetized under the first letter of the consonant cluster.

Germanic styles of spelling will use the "h" to elongate vowels, turning vowels like letter "i" from [ɪ] to [i] or "u" from [ʊ] to [u].

J The sound produced by "j" is never [dʒ] like it is in English. In Yiddish transliterations, it acts as either the glide [j], as is consistent with German, or the diphthong [ɪ]. The Yiddish letter equivalent is the singular (י), as multiple yuds create different phonemes.

K This consonant acts as the same stop plosive [k] of English but is less aspirated. In the Yiddish alphabet, this sound is represented as (כ) and (ך).

Kh See "ch"

| | |
|-------|--|
| L | "L" is the same linguadental [l] as its English equivalent. It is represented in the Yiddish alphabet as (ל). The only difference with "l" is that sometimes it is elongated in place of a vowel. See Chapter 3.3 for specifications. |
| M | "M" is the same bilabial nasal consonant as its English equivalent. It is represented in the Yiddish alphabet as (מ) or (ם) at the ends of words. |
| N | "N" is the same nasal [n] as in English. In the Yiddish alphabet, it is written as (נ) or (ן) at the end of a word. See Chapter 3.3. |
| Ng/Nk | Due to the assimilation of the "n" in the pronunciation of the velar stop plosives "g" and "k," the resulting sounds are [ŋ] and [ŋk] respectively. In the sample IPA transcriptions in Appendix B, combinations of "n" + "k" will be notated as [nk] for the purpose of simplicity since the two variations sound the same. |
| P | When a transliteration shows a "p," whether in YIVO or Germanic spellings, the resulting sound is the normal bilabial stop plosive sound we are accustomed to in English, but unaspirated. The Yiddish equivalent is (פ). |
| Q | In German, this letter in conjunction with a "u" sounds as [kv]. Typically this is spelled in transliterations as "kv," like in the word <i>kvelen</i> , meaning to take pride in, and the use of "q" is close to nonexistent. |
| R | The typical "r" in spoken Yiddish is the uvular [R], like in spoken French. But in sung Yiddish, it is appropriate to use the flipped [r], just as is standard for French singing diction. Depending on the text and emotional stress, a rolled [r] is also appropriate. This rule is consistent between YIVO |

and Germanic spellings. In the Yiddish alphabet, the sound is represented as (ר).

S "S" is almost always pronounced as [s]. In some cases, when following Germanic spellings, an "s" beginning a word or between two vowels will be pronounced as [z]. However, mostly a "z" is used in instances where [z] is the desired phoneme. Initial "sp" and "st" require confirmation in a dictionary since these can be pronounced as [ʃp] and [ʃt] respectively or can be [sp] and [st]. Most often when the desired sound involves the [ʃ], this will be notated in the orthography with the incision of an "h" after the "s," like in the word "shtil" or "schpilze." In Yiddish orthography, the [s] sound can be written as (ס), (שׂ), or (ר).

Sh/Sch The combination of "sh" or "sch" (with Germanic spellings) is the phoneme [ʃ]. This is written in Yiddish as (שׂ).

T "T" is pronounced as a dentalized [t]. This is consistent between YIVO and Germanic spellings. In the Yiddish alphabet, this is written as (ט) or (ר).

Ts/tz The sound created by the "ts" and "tz" is [ts] as in the word "hurts." In Yiddish orthography, this is represented as (צ) or (ץ) at the end of a word.

Tsh/Tsch This combination of letters creates the [tʃ] phoneme. In English, this phoneme is typically produced with "ch." The combination of "c" + "h" is never used to produce [tʃ] as it is associated with the phoneme [x].

| | |
|----|--|
| V | This phoneme will mostly be [v], as in the Yiddish (װ) or (ױ). In rare instances it will be [f]. |
| W | "W" is a clue that a piece's transliteration derives from Germanic-inspired orthography since the glide [w] is not a phoneme in the Yiddish language. The "w" is then read exactly as it is in German, as [v]. |
| X | "X" is not a letter commonly found in Yiddish transliterations. Normally the [ks] sound associated with the letter in English phonology is written in Yiddish transliterations as "ks" or "kz." |
| Y | The letter "y," just like in English, can be the glide [j] or can be a vowel producing the [i] sound or the [ɪ] diphthong. This flexibility of the letter is consistent between YIVO and Germanic spellings. In the Yiddish alphabet this is written as (ײ). |
| Z | In rare instances, this will be pronounced as [ts] like in German, but the majority of the time this letter is presented, it will sound as [z]. This is represented as (ז). |
| Zh | When "z" and "h" are written together, in both Germanic and YIVO spellings, they create the [ʒ] phoneme. This is produced in the Yiddish alphabet as (װײַ), the combination of letters that produce the phonemes [z] and [ʃ]. |

3.3 NOTES ON "L" AND "N" IN SINGING

The Weiner pronunciation guide contains a note that "'n' may occur in Yiddish, alone or in combination with other consonants, as the final syllable of a word. It is treated as a semi-vowel, and in singing it should be sustained without the interpolation of any additional vowel."³³ This refers to a practice of sustaining an [n] hum on certain pitches without the addition of a vowel like a schwa beforehand, as directed in the orthography of the word. The Weiner guide only mentions this rule pertaining to "n," but other Yiddish scores and recordings exhibit this rule to be true as well for "l."

FIGURE 9. LAZAR WEINER'S "A MAYSELE," MM. 13-20.³⁴

13
V. tech - ter kha - se - ne tsu ma - chn? Hert nor, hert, vos iz ge-shen A
Pno.

17
V. may - se gor nit tsum la - chn. Kunt af sha - bes an oy - re - chl
Pno. mf

³³ *The Lazar Weiner Collection*, iv.

