“I was attracted to the strange and haunting beauty of Jewish music. I felt almost, as though I had been brought into a new musical world when a few authentic Jewish melodies were brought to my notice. I was so bewitched by the mysterious color and exotic charm of these melodies that for weeks I could not get this music out of my mind. Then my imagination was set aflame...”

Maurice Ravel
"His voice and art bring together three great traditions - a Slavic timbre, an Italian technique, and a cantorial breadth and intensity of spirit"

R.Dyer
Folksongs of a vanished era
Excerpts from the foreword written by Abba Kovner on the „Anthology of Yiddish folksongs”

These songs were sung by a people in a world that has vanished. It was the world of East European Jewry, which in the last generations before World War II comprised the greater part of the Jewish people.

Segregated from the surrounding society, cut off from the rest of the world, isolated by inferior roads between swamps and forest, and by the wall of political prohibitions, densely packed together in their small settlements, the Jews developed the special type of community which was the Jewish township of Eastern Europe - the shtetl.

The shtetl was not a small town. Nor was it a large village. The shtetl was simply a small organ in the body of a large population - and it was a complete Jewish world in itself. A world of enormous paradox: in damp cellars, in garrets, in courtyards of synagogues, or in the market squares, the Jews lived history with an uncommon intensity. They did not make history, but history was happening to them constantly.

Besides the shoemaker’s stool, in negotiation with the tailor, in everyday conversations about an egg and chickens, in the old market, or in pleasant discourse with the Sabbath guest, you could hear them recalling the creation of the world, the expulsion from paradise and ... the Russo-Japanese War. In one breath they would mention the names of Balaam, Alexander the Great, the Gaon of Vilna and Napoleon, the Maggid of Dubno and Rothschild...

From a distance - meaning in the eyes of a stranger - the Jewish street seemed like a nest of ants, whose inhabitants were blindly running about. But the masses in the shtetl had a dream. From that dream came Trotsky and Weizman, Chagall and Artur Rubinstein, Bialik and Ben Gurion...
At all those times folksongs served as an expression of the close connection which the Sabbath and festivals had with the Holy Blessed One and His Chosen People and the Torah and the commandments. The language was a mixture of Yiddish and Hebrew together with a great deal of "internationalism". The body was of course the colloquial language - the *heimish loshn* - the intimate speech of the common folk. As for the melody - it came from the synagogue... but also from the sheepfolds, from the music stand of the cantor and from the pens of the Russian or Ukrainian *khutor* (farmyard). There are... songs that were taken over and tunes that were borrowed, the notes of which preserve their local non-Jewish character inside our folksongs... When he came to sing nursery rhymes or love songs, or to trill a *Hasidic* tune, or to make wedding guests dance (it should be remembered that wedding songs would also digest into everyday matters such as Jewish politics on the local and world scale!), the popular Jewish performer would imprint upon all of them something so very Jewish, in the mystical-melancholy rhythm and in the forceful expression of the words, that it would be difficult to find anything comparable elsewhere.

The folksongs of the Jews of Eastern Europe are a faithful mirror of the life of the Jewish people in exile. More than anything else, (they) bring us closer to understanding the vitality of the Jewish character, the difference between the Jew's feeling for life and that of the surrounding peoples, which arose from the abundance of his sufferings and his poor man's joy.

From: "Anthology of Yiddish folksongs"
The Hebrew University Jerusalem
Mount Scopus Publications by Magnus Press
Un dokh sing ikh! And yet I sing!

The texts of the songs printed in this booklet don’t always correspond to the versions known from other compilations. With some exceptions marked by (**), we have tried to render the texts the way they are interpreted by Alexandrovich. Moreover, the lyrics of some of the songs have been originally written (“A glezele Lekhayim”) or re-written specifically for him (e.g. partly “Dos Yidishe Lid”) and some melodies have been originally composed particularly for him.

As for the English translation, it was not our aim to produce an English version of the songs, but trying to render, beside the content, the very special character of the original. Therefore, we have endeavoured to follow as faithfully as possible the structure of the Yiddish verses which sometimes led us to neglecting better or more elegant English expressions.
SHPIL ZHE MIR A LIDELE IN YIDISH
Words: Y. Kotliar * Music: M. Jampolski
Published: Moscow, 1968

Shpig zhe mir a lidle in yidish
Dervekn zol es freyd un nisht keyn khidessh
Az ale, groys un kleyn
Zoln kenen dos farshteyn
Fun moyl tsu moyl dos lidlele zol geyn!
A lidlele on ziftsn un on trenn
Shpig azoy az ale zoln hern
Az ale zoln zen
Ikhe lev un singen ken
Sheyner nokh un beser vi geven

Shpig, shpig, klezmerl, shpig
Veyst dokh vos ikh meyn un vos ikh vil
Shpig, shpig, shpig a lidlele far mir
Shpig a nig n mit harts und mit gefil!