³⁴ *The Lazar Weiner Collection*, 39.

As can be seen in mm. 14 and 18 of Figure 9, no vowels are written on the second syllables of "machn" and "lachn" before the "n," or before the "l" in m. 20 on the word "oyrechl," insinuating the voicing of "n" and "l" in place of a vowel. The observance of this practice on recordings gives a real Yiddish air to the songs in which the performers use it. Although the effect is pleasurable, it should not be observed in most classical settings of the text. It is appropriate for folk settings, like one finds in the Weiner anthology, in musical theatre pieces, or in cantorial concert arias where the text is traditional liturgical. But the prospect of sustaining an "l" or "n" on a G-5 should not be a singer's worry, like in Sholom Secunda's "Bai Mir Bistu Sheyn."

FIGURE 10. SHOLOM SECUNDA'S "BAI MIR BISTU SHEYN," M. 18.³⁵



In the measure posted in Figure 10, the singer would be unwise to make the leap of a fifth up to the G, onsetting on [x], and then sustaining [l] through the leap back down to the D. It would be vocally easier and more beautiful to insert and sustain a schwa.

³⁵ *A Treasury of Yiddish Song*, 78.

The lack of a vowel written on that particular note is a choice of orthography and does not change the meaning of the word. For instance, "oign" and "oigen" are both transliterations of (אױגן) meaning "eyes" and can be seen published in *A Treasury of Yiddish Art Song*, as displayed in Figure 11.

FIGURE 11. RUMSHINSKY'S "SHEYN VI DI LEVONE," M. 24 VS. SECUNDA'S "BAI MIR BISTU SHEYN," M. 9.³⁶

The figure displays two musical excerpts side-by-side. The left excerpt, labeled 'Rumshinsky "Oign"', shows a vocal line on a five-line staff with notes for 'she - ne oi - gn'. Above the staff are the chords F7 and D#7/F. Below the staff, there is a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The right excerpt, labeled 'Secunda "Oigen"', shows a vocal line on a five-line staff with notes for 'it oi-gen vi bai a'. Above the staff are the chords Cm and Cm/E. Below the staff, there is a piano accompaniment on a grand staff. The comparison highlights the orthographic difference in the word 'eyes' between the two composers' settings.

The same difference exists with the word "shlofn," or "shlofen," from the Yiddish (שלאָפֿן) meaning "to sleep." This comparison can be seen between Goldfadn's "Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen" and A. Piamenta's "Unter Dem Kinds Vigele" (see Figure 12).

³⁶ Ibid, 29 and 78.

FIGURE 12. GOLDFADN'S "ROZHINKES MIT MANDLEN," M. 18 VS. A.

PIAMENTA'S "UNTER DEM KINDS VIGELE," M. 11.³⁷

The image shows two musical settings of the word 'shlofn'. On the left, Goldfadn's setting 'Shlofn' is shown in a single system with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics 'shlo - fn a' are written below the vocal line. On the right, Piamenta's setting 'Shlofn' is shown in two systems. The first system has a vocal line with lyrics 'kind vet shlo - fen un' and a piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with a slur over the notes. The piano accompaniment for Piamenta's setting includes a Gm chord and an A chord.

Goldfadn "Shlofn"

Piamenta "Shlofn"

Many scores publish the vowel-less "l" or "n" with an apostrophe, which also implies the use of a schwa. This comparison can be seen comparing Leo Low's "Margaritelach" with Viktor Ullmann's "Margarithelech," two different settings of the same text. Where Low uses the words "veld'l" and "taich'l," Ullmann uses "wel'del" and "teichel," two different orthographies which produce the same phonemes (see Figure 13).

FIGURE 13. LEO LOW'S "MARGARITKELACH," MM. 7-8 VS. VIKTOR

ULLMANN'S "MARGARITHELECH," M. 3.³⁸

The image shows two musical settings of the text 'vel - d'l baim tai - ch'l dort'. On the left, Leo Low's setting is shown in a single system with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Moderato'. The lyrics 'vel - d'l baim tai - ch'l dort' are written below the vocal line. On the right, Viktor Ullmann's setting is shown in two systems. The first system has a vocal line with lyrics 'Wel - del beim Tei - chel, dort' and a piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with a slur over the notes. The piano accompaniment for Ullmann's setting includes a Gm chord and an A chord.

Low

Ullmann

³⁷ Ibid, 8 and 131.

³⁸ Ibid, 105 and Viktor Ullmann, "Margarithelech," *Sämtliche Lieder für Singstimme und Klavier*, Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co., 2004, 210.

In Z. Zilbert's arrangement of "Reb Dovidl," as published in *A Treasury of Yiddish Song* (see Figure 14), the arranger's opinion of the final "l" is made abundantly clear by comparing the title name "Dovidl" with the name as it is presented in the score. The rabbi's name appears 18 times throughout the music, not counting any twice in repeated sections, but appears as "Dovidil" with the added "i" inserted before the final "l" in all 18 repetitions. Although this may seem like a typographical error for the title to be the only version without the "i," the table of contents also lists the piece with the "i"-less title. This infers the arranger's opinion that the spoken title is pronounced differently than when the words are sung, even though "Reb Dovidl" is a folk tune.

FIGURE 14. Z. ZILBERT'S "REB DOVIDL," MM. 1-9.