Lomirschegn s 'lidele tsusamen
Vi gute fraynd, vi kinder fun eyn mamem
Mayn eyntsiger farlang, s 'zol klingen fray und frank
In alemens gesang oykh mayn Gesang

Shpig zhe mir a lidle fun sholem!
Zol shoyn zayn sholem, nit keyn khoislem!
Az felker, groys un kleyn
Zoln kenen dos farshteyn
On krig un on milkhomes zikh bageyn

PLAY ME A LITTLE SONG IN YIDDISH
Words: Y. Kotliar * Music: M. Jampolski
Published: Moscow, 1968

Play me a little song in Yiddish
Let it bring joy and not misery
Everyone, the old and the young
Shall understand it
Let this song be passed from mouth to mouth!
A little song without sighs and tears,
Play it in a way that everyone can hear
That everyone can see
I'm still alive and singing
Singing even better than before.

Play, little fiddler, play
You know what my thoughts and wishes are
Play a tune for me
Play a joyful tune with heart and soul!

Let us sing the little song together
As good friends, as children of one mother
May my chant resound, and such is my desire,
Among all other songs in the general chorus.

Play me a little song about peace
And it shall be real peace and not an illusion
And all nations, great and small
Shall understand it
And live without wars
KINDER-YORN
Words + Music: Mordechai Gebirtig
Published: Moscow, 1968

Kinder-yorn, zise sheyne yorn
Eybik ligt ir mir in mayn zikorn
Az ikh derman zikh ayer tsayt
Tut mir azoy bang un leyd
Oy, vi shnel ikh bin shoyn alt gevorn!

Kinder-yorn, zise sheyne blumen
Mir tsurik vet ir shoyn mer nit kumen
Yorn kalte, troyerike,
Shvartse, more-shkhoyredike -
Vi a kholem zeyd ir mir farfloygn ...
*** (Original: Hohn ayer sheynem plats farnumen)

Ikh ze dos shtibl far mayne oygn,
Vu ikh bin geboyn, eretsoygen
Un das vigl ze ikh dort
Shteyt nokh oyf dem zelbn ort
Oy vi shnel ikh bin shoyn alt gevorn!

Vi a kholem iz dos alts farfloygn ...

YUNGE YORN
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Iber berg un iber tol'n (***)
Fliem toyn porn, fliem toyn porn
Nokh keyn nakhes nit gehat
Un shoyn avek di yorn

Spant zhe brider gikher ayn
Kare ferd di porn, kare ferd di porn
Mir veln forn un deryogn
Undsere yunge yorn

Mir hobn deryogt undsere yorn
Oyfn breitn brik, oyfn breitn brik
Yorn yunge, kert zikh um
Aheym tsu unds zurik

„Neyn, neyn, neyn, mir veln nit kumen
Shoyn nit tsu vemen:
Ir hot badarft yungerheyt
Di yorn nit farshemen!”

CHILDHOOD YEARS
Words + Music: Mordechai Gebirtig
Published: Moscow, 1968

Sweet years of my childhood
Forever you remain in my memory
When I think of those times
I become sad and anxious
How quickly have I grown old!

Childhood years, sweet and beautiful flowers
Never you will return to me
Years of coldness and sadness
Black and gruesome -
You've gone like a dream

Still I see the little room
Where I was born and begot
And I see my cradle there
Still at the same place
How quickly have I grown old!

All that is gone like a dream ...

THE YEARS OF YOUTH
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Across the mountains, across the valleys
Pairs of doves are flying
I have not yet enjoyed life
And my years, they are already gone

Hitch up quickly to the carriage
A pair of horses
And let us chase
The years of our youth

We overtook our young years
On the broad bridge
Oh, my young years, turn back
Come back home to us

„No, no, we will not come!
To you, we won t come back:
In your young years
you should not have disgraced us!”
A PASTEKHL, A TROYMER
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
Published: Moscow, 1968

Hot a pastekhl, a troymer
Lib gehabt tsum himl kukan
Hobn welf dort hinter boymer
Zikh genumen rukn
Hobn tsigelekhem gemeket
Hobn shefelekhem gebeket
Un dem pastekhl mitn shtekn
Nit gekent dervekn

Ven dos pastekhl, der troymer
Hot tsum himl zikh farkukt
Hobn welf dort hinter boymer
Di tsherede fortsukt
Hobn tsigelekhem gemeket
Hobn shefelekhem gebeket
Un dem pastekhl mitn shtekn
Nit gekent dervekn

Ven dos pastekhl, der troymer
Hot a heym zikh geyn geklibn
Zaynen dortn hinter boymer
Beyndlekhem bloyz geblibn
Keyner hot shoyn nit gemeket
Keyner hot shoyn nit gebeket
Aza pastekhl mitn shtekn -
Meg di erd farekhn!

A LITTLE SHEPHERD, A DREAMER
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
Published: Moscow, 1968

A little shepherd, a dreamer
Loved to stare at the sky
Wolves from behind trees
Started sneaking around
The little goat bleated
And the little sheep shrieked
But the shepherd with the stick -
They could not awaken

As the little shepherd, the dreamer
Was lost in the skies
The wolves from behind trees
Lacerated the flock
The little goat bleated
And the little sheep shrieked
But the shepherd with the stick -
They could not awaken

And when the little shepherd, the dreamer
prepared himself to go home
There were left, behind the trees,
Only little bones
There was no more bleating
There was no more shrieking
That shepherd with the stick -
May the earth cover him up!
IN ROD ARAYN
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
Published: Moscow, 1968

In rod arayn, in rod arayn
Mit freyd af ale dekker
S'iz bay unds di simkhe groys
To gis on ful dem bekker!

Tants, tants, tants a bisele mit mir
Zi hot lib di eydems
Un ikh hob lib di shnir

Kh'v'olt mit aych a tants gegangen
Nor s'iz shoyn nit di yorn
In akht tsendlik, keyn ayn-hore
Shoyn arayngeforn

S'hot zikh mir di zip tsezipt
Un s'hot zikh alts tseshotn (***)
S'hotn zikh mir di shikh tserisn
Tants ikh in die zokn

Lomir nemen tsu bislekh mashke
Genug shoyn gisn trem
Nemt zhe ale tsu bislekh vayn
Un lomir freylekh vern!

JOIN THE CIRCLE
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
Published: Moscow, 1968

Come into the dancing circle
Make merry in every house
Great joy has come to us
Fill up your wine-glasses!

Dance, dance, dance a little bit with me
She likes her sons-in-law
And I like my daughters-in-law

I would dearly love to dance with you
But I am not young any longer
I am already - knock on wood -
Going on eighty

I'm like a riddle totally riddled
And I'm falling apart
My shoes have been ripped up
So I dance with only socks on

Let us have a little drink
There has been enough crying
Let us all take a little wine
And let's become cheerful!

There are numerous different textual versions of this old tune. The chorus, which originates from a Hassidic song from the middle of the 19th century, was especially adjusted to suit all kinds of private or official situations. During the Holocaust, it made a reference to the yellow passes issued by the German authorities: "Hostu a gein shayn hob ikh khasene mit dir" - If you have a yellow pass, I'll marry you!"
MEKHUTONIM GEYN
Words: M. Varshawsky * Music: O. Feintuch
Published: Moscow, 1968

Mekhutonim geyen, mekhutonim geyen...
Mekhutonim geyen, kinder
Oy lomir zikh freyen, zet nor zet:
Der kosn iz a vunder
O, shpilt a Vivat farn kosns tsad!

Dsham, dsham....
Mekhutonim geyen ale
A tentsele in eynem geshvind
O'zet nor, zet nor, kinder
Vi zey tupen, vi zey tantsn atzind!

Mekhutonim geyen, mekhutonim geyen...
Ot geyt di shvester Freydl
O, nemt zii arayn in redl, zet nor zet
Zi dreyt zikh vi a dreyl!
O, shpilt a Vivat farn kosns tsad!

Mekhutonim geyen, mekhutonim geyen...
Ot geyt der feter Mendik
O, mit vos khobn mir zikh farsindikt, zet nor zet
Er blost zikh vi an indik
O, shpilt a Vivat farn kosns tsad!

THE IN-LAWS ARE COMING
Words: M. Varshawsky * Music: O. Feintuch
Published: Moscow, 1968

The in-laws are coming, the in-laws are coming...
Let us be merry! Look at him, look:
The groom is wonderful
Let us play a „Vivat!” to his family!

Dsham, Dsham, ....
All the in-laws are coming
Let us dance all together
Oh, look at them, look:
How they now jump and dance with joy!

The in-laws are coming...
Here comes the groom’s sister Frejdl
Let her inside the circle, look at her, look
How she’s whirling around like a spinning top
Play a „Vivat!” to the groom’s family!