Reb Dovidl

Folktune
Arr: Z. Zilberts
Lyrics: F. Fuchs

Allegro moderato

mf

creno.

f

mf grazioso con gusto

Reb Do-vi-dil reb Do-vi-dil der

poco rit.

p a tempo

3.4 SYLLABIFICATION

Yiddish syllabification follows the rules of the language from which the word derives. In most cases, the penultimate syllable or the root of the word will be given the text stress as this is the syllable to generally receive stress in both German and Hebrew. Just as in German, it is important to grasp which syllables are prefixes and suffixes as these receive stress as if they were separated from the words to which they are attached. Thankfully unlike German, this is not as difficult of a task for those singing in Yiddish because the Yiddish language keeps most of its words uncompounded.

Prefixes to keep in mind:

- ge-
- far-
- ois-
- ne-

Common suffixes, many of which are diminutive in nature, include:

- - (e)le
- - (e)lach
- - (e)lech
- -en
- -ke
- -ishe(n)
- -tsin

CHAPTER 4: COMPARISON WITH OTHER LANGUAGES

4.1 A BRIEF COMPARISON WITH GERMAN

Because Yiddish is so heavily influenced by German, there is a wealth of overlap in syllabification, grammar, and vocabulary. Singers used to translating their German arias and transcribing their German art songs into IPA will have an easier time translating their pieces when they recognize that the Yiddish "zingen" is pronounced and translated the same way as the German "singen;" Yiddish "is" translates the same way as the German "ist;" Yiddish "mit" is the German "mit." The Yiddish theatre song "Bai Mir Bistu Sheyn" [bai mir bistu ʃen], from Sholom Secunda's *M'ken leben nor m'lost nit* (One Could Really Live, but They Won't Let You), translates as "Bei mir bist du schön" [bai mir bist du ʃøn] in German. This song, translated into English and made popular by artists like the Andrews Sisters, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman, and Judy Garland, illustrates one of the biggest differences between Yiddish and German in that Yiddish does not have mixed vowels in its repertoire of sounds. Because of this, the word for "beautiful" goes from the German "schön" [ʃøn] to the Yiddish "sheyn" [ʃen]. Another example is the English word "brothers," which goes from the German "brüder" [brydər] to the Yiddish "brider" [brɪdər].

In both cases, it is interesting to note that between the [ø] and [e] of the word for "beautiful" and the [y] and [ɪ] of the words for "brothers," the only aspect of articulation that changes is the rounding of the lips. Just as Yiddish favors an unrounded "o" vowel, it does not participate in the necessary lip rounding of German mixed vowels, while the tongue stays in the same position as the mixed vowels.

One difference between German and Yiddish which particularly makes German-based orthographies of Yiddish difficult to read is that German has the practice of

unvoicing final consonants and Yiddish does not. So, for instance, while it is possible for a Yiddish word to end with a [d], it is impossible to notate that in German spelling since all final "d"s become [t] in German. So when reading a piece that has been identified as having a more Germanic transliteration, it is important to look the word up in a dictionary to see if a final "b" is [b] or [p], if "d" is [d] or [t], "g" is [g] or [k], and so on.

Another variant between the two languages is the absence of the German ich-laut [ç]. Those classical singers who trained hard to grasp the pronunciation of the cat-like hissing sound that is the ich-laut will have to grow accustomed to using the uvular ach-laut for all instances of the "ch" and "kh." The word "ich," meaning "I" in both German and Yiddish, goes from the German [ɪç] to the Yiddish [ɪx], even though the spelling is often the same. This is due to the arch of the tongue being farther back in the mouth, which corresponds with Yiddish's roots in Hebrew.

4.2 A BRIEF COMPARISON WITH HEBREW

In Ethan Nash's chapter of *The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal* on Hebrew diction, he specifies that the [x] is pronounced farther back in the throat, as a uvular sound instead of the velar sound of the German [x].³⁹ This rule Nash dictates about Hebrew is consistent with Yiddish pronunciation. It is because of this back articulation of the [x] that Yiddish speakers do not have the [ç] of German. This ich-laut factor and the absence of mixed vowels make Yiddish pronunciation closer to Hebrew than to German, despite the fact that the Yiddish vocabulary is mostly Germanic in origin.

³⁹ Ethan Nash, "Hebrew," *The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal*, Duane Richard Karna, ed., Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012, 103.

One of the facets about Yiddish that is most comparable to Hebrew is the use of the Hebrew characters in its alphabet. Jews who attended Hebrew school when they were young will already be familiar with the characters written in the Yiddish alphabet. But those same students may experience confusion in reading the alphabet becomes the alphabet is not read in the same way as the Hebrew alphabet. In the Hebrew alphabet, with a few exceptions, all of the vowels are written as a series of dots and lines beneath the letters of the alphabet, which are all considered as consonants, like those found under the different alefs listed in Chapter 3.1. Likewise, the vov, which only sounds as [v] when doubled in Yiddish, is always [v] in Hebrew unless there is a dot dictating that it is to be pronounced as [o] (וֹ) or [u] (וּ); the ayen (ע), the Yiddish vowel for [ɛ], is silent in Hebrew; the Hebrew yud (י) is still used for the [j] glide and [ɪ] diphthongs, but gets its initial vowel from the symbols written around it and not from being repeated like in Yiddish.

Beyond the alphabet and articulatory traits, the bulk of Yiddish words from Hebrew origin pertain specifically to Jewish culture and religion, like the English word for "cantor," which becomes (חַזַּן) [xazan] in Hebrew and then (חַזַּן) [xazn] in Yiddish, and the word for "rabbi," which becomes (רַב) [rev] in Hebrew and (רַב) [rɔv] in Yiddish.