The in-laws are coming...
Here comes the cousin Mendik
What did we do to him, look at him, look
He’s puffed up like a turkey
Oh, play a „Vivat!” to the groom’s family!
BAY A TAYKHL
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune / Bialistock
Collection of Folk Tunes by Menachem Kipnis *
Published: Moscow, 1968

Bay a taykhl wakst a boyml
Waksn oyf im zwaygn
Mit alemen redstu
Mit alemen bistu frayndlekh
Nor mir heistu schwaign

Bay a taykhl wakst a boyml
Waksn oyf im blumen
Oy, freg ikh dikh, libste
Wen westu kumen
Westu shoyn amol kumen?

Bay a taykhl wakst a boyml
Waksn oyf im bleter
Oy, freg ikh dikh, libste
Westu shoyn amol kumen,
Legst alts op oyf shpeter ...

BY A LITTLE POND
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune / Bialistock
Collection of Folk Tunes by Menachem Kipnis *
Published: Moscow 1968

There is a little tree down by a little pond
With branches growing
You talk with everyone
You are friendly with everyone
But bidding silence to me alone

There is a little tree down by a little pond
With flowers all over
I ask you, my beloved,
When will you come
Will you ever come to me?

There is a little tree down by a little pond
With leaves all about
I ask you, my beloved,
Will you ever come to me?
But you keep putting it off till later

A KHAZN AF SHABES
Words: Unknown * Music: O. Lichtenstein
Published: Moscow, 1968

Iz gekumen a khazn in a kleyn shtetele
Davenen a shabes. Oy, davenen a shabes.

Zaynen im gekumen hern
Di dray shenste balebatim fun dem shtetl
Di dray shenste balebatim funem shtetl:
Eyner — a shnayerl,
Der zweyte — a schusterl
Un der drite, o der drite — a balegole

Ruft zikh opet dos shnayerl:
„Oy-oy-oy! Hot er gedavnt
Hot er gedavnt!
Azoy vi me git mit der nodl a shtokh
Un mitn ayzn a pres!”

Oy, hot er gedavnt!
Oy-oy-oy, oy-oy-oy, oy-oy
Hot er gedavnt!

A CANTOR FOR SABBATH
Words: Unknown * Music: O. Lichtenstein
Published: Moscow, 1968

A cantor arrived at a small shtetl
To pray on Sabbath.

There came three gentlemen (to hear him pray)
The three most respectable gentlemen of the shtetl:
The three prettiest gentlemen of the shtetl:
The first one - a dressmaker
The second - a shoemaker
And the third, oh, the third - a coachman.

Says the dressmaker:
„Oh, how he prayed!
Oh, how he prayed!
Like stitching with a needle
And pressing with an iron!”

Oh, how he prayed!
Oy, oy, oy ...
How he prayed!
Ruft zikh opet dos schusterl:
„Oy-oy-oy, hot er gedavnt
Hot er gedavnt!
Azoy vi me git mit di dratve a tsi
Un mit n hamerl a klop!“

Ruft zikh opet dos balegole:
„Oy-oy-oy! Hot er gedavnt
Hot er gedavnt!
Azoy vi me git mit di leytses a tsi,
Un mitn baytsli a khvoshtsh — vyo!
Oy, iz dos a bartfile!“

**DER FURMAN**
Words: Unknown * Music: B. Berggolts
* Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Bin ikh mir a furman un hob mir a por ferdlekh
Ferdlekh, odlers gar tseve
Fil zumers, fil vinters, fil hitn un keltn
Shoyn durkhgemakht hob ikh mit zey
Mayn heym iz dos feld, mayn bed iz der vogn
Arbet shoyn s shmaysn, di ferdln zoln trogn
Durkh zamd un durkh blote, kolzman koyekh iz nokh do
Sing ikh mir a lidl, ayda uvyo ...

Un di ferdlekh fien, fien, fien
Tu ikh mit di leytses tsien, tsien
Un di reders kripen, makh ikh mit di lipn:
Vyo, vyo, vyo!

Haynt ven ikh zits mikh fartrakht oyf der kelne
Un glet fun mayn ferdl di hor
Vayst zikh mir oys, az di zamf fun di reder
Farshtn a yor nokh a yor
Ikh batrakht mir di ferdlekh — dem shvartsn, dem vaysn
Ikh heb zey ontraybn un faybn un shmaysn
Durkh zamd und durkh blote, kolzman koyah is nokh do
Sing ikh mir a bidl ...

Haynt ven mayn ponim iz ful shoin mit kneytshn
Un groy iz gevorn mayn kop
Doch mayne hent zaynen starke fun aysen
Zey losn di leytses nit op
Gesunt zoln zayn di hent mit masols
Ferdlekh flig zhe, zayt nit keyn foylers
Durkh zamd un durkh blote, kolzman koyekh is nokh do.
Sing ikh mir a bidl: ayda uvyo!

Says the shoemaker:
„Oh, how he prayed!
Like pulling the thread
And tapping with a hammer!“

Says the coachman:
„Oh, how he prayed!
Like pulling at the reins
And lashing the horses with the whip - vyo!
Oh, what a wonderful cantor!“

**THE COACHMAN**
Words: Unknown * Music: B. Berggolts
* Published: Tel Aviv 1972

I am a coachman and I have a pair of horses
Two horses like eagles
Many summers, many winters, great heat and severe cold
I shared with them
The field is my home and my bed is the carriage
My work is to be a coachman, the horses are carrying me
Through sand and dirt, but I'm still strong
And I sing my song ...

And the horses are flying
And I'm pulling the reins
And the wheels are squeaking, and my lips go:
Vyo, vyo, vyo!

As I was sitting on the coach box today
And as I was brushing my horses
I realised that the sand falling off the wheels
Buried my years one after the other
I look at my horses - the black one and the white one
I was urging them, I was whistling and I was driving the coach
Through sand and through dirt, and I'm still strong
And I sing my song ...

Now my face is full of wrinkles
And may hair is grey
But my hands are still as strong as iron
And they don't let up pulling the reins
Blessed be these toil-hardened hands
Fly, my little horses, don't be lazy
Through sand and through dirt, I'm still strong
And I sing my song: ayda uvyo!
- If I want, I pronounce the words:
  "God has created man out of his wisdom ..."
  - Who are you?
  - I am ... do you know who I am?
    - I've been thinking you were Avrom Shmuel's son-in-law who is dealing in leather.
  - Which leather? Whose leather?
    My father never dealt in leather!
    And my grandfather didn't deal in leather either!
    What do I have to do with leather?!
    I am ...
    - I've been thinking you were Yosl Ber's son-in-law who is dealing in feathers.
  - Which feathers? Whose feathers?
    My father never dealt in feathers!
    And my grandmother never ever slept on feathers!
    What do I have to do with feathers?!
    I am ...
    - Aha! Now, I know who you are!
      You are a bit of a cantor, I guess
      and a bit of a fool!
    - Ot, ot, ot!
      You've got it a bit
      And you've missed a bit!
      That means, I am a cantor
      But not a fool!
VARNITSHKES
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
* Published: Moskau, 1968

Gevald! Vu nemt men, vu nemt men, vu nemt men
Vu nemt men mel af makhn di varnitshkes
On heyvn un on salts, on fefer un on shmalts
Vu nemt men mel af makhn di varnitshkes?

Gevald! Vu nemt men ...
A lokshnhret af katschn di varnishkes
On heyvn un on salts, ...

Gevald! Vu nemt men ...
An oyvn af tsu bakn di varnishkes
On heivn un on salts, ...

Gevald! Vu nemt men
Gevald! Vu nemt men
Vu nemt men, vu nemt men a bokher ...
A bokher af tsu esn di varnishkes?
Az ikh bin aleyn on salts, on fefer un on shmalts
A bokher af tsu esn di varnishkes ...

LEYG DAYN KOP OYF MAYNE KNI
Words: H. Leivick * Music: L. Birnov *
Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Leyg dayn kop oyf mayne kni
Gut azoy tsu lign
Kleyne kinder shloifn aleyn (***)
Groyse darf men vignon
Kinder hobn shpilekhlekh
Shpiln ven zey viln
Groyse shpiln nor mit zikh
Muzn eybik shpiln
Hob nit moyre - ikh bin do
Ikh vel dikh nit farshtoysn
Host shoyln haynt genug geveynt
Vi es past a groysn
Ongeveynt un ongeklogt
Ikh vel dikh farvgahn
Leyg dayn kop oyf mayne kni
S izt gut azoy tsu lign

THE DUMPLINGS
Words + Music: Traditional folk tune
* Published: Moskau, 1968

Help! Where shall I get ...
Where shall I get flour to make dumplings
Without yeast and salt, without pepper and grease
Where shall I get flour to make dumplings?

Help! Where shall I get ...
A board on which to roll the dumplings
Without yeast and salt, ...

Help! Where shall I get ...
An oven to bake the dumplings ...
Without yeast and salt, ...

Help! Help!! Where shall I get ...
Where shall I get a fellow ...
A fellow who wants to eat the dumplings?
Since I am even without yeast and salt,
pepper and grease
A fellow to eat the dumplings ...