CONCLUSION

Singing in Yiddish comes with a unique set of challenges. Like any other foreign language, figuring out how to read the words is paramount to expressing the musical text. This becomes particularly challenging in Yiddish songs as the words are written with inconsistent spellings. Despite the YIVO attempt to standardize the orthography of transliterations, there are still many pieces of literature predating and postdating the standardization that do not adhere to the YIVO rules, and finding orthographical inconsistencies is commonplace even within single pieces. What was once a popular genre of music thriving on the streets of New York City around Second Avenue and in Eastern Europe is now nearly forgotten. Yiddish art songs and choral works are rarely performed.

Yiddish music lost its popularity around World War II when the world's majority of Yiddish speakers died in concentration camps around Europe. In America, cultural assimilation has diminished the use of the Yiddish language to where the only words commonly recognized are those found in movies by directors like Mel Brooks. Still there are organizations like YIVO and libraries at universities like Yale and Brown that have archived Yiddish music; the Milken Family Foundation, which has made several recordings of Yiddish pieces; Rutgers University, which staged a production of Rumshinsky's *Di goldene kale* in 2015; the Gilbert and Sullivan Light Opera Company of Long Island who actively perform their shows in Yiddish; and the National Yiddish Theatre - Folksbiene who were awarded a 2007 Drama Desk lifetime achievement award for their efforts to preserve Yiddish theatre. But Yiddish is being less and less used with each generation, making it all the more foreign of a language. In a genre of music where

the same art songs are heard on every recital and where the same operas are staged again and again, revitalizing Yiddish music offers an outlet for more variety of repertoire for all voice types. But this revival will not take off unless people have a guide to Yiddish diction. The guide presented here has been formulated by combining multiple phonology guides, including those found in Yiddish-English dictionaries, a Yiddish musical anthology, and the YIVO website, with the practices of classical singing diction found in literature by Joan Wall and Duane Richard Karna. It is not intended to deem other practices of Yiddish diction as wrong, but offers a tool for unification amongst ensembles and a means for Yiddish beginners to take a step into a vast new world of musical literature.

APPENDIX A: YIDDISH PHONEMES

| <u>Yiddish Letter</u> | <u>Letter Name</u> | <u>Possible Transliterations</u> | <u>English Example</u> | <u>IPA Symbol</u> | <u>Other Notes on Pronunciation</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--|
| א | Silent alef | | | N/A | Used at the beginning of words or roots that would otherwise begin with the vowels (א) or (י) |
| אָ | Pasek Alef | a, o | "Art" | [a] | |
| אױ | Komets Alef | O | "Love," or "Awesome" | [ʌ], [ɔ] | The vowel presented here is similar to an [o] in which the lips are not fully rounded, resulting in one of the other two IPA symbols given. The vowel sways to [ʌ] in closed syllables and to [ɔ] in open syllables and before "r" |
| ב | Beys | B | "Band" | [b] | |
| בֿ | Veys | v, w | "Vend" | [v] | |
| ג | Giml | G | "Give" | [g] | |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---------------------|----------|--|
| ד | Daled | D | "Darn" | [d] | When presented preceding a zayen and a shin (דזשין), the combination creates the [dʒ] sound like in the word "justice" |
| ה | Hey | H | "Hello" | [h] | The vowel sounds as a [u] in open syllables and before "r" and sounds as an [ʊ] in closed syllables. When two vovs are presented consecutively (וו), they are pronounced as [v], as in the word "very." When the vov precedes a yud (וּ), the resulting sound is [ɔɪ] like in the word "oy!" |
| ו | Vov | uh, oo, u | "Noodles" or "Hood" | [u], [ʊ] | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---------------|---------------|---|--------------------------|--|
| ך | Melupm Vov | Same as above | Same as above | Same as above | Used to distinguish which vov gets the [u] sound when there are three written together, creating either [uv] (װװ) or [vu] (װװ) |
| ץ | Zayen | Z, s | "Zipper" | [z] | When presented preceding a shin (ץץ), the combination creates the [ʒ] like in the English word "azure" |
| ח | Khes | Ch, kh | Like the Scottish "Loch" | [x] | |
| ט | Tes | T | "Tie" | [t] | Dentalized. When preceding a shin (ץט), the combination results in a [tʃ], like in the word "cheer" |
| י | Yud | y, i, ee, j | Varies between "yet," "stich," and "each" | [j], [i], [ɪ], [e], [aɪ] | Two consecutive yuds (ײ) produce the [e] sound like in the word "eight." When the yuds have a line underneath them (ײ̲), they |

| | | | | | |
|----|------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------|---|
| | | | | | produce the [aɪ] sound like in the word "sky" |
| כ | Kof | C, k | "Catch" | [k] | |
| כּ | Khof | Ch, kh | Like the Scottish "Loch" | [x] | |
| ך | Langer Khof | Same as above | Same as above | [x] | Only appears at the end of a word |
| ל | Lamed | L | "Land" | [l] | |
| מ | Mem | M | "Mountain" | [m] | |
| ם | Shlos Mem | Same as above | Same as above | [m] | Only appears at the end of a word |
| נ | Nun | N | "Nice" | [n] | |
| ן | Langer Nun | Same as above | Same as above | [n] | Only appears at the end of a word |
| ס | Samekh | S | "Sick" | [s] | |
| ע | Ayen | e, eh | "Better" | [ɛ] | |
| פ | Pey | P | "Ponder" | [p] | |
| ף | Fey | f, v | "Fish" | [f] | |
| ף | Langer Fey | Same as above | Same as above | [f] | Only appears at the end of a word |
| צ | Tsadek | ts, tz, z | "Tzar" | [ts] | Is never given the voiced equivalent of [dz] |
| ץ | Langer Tsadek | Same as above | Same as above | [ts] | Only appears at the end of a word |
| ק | Kuf | k, c | "Count" | [k] | |
| ר | Reysh | R | "Rare" | [r] | In spoken or informal singing, this is the velar [R]; in classical, it is the roller of flipped [r] |

| | | | | | |
|----|------|----|--------|-----|-------------------------|
| שׁ | Shin | Sh | "Shut" | [ʃ] | |
| שׂ | Sin | S | "Six" | [s] | Never the voiced [z] |
| תׁ | Tof | T | "Town" | [t] | Dentalized |
| תׂ | Sof | S | "Sing" | [s] | |

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF IPA TRANSCRIPTIONS

Below are three Yiddish works, each with different orthographies. For each piece, every line of text is written as four separate lines as follows:

Original Text
IPA Transcription
Literal Translation
Poetic Translation

It should be kept in mind while reading the transliterations that schwas are used where there are neutral, unaccented syllables. However, they should be pronounced closer to [ɛ] than any other vowel and are often written in the original Yiddish text as (ײַ), the symbol that sounds as [ɛ].

RAVEL'S "L'ÉNIGME ÉTERNELLE"

Ravel's piece is written with very inconsistent orthography. Words like "frägt" are clearly Germanic in spelling, due to the umlaut used, while words like "velt" are spelled more in line with YIVO transliterations. Thankfully, the same text has been set by multiple composers with different orthographies. This gives performers the additional tool of using other settings to compare for pronunciation. The text comes from a popular Jewish verse. The poetic translation is written by Howard Weiner.⁴⁰

"L'énigme éternelle"

Frägt die Velt die alte Kashe, tra la la la
[frɛkt di vɛlt di altə kafə...]
Asks the world the old questions, tra la la la
If the world asks the old question, tra la la la

⁴⁰ Frank Harders-Wuthenow, *Elegy for the Jewish Villages*, CD Liner Notes, Berlin; EDA Editions Abseits, 2007, 16-17.

Entfernt men, tra la la la.
[ɛnfɛrnt mɛn...]
Answers men, tra la la la
One answers tra la la la.

Un as men will kennen sagen
[ʊn az mɛn vɪl kɛnən zagən]
And as men want to-know to-say
And if one will, one can also say

Frägt die Velt die alte Kashe, tra la la la.
[frɛkt di vɛlt di altə kaʃə...]
Asks the world the old questions, tra la la la
If the world asks the old question.

ULLMANN'S "BREZULINKA," OP. 53

The Ullmann text is very Germanic in its orthographical rules. This may be due to Ullmann's Austrian heritage, the fact that he wrote the set while in a concentration camp, or because the publisher (Schott) is a German company. The back of the anthology includes the words rewritten with YIVO spellings, but there are still many inconsistencies between the two orthographies, including some words which have different translations between the two versions. Because of the discrepancies in the anthology, a lot of confirmation was required in a dictionary for the below transcriptions. The first two songs have text written by David Einhorn and Zalman Shneour respectively. The third piece uses words from a popular melody. For all three songs, the poetic translations written below are written by Howard Weiner.⁴¹

"Berjoskele"

Ruig, Ruig schockelt ihr gelocktes grines Kepel,
[ruɪk ruɪk ʃɔkɛlt ɪr gɛlɔktəs grɪnəs kɛpəl]
Calm, calm shakes its little green head
Serenely, serenely sways its green little head,

⁴¹ ibid, 25-26.

mein wejssinke Berjoskele un davent on a Schir;
[main vesinkə bərjɔskələ ʊn davənt ʌn a ʃɪr]
my white little-birch-tree and prays without end
my little, white birch tree, and prays without end;

jedes, jedes Bletele ihr's scheptschet shtil a t'fille
[jɛdəs jɛdəs blɛtələ ɪrz ʃɛptʃət ʃtɪl a tʃɪlə]
Every, every leaf theirs whispers softly a prayer
Every, every leaf whispers softly a prayer

Sej schejn klein Berjoskele, mispallel ejch far mir!
[ze ʃɛn klɛn bərjɔskələ mɪʃpələl ɛx far mir]
They pretty small little-birch-tree, say-a-verse for me
be nice, little birch tree, say a prayer for me!

Fun weiten Marev hot sick trojrig farganvet
[fʊn vaɪtən marəv hət zɪk trɔjʀɪk farganvɛt]
From far west had itself sorrowfully fallen
From far in the west a slender red ray

in die dine twejgelech a rizer, zarter Stral,
[ɪn di dɪnə tsvegələx a rɪtsər tsartər ʃtral]
in the thin little-twigh a red gentle ray
furtively slipped between the thin branches,

un a stillen Kush getun di Bletelech die Klejne
[ʊn a ʃɪlən kʊʃ gɛtʊn di blɛtələx di klɛnə]
And a quiet kiss gave the little-leaves the little-one
and gave a quiet kiss to the small leaves

welche hoben dremlendig gehorcht dem Nachtigall.
[vɛlχə hɔbən drɛmləndɪk gəhɔrxt dɛm naxtɪɡal]
Who had dozed-off listening to-the nightingale
that were dreamily listening to the song of the nightingale.

Fun die weite Felder is a Wintele gekumen
[fʊn di vaɪtə fɛldər ɪz a vɪntələ gɛkʊmən]
From the long field is a little-breeze came
Over the broad fields a wind came

un derzejlt die Bletelech Legends on a Schir,
[ʊn dɛrtsɛlt di blɛtələx lɛɡənts ʌn a ʃɪr]
And tells the little-leaves' legends without end
and told the leaves stories without end,

Epes hot in Harzen tief bei mir genumen benken
[ɛpəs hət in hartsən tif bəi mir gənʊmən bɛnkən]
Something had in heart deep by me begun to-yearn
something deep in my heart began to yearn

Sej schejn kleijn Berjoskele, mispallel ejch far mir.
[ze ʃɛn klen bɛrjɔskələ mɪʃpaləl ɛx far mir]
The pretty small little-birch-tree, say-a-verse for me
be nice, little birch tree, say a prayer for me.