LAY YOUR HEAD UPON MY KNEES
Words: H. Leivick * Music: L. Birnov *
Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Lay your head upon my knees
It's good to lie that way
Little children fall asleep by themselves
Grown-ups must be rocked

Children have their little toys
Play whenever they want
Grown-ups play only with each other
Have to play forever

Don't be afraid, for I am here
I won't push you away
Today, you have already wept enough
As a grown-up is supposed to

You have wept and cried
Now I will rock you
Lay your head upon my knees
It's good to lie that way

The music was probably written for Alexandrovich and was transcribed later on from his recordings and published in some compilations of Yiddish songs. There exists another melody for this poem by the American Yiddish composer S. Golub.
MOYSHELE, MAYN FRAYND
Words + Music: Mordechai Gebirtig
Published: Moscow, 1968

Vos mahkstu epes Moyshele?
Kh’derken dikh nokh on blik
Du bist geven mayn khaverl
Mit yorn fil tsurik
Un nokh in kheyder hohn mir
Gelernt lang banand
Ot shteyt far mir der rebe nokh
Der kantshik in zayn hant

Oy, vi nemt men tsurik di yorn
Yene sheyne tsayt?
Oy, dos yunge sheyne lebn
Iz fun unds shoyn vayt
Oy, vi nemt men tsurik di yorn
Moyshele, mayn fraynd?
Oy, nokh yenem beyzn rebn (***)
Bengt dos harts nokh haynt (***)

Vos makht dayn shvester Rokhele?
Ikh volt zi haynt gesen
Zi iz amol, gedeynkstu nokh,
Mir nont tsum harts geven
Nor zi gelib hot Berele
Gehast mikh on shum grunt
Geblibn iz in hartsn lang
A nit farheylte vund

Oy, vi nemt men tsurik di yorn ...
Oy, nakh yenem shener Rokhele
Bengt mayn harts nokh haynt

Vi geyt es epes Berele,
Avremele vos makht?
Un Zalmele un Yosele?
Zeyer oft fun aykh getrahkt
Gekholemt fun aykh, kinderlekh
Gezen zikh in der mit
Gevorn alte yidelekh
Vi shnel dos leben flit

Oy, vi nemt men tsurik di yorn ...
Oy, nokh yene yunge laydn (***)
Bengt dos harts nokh haynt

How are you doing, Moyshele?
I recognized you at once
You were my best friend
Many years ago
We used to go to cheder (school)
Where we learned together for a long time
I can still see the Rebe
With the little whip in his hand.

How can one bring back those years
That wonderful time?
Oh, that fine young life
Is far behind us
How can we bring back the years,
Moyshele, my friend?
Oh, that angry Rebe
How my heart is still longing for him

How is your sister Rokhele?
I wish I could see her now
Do you remember that I used
To be fond of her?
But she was in love with Berele
I don’t know why she disliked me
That left a wound in my heart
Which has not healed yet

How can one bring back ...
Oh, that beautiful Rokhele
How my heart is still longing for her

How is Berele?
What does Avremele do?
And Zalmele and Josele?
How often I thought of you all
I saw you in my dreams, dear children
And I saw myself among you
Now we are old Jews
How quickly life is passing away

How can one bring back ...
O, those sufferings from my youth
How my heart is still longing for them
AND YET I LIVE!
Words: O. Lichtenstein * Music: Z. Berdiechever
* Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Though I have no money
Not even a little copper-coin
Though I cannot celebrate Sabbath
Since I lack everything that’s needed for it -
I live! Oy, oy, how I live!

Such a year I wish only to my enemies,
It makes no sense!
During my wandering through life
I experienced so much suffering and pain -
But, yet I live!

Though in the song of mine
There is a sound of sadness
Yet, sometimes I need,
I need to sing -
And I sing! Oy, oy, how I sing!

Only to my enemies I wish a year like that ...
And yet I sing!

Though I lost all my energy
Though I have no more strength at all
Yet, sometimes, I need
I need to wear myself out by dancing!
And I dance! Oy, oy, how I dance!

Such a year I wish only to my enemies ...
And yet I live! And yet I sing! And yet I dance!
DOS YIDISHE LID
(DOS LID FUN GOLUS)
Words: Unknown * Music: S. Sekunda
* Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

Der yid meg zayn orim
Dokh iz er zeer raykh
Vayl gaystike oytseres
Hot er zeer asakh

Der yid iz geduldik
Zayn bitokhn iz groys
Fun a brenendikh oyfn
Kumt er lebedik aroys

Men ruft im Ben Melekh
A yaksn, a gvir
Un yedes land
Farmakht far im di tir

Er klogt un er veynt
Er ken shoyn nit mer
Afile zayn gelekhter
Iz gemisht mit a trer

Makht zikh a mol
Es geyt im shoyn gut
Dermont men im bald
Az er iz a yid
Un men git im vider
Dem shtekn in der hant,
Un er sukh a naye land