"Margarithelech"

In Weldel beim Teichel, dort senen gewaksen
[in vɛldəl baɪm taɪxəl dɔrt zənən gəwaksən]
In the-grove by-the creek, there were grew
In the little woods, by the creek there grew

Margarithelech elent un klejn,
[margaritələx ɛlənt ʊn klen]
Little-daisies lonely and small
daisies lonely and small,

wie klejninke Sunen mit wejssinke Strahlen,
[vi klenɪnkə zʊnən mɪt vɛsɪnkə ʃtralən]
Like little suns with white rays
like little suns with white rays,

mit wejssinke tra-la-la-la.
[mɪt vɛsɪnkə tra la la la]
With white tra-la-la-la
with white tra-la-la.

Gegangen is Chavele still un farcholemt,
[gəgənən ɪz xavələ ʃɪl ʊn fɑrxələmt]
Goes is Chavele silent and dreamy
Chavele walked quietly and dreamy-eyed,

zulosen die goldblonde Zep
[tsulɔzən di gɔldblɔndə tsɛp]
To-loosen the golden-blond tussels
her gold-blond pigtail loosened

dos Helzel entblojst un gemurmelt,
[dʌs hɛldzəl ɛntblɔɪst ʊn gɛmɔrmɛlt]
The neck uncovered and (she)-hummed
her neck uncovered, and she hummed, sang,

gesungen a Lidele, Tra-la-la-la.
[gəzʊŋən a lɪdələ tra la la la]
(she)-sang a little-song tra-la-la-la
a little song, tra-la-la.

Die Sun is forgangen, der Bocher verschwunden,
[di zʌn ɪz fɔrgaŋən dɛr bɔxər fɛrʃvʊndən]
The sun is set, the boy has-disappeared
The sun has set, the young man has disappeared,

un Chavele sitzt noch in Wald.
[ʊn xavələ zɪst nɔx ɪn vald]
And Chavele sits still in (the)-forest
and Chavele still sits in the wood.

Sie kukt in der weiten un murmelt farcholemt
[zi kʊkt ɪn dɛr vaɪtən ʊn mʊrmɛlt fɑrxələmt]
She gazes in the distance and hums dreamily
She gazes into the distance and hums dreamy-eyed

dos Lidele: Tra-la-la-la.
[dʌs lɪdələ tra la la la]
the little-song tra-la-la-la
the little song, tra-la-la.

"A Mejdle in die Johren"

Ich bin schejn a Mejdle in die Johren,
[ɪx bɪn ʃɛn a mɛdəl ɪn di jorən]
I am pretty a maid in the years
I am an unmarried girl, no-longer young,

wos hostu mir den Kopf fordreht?
[vʌs hʌstu mɪr dɛn kɔpf fɔrdret]
What have-you to-me the head occupied
why did you steal my heart?

Ich wolt schejn lang a Kale geworden
[ix vɔlt ʃen laŋ a kalə gəvɔrən]
I want pretty long a bride to-become
I've wanted to be a bride for a long time

un efscher take Chassene gehat.
[ʊn ɛʃər takə xasənə gəhat]
And maybe really (a)-marriage have
and perhaps really have a wedding.

Du host mir zugesogt zu nemen,
[du hɔst mir tsʊgəzɔkt tsu nɛmən]
You have to-me promised to take
You promised to take me,

un ich hob ejf Dir gewart;
[ʊn ix hɔb ɛf dir gəvart]
And I have out for-you waited
and I waited for you;

farvos solstu, Duschenju mich farschejmen
[farvɔs zɔlstu duʃənju miχ farʃemən]
Why should-you, stew me-(in) embarrassment
why should you, sweetheart, put me to shame

Zi hostu Dich in mir genart?
[tsi hɔstu diχ in mir gənart]
If had-you yourself in me deceive
or did you just want to deceive me?

LAZAR WEINER'S "A NIGUN (TSCHIRI-BIM)"

Songs from the Weiner anthology are very user-friendly for determining pronunciation as their transliterations adhere to YIVO standards. Additionally, the text is written at the end of each song in the Yiddish alphabet so that if there are any questions regarding the pronunciation, like if a consonant is voiced or unvoiced, one can double check by referring to the original Yiddish text. Having the Yiddish text available is also useful because it eliminates the guesswork involved in getting a literal word-for-word

translation of the pieces. Because there is no question over a word's spelling, a singer can look the word up directly in a dictionary or on a source like Google Translate.

Because the Weiner song below is folk-like in nature and because the pronunciation guide specifies in the intro to the anthology, the transcription below adheres to the rule of the semi-vowel "n." In this interpretation of the text, the consonant "n" is sustained in place of the vowel where there is no other vowel indicated preceding it. The words "tshiri bim bam bam" should be sung with open vowels, but I will not transcribe them below as they are nonsense syllables and should be performed however the performer can best portray the song of the pauper in the text. The words are written by L. Magister and the poetic translation comes from the Weiner anthology.⁴²

"A Nigun (Tschiri-Bim)"

Iz a kabtsn amol gevezn,
[iz a kabtsn amol gəvəzn]
Was a pauper past there-was
Once upon a time there was a poor man.

flegt er nor mit Got zich krigen.
[fləgt ɛr nɔr mɪt ɡɔt zɪx kɪgən]
Used-to he only with God he would-fight
All he did was quarrel with God.