Un kumt a nay yor
Ale felker bis gor
Singen un tantsen un vern az mid
Nor der yid Rosh ha shona
Zitst in shul mit kavona
Un hert fun zayn khazn
An ander min lid:

THE JEWISH SONG
Words: Unknown * Music: S. Sekunda
* Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

A Jew can be poor
However, he is very rich
Because of the spiritual wealth
He has got in abundance

A Jew is patient
His confidence is immense
Of a burning oven
He gets out alive

They call him Ben Melekh (Son of a king)
A noble and wealthy man
But all countries
Close their doors on him

He is wailing and crying
He can’t go on any longer
Often his laughter
Is mixed with a tear

And should it happen for once
That he is doing well
He will soon be reminded
Of being a Jew
And once again he is given
A stick in his hand
And is looking for a new refuge

At the New Year’s Eve
All the people in the world
Are rejoicing with singing and dancing
But the Jew, at Rosh ha shana,
Is sitting in the synagogue
And is listening to the cantor
Who sings quite a different tune:


I plead before You, God,
To have pity on your people...

And on the evening of Yom Kipur
You will hear how in the synagogue,
The cantor sings
With tears in his voice:

... from this Yom Kipur
and to the next...

But there will come a day
When also the houses of Israel are rejoicing
When the Jews sing with happiness
And that is the day of Simcha Torah:

He has been given to us the holy Torah
The dearest thing in the universe...

(*) From the Jewisch Pryer Books.
Original text in Hebrew

Alexandrovinch considers this aria, "the heart" of his Yiddish repertory because it represents the essence of the spirit and the soul of Eastern European Jewry. It includes three cantorial parts (sung in Hebrew) with excerpts of prayers for some of the most important Jewish High Holidays (Rosh ha shana, Yom Kipur, Simcha Torah) where the cantor Misha Alexandrovich demonstrates his unique art of "Bel canto - chazanuth".

In Russia, he was forbidden to sing or publish this song because of these religious texts included.
A glezele lekhayim
Words: B. Berggolts * Music: L. Pulver
* Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

A glezele lekhayim es shadt nit nemen haynt
Ven me zitst bay a yomtevdikh tish
A glezele lekhayim - far frayntshaft un far fraynt
Me zol shtendik nor munter zayn un frish

A glezele lekhayim far alt un yung vos zitsn do
Far yedern bazunder
Vos zaynen haynt mit unds nito
A glezele lekhayim - dem bekher ful mit vayn -
Far der zun, zi zol shtendik mit unds zayn

A glezele lekhayim - mayn toast vird zayn atzind
Nor oyt simkhes bay yedern fun aykh
A glezele lekhayim far muter un far kind
Az mit nakhes di mame zol zayn raykh

A glezele lekhayim - nit opshteyn zol fun aykh di shayn
Keyn shvartser tog in lebn
In der mishpokhe zol nit zayn
A glezele lekhayim iz oystrinken keday
Ven me zet zikh mit fraynd oyt dos nay

A glezele lekhayim far undser sheynner land
Iber unds zol der himl kukan reyn
A glezele lekhayim - ikh vintsh aykh nokh anand
Mit a shmeylekh oyt di lipn zolt ir geyn

A glezele lekhayim bagleytn zol unds shtendik greyt
Mi layblekhe un noente
Me zol keyn mol nit zayn tsesheydt
A glezele lekhayim - far alts vos unds bahelt
Un far sholem oyt der gantser velt!

TO MAKE A TOAST
Words: B. Berggolts * Music: L. Pulver
* Published: Tel Aviv, 1972

It does no harm to drink a toast
As we sit around a festive meal
A toast to friendship and to friends
Let us be always cheerful and bright

A toast to old and young, to all who are here
And to those
Who have since departed
A toast - let the cup be full of wine -
To the sun - may it always shine upon us

Now I want to make a toast
To the happy occasions which may always be with you
A toast to mother and to child
May she always be rich in great happiness and joy

A toast, that the light of life will never forsake you
May your family never
See a dark day in life
A toast we will drink
When we meet friends anew

A toast to our beautiful country
May the skies above us always be bright
A toast - and I wish
That you may always keep a smile on your lips

A glass to make a toast shall always be with us
From those who are near and dear to us
We shall never be parted
A toast - to what is still hidden from us -
And to peace in the whole world!