Vunder iber vunder hot mit im getrofn
[vɔndɛr ɪbɛr vɔndɛr hɔt mɪt ɪm ɡɛtrɔfn]
Wonder over wonder had with him met
Wonders and wonders befell him

ven er hot gezungen ot aza min nigun;
[vɛn ɛr hɔt ɡɛzʊŋən ʌt aza mɪn nɪɡʊn]
When he had sung his nigun
when he sang a tune like this;

Tshiri bim bam bam...

⁴² *The Lazar Weiner Collection*, 69.

Hot fun nigun zich vayn gegosn,
[hɔt fɔn nɪɡʊn zɪx vaɪn ɡɛɡɔzn]
Had from nigun his wine flowed
From this tune flowed wine,

hot er zup noch zup geshlungen.
[hɔt ɛr zʊp noːx zʊp ɡɛʃlʊŋən]
Had he gulp after gulp swallowed
and he swallowed gulp after gulp.

Vunder iber vunder hot mit im getrofn...
[vʊndɐ ɪbɐ vʊndɐ...]
Wonder over wonder...
Wonders and wonders...

Zingt der Yid, un s'gist mesikes,
[zɪŋt dɛr jɪd ʊn sɡɪst mɛsɪkəs]
Sang the Jew, and sweetness flowed
As the Jew sang, and sweetness flowed,

iz er azsh fun freyd geshprungen!
[ɪz ɛr aʒ fʊn frɛd ɡɛʃprʊŋən]
Is he actually from joy leapt
he actually leapt for joy!

Vunder iber vunder hot mit im getrofn...
[vʊndɐ ɪbɐ vʊndɐ...]
Wonder over wonder...
Wonders and wonders...

APPENDIX C: CLASSICALLY SUNG YIDDISH PIECES

| <u>Composer</u> | <u>Title of Work</u> | <u>Vocal Genre</u> | <u>Important Dates</u> | <u>Other Information</u> |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|--|---|
| Friedsell, Louis | <i>Ben Ami</i> | Operetta | 1908 | Words by Goldfaden |
| Goldfaden, Abraham | <i>Bar Kokhba</i> | Operetta in 4 acts | Veidlinger says performed 1882, YIVO Archives say 1901 | About Bar Kokhba, the leader of a Jewish resistance against the Romans in 130s CE Jerusalem. The play caused Tsar Alexander III to ban Yiddish Theatre for the worry that it was going to inspire the Jews to rally against him. During Stalin's reign, the opera was used as a beacon of communist principles. |
| Goldfaden, Abraham | <i>Shulamith</i> | Operetta | 1899 | |
| Laks, Simon | <i>Eight Jewish Folk Songs</i> | Song Set | 1947 | Includes "Ich bin a balagole," "Wigenlid," "Di gilderne pawe," "Unser rebeniu," "In droid is a triber tog," "Gwaldze braider," "Di alte Kashe," "Fraitik far nacht." |
| Lubin, Harry | <i>Di eybike mame</i> (The Eternal Mother) | Operetta | 1928 | An operetta that pokes fun at the overbearing worry wart that is the stereotypical Jewish mother. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------|---------|---|
| Meyerowitz, David | <i>Gebrokhene hertser</i> (Broken Hearts) | Play | 1903 | Contains the song "Got un zayn mishpet iz gerekht," ("God and His Judgement Is Just"). |
| Olshanetsky, Alexander | <i>Der katerinshtshik</i> (The Organgrinder) | Musical Theatre | 1933-34 | A musical comedy involving gypsies, fortune tellers, rejection of arranged marriage, and a happy ending. Show is the origin of English- translated song "I Love You Much Too Much," which was later recorded by Ella Fitzgerald and Dean Martin, as well as Jan Peerce in the original Yiddish version. |
| Olshanetsky, Alexander | <i>Der letster tants</i> (The Last Dance) | | 1930 | A woman is forced to marry by a certain age in order to inherit the money left by her father. For convenience, her lawyer sets her up with an innocent prisoner awaiting execution at Sing Sing Prison. |
| Olshanetsky, Alexander | <i>Di eyntsike nakht</i> (The One and Only Night) | Operetta | 1929 | Operetta is set in Russian in the time of Tsar Nicholas I. It is about a Jewish boy who is kidnapped and later befriended and raised by a Russian general. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------|---|---|
| Olshanetsky, Alexander | <i>In gortn fun libe</i> (In the Garden of Love) | Play | 1926 | Show is speculated to exhibit the popular Yiddish theatre theme of being saved from a loveless arranged marriage. |
| Olshanetsky, Alexander | <i>Vos meydlekh tuen</i> (What Girls Do) | Operetta | 1935 | |
| Perlmutter, Arnold | <i>A mentsh zol men zayn</i> (Be a Decent Person) | Operetta | 1908 | |
| Perlmutter, Arnold | <i>Di polishe khasene</i> (The Polish Wedding) | Operetta | 1916 | |
| Ravel, Maurice | "L'énigme éternelle" (The Eternal Question) | French Art Song | Written for voice and piano 1914, Orchestra- ted 1919- 1920 | Song is the second movement of Ravel's <i>Deux mélodies hébraïques</i> . It is based off an old Yiddish verse that is set by many other composers under the title "Di alte Kasche." The first movement of the set is written in liturgical Hebrew. |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|-----------------|--|
| Russotto, Henry A. | "Churbon Titanik, oder Der naser keiver" | Song | Written 1912 | Written about the tragedy of the famous Atlantic shipwreck. The Library of Congress lists this work under its Yiddish name as a song for high voice and piano. On a separate page, it lists the work under its English title, "The Titanic's Disaster," as a popular song. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Berele Tresp</i> | Theatre Show | Written 1912 | Contains the song "Watch Your Step," about an Eastern European woman getting used to the new phrases she hears in the United States. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Di goldene kale</i> (The Golden Bride) | Operetta in 3 Acts | 1923 | Comedic operetta about a woman who inherits a massive fortune after her father dies and suddenly becomes wealthy with suitors trying to marry her. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Der rebe hot geheysn freylekh zayn</i> (The Rebbe Has Bidden Us to Be Merry) | Operetta | 1921-22 | Operetta about a rabbi's son who falls in love with a gypsy. Show has 20 musical numbers and includes a large double chorus and dance numbers. |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--|----------------|------|--|
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Der rebetsn's tokhter</i> (The Rabbi's Wife's Daughter) | Operetta | 1922 | Considered a reworking of Rumshinsky's first Jewish operetta <i>A yidish kind</i> from 1909. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Di khaznte</i> (The Cantor's Wife) | Musical Comedy | 1918 | Show is filled with many liturgical and religiously themed songs, but with secular motives. For instance, the show's song "Shma Yisro'el," based on liturgical text, is sung by a tenor as a plea to God to have a woman fall in love with him. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Dos galitsiyaner rebele</i> (The Little Galician Rabbi) | Musical | 1937 | The plot of this show is mostly speculated in the liner notes of <i>Great Songs of the Yiddish Stage</i> , Vol. 3. But the song "Shloymele Malkele" is sung as a love duet by a brother and sister after they discover that they are not actually related. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Dos mamele</i> (The Little Mother) | Operetta | 1927 | Show was used as the inspiration for the Yiddish film <i>Mamele</i> in 1930 with a score by Abraham Ellstein. |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|----------|------|--|
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Dos radio meyd</i> (Radio Girl) | Musical | 1929 | Includes "Di Primadonna," where a woman describes wanting to be a famous prima donna and meeting a manager more interested in her "ooh-la-la" than her "tra-la-la." |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Tsipke</i> | Operetta | 1924 | Tells the tale of Tsipke who creates a false identity to escape life with her abusive alcoholic father who forced her to marry a bartender whom she doesn't love and who was drafted into the military the day after their wedding. |
| Rumshinsky, Joseph | <i>Yosl un zayne vayber</i> (Yosl and His Wives) | Operetta | 1937 | Operetta tells the tale of a man in America who is in love with a blind woman back in the old country. He borrows money to move his love to America to be with him, but her sister goes instead pretending to be the blind sister with renewed sight and ends up falling in love with one of the people who lent the man money for the ticket. |

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|---------------------------------------|--|--|------|---|
| Secunda, Sholom | "Dos yidishe lid" (The Jewish Song) | Considered to be a quasi- cantorial concert aria | 1924 | Was added to Sholom Secunda's musical melodrama <i>In nomen fun got</i> (In the Name of God) as a cantor's plea for worthiness to be able to sing prayers for the congregation during the Jewish High Holy Days. |
| Smulewitz, Solomon | "A brivele der mamen" (A Letter to Mama) | Popular Song | 1907 | Ballad about a man who moves to America with the only wish from his mother that he write her a letter from America. The song was not written for a play or operetta, but later inspired the plot of multiple plays which used both the title and the song in their productions. "A brivele der mamen" was later turned into a Yiddish film with a score by Abraham Ellstein which quoted from the original song throughout the film score. |
| Trilling, Ilia and Isidore Lillian | <i>Leb un lakh</i> (Live and Laugh) | Musical | 1941 | Show flashes back and forth between past and present over a ten-year span and involves failed relationships, scandal, extortion, and murder. |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|------|--|
| Ullmann, Viktor | <i>Brezulinka (Three Yiddish Songs).</i> | Art Song Set | 1944 | Contains the songs "Berjoskele," with words by David Einhom, "Margarithelech," with words by Zalman Shneour, and "A Mejdle in die Johren," with words from a popular melody. |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>Amol in tzayt (Legend of Toil)</i> | Cantata | | |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>Amos</i> | Cantata | | |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>Golem</i> | Opera | 1957 | |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>Hirsh lekert</i> | Cantata | | |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>In Kamf far frayhayt</i> | Cantata | | Subtitled as "Choral Ballet" |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>The Last Judgment - Bontshe shvayg</i> | Cantata | | |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>The Lazar Weiner Collection</i> | Anthology of Yiddish art songs for voice and piano | | 31 art songs included. Yehudi Wyner, ed. Transcontinental Music Publications, 2011. |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>Mentsh in der velt</i> | Cantata | | |
| Weiner, Lazar | <i>Tzu dir, amerike</i> | Cantata | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|----------------|---|---|
| Weisgall, Hugo | <i>The Golden Peacock</i> | Song Cycle | Written 1967 or 1976 | Set of seven popular songs that fuse simple Yiddish melodies with tonal complexity in the accompaniment. Includes "Undzer Rebenyu," "Der Rebe Elimeylekh," "Baleboste Zisinke," "Mayn Harts Veynt in Mir," "Lomir Zikh Bafrayen," "Shlof Mayn Kind, Shlof Keseyder," and "Di Goldene Pave." |
| Wolfsthal, Chone | <i>Bas Yerusholayim</i> (The Daughter of Jerusalem) | Operetta | 1916 | |
| Thomashefsky, Boris, and Louis Friedsel | "Kaddisch" from <i>Der Yeshiva Bokher</i> | Song from Play | Premiered in 1899 in both New York and Philadelphia | A Yiddish adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet in which the lead character, a rabbinical student, finds his rabbi father dead in the Torah arc. Adapted from an 1899 melodrama of the same name by Isidore Zolotarevsky. |

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