The text was written and especially extended by the last verse for Misha Alexandrovich. The melody originates from an old tune of the same title but with a different text by J. Rumshinsky. This song is one of the very few which got the approval of the Russian censorship, that is to say Alexandrovich was allowed to record it in Russia. The version which can be heard on this record, however, is one of those ones Alexandrovich did after his emigration to Israel.
Б. Бергольц  музыка Л. Пульвера  для М. Александровича

ПЕСНЯ ЗА ЗДРАВЬЕ
(подстроочный перевод с еврейского)

Рюмочку за здоровье
не мешает сегодня выпить
когда сидишь за праздничным столом.
Рюмочку за здоровье,
за дружбу и друзей
за бодрость и мужество.
Поднимем мы бокалы
за стариков и молодых
сидящих рядом с нами
и за отсутствующих.
Еще бокал выпьем за то,
чтобы солнце над вечно сопутствовало.

Поднимем — же рюмки и тост произнесем
в честь радостной жизни,
в честь матери и ребенка,
чтобы мать всегда была полна веселья.
Рюмочку за здоровье, чтобы лучистый свет
нас сопровождал и —
чтобы черные дни никогда не уп.
Рюмочку вина выпьем
когда друзья 2.

From the archive of Misha Alexandrovich:
Censorship document for „A gleze lekhayim“
(Russian title: „Pisma za zdravje“ - Song to health), 1967.

The lyrics of any yiddish song had to be literally translated into Russian and approved and stamped by the Russian censorship before Alexandrovich was allowed to sing or record it. Thus, in the Soviet Union numerous of his Yiddish songs have never been published. On top from left to right the names of the author (B. Berggolts) and the composer (L. Pulver) as well as the dedication of the author: „To M. Alexandrovich“.
Misha Alexandrovich

Born in 1914 in the little Latvian town Berspils near Riga, known at the age of 7 throughout Europe as “The Wunderkind” performing a repertory from Glinka to Schubert, invited by the legendary Benjaming Gigli to Milan to become one of his last disciples, having been, with over 6000 concerts and 20 million records sold, one of the most popular artists in the Soviet Union, the Russian singer Misha Alexandrovich ranges, due to the beauty of his voice, the spirituality of his expression and his outstanding gift to create an incredible harmony between words and music, among the essential lyric tenors of the last century.

He is recognized equally as one of the great cantors of the last 100 years.

His interpretation of Jewish prayer texts, combining the virtuosity of a bel canto-trained, unusually modulated and intrusive voice, with his deeply felt belief, served to create an almost magical effect. As Chief Cantor of Manchester (in 1940; at the age of 26 he was probably the youngest cantor world-wide), Kovno (Lithuania) and Moscow, and later on of Toronto, New York and Ramat Gan (Israel) his art of Chazzanut was drawing also non-Jews and professional singers into the synagogues. Between 1945 and 1971, however, he was prevented from exercising his religious profession, since in the Soviet Union any religious activity had been prohibited.

As for the Yiddish song, Misha Alexandrovich has been celebrated as its most unique interpreter. Deeply rooted in the culture and history of the Jewish stetl of his forefathers and fundamentally attached to the Yiddish language, Misha Alexandrovich put the whole spectrum of his art into these songs, commonly considered as simple folk tunes, and raised the ancient melodies to the level of classical music. Thus, they became a new form of art achieving wide popularity in Russia and abroad, inciting contemporary composers and authors to create new songs especially for him.

The 7 year old "Wunderkind"
Photo from the entrance ticket of his concert in Warsaw, 1920.
Nevertheless, one of the important tenors of the 20th century, was unable to achieve an international career, and his unique voice remained withheld from the general public in the West up to the time of his emigration to Israel in 1971. Thus, when in 1972 he was finally able to give his first concert in the USA, the New York Times referred to him as "one of Russia’s better kept cultural secrets".

For, Misha Alexandrovich is a Jew. And therefore, while he was allowed to give private concerts for Stalin and Chrushchev and received the highest awards and privileges ever given to an artist in the Soviet Union, he was forbidden to travel to the West.

Only after massive pressure by the UN and the government of Israel, his emigration to Israel was finally granted and the nearly sixty-year-old singer experienced late satisfaction. He gave celebrated concerts in the USA and Canada, in South America, Australia and, of course, in Israel.

As Chief Cantor of the Great Synagogue of Ramat Gan in Israel, appearing in other synagogues world-wide, Alexandrovich was able to pursue again his religious calling from which he had been prohibited in the Soviet Union.

Finally, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the artist even gave concerts in Russia again: 3 tours with 40 concerts were sold-out for weeks in advance. Just like the Concert Hall in Moscow, where, in 1997, he bade farewell to his audience.

In 2000, an exhibition dedicated to his artistic life achievement was inaugurated in the Schaliapin Museum in Moscow.

Misha Alexandrovich now lives, at the age of 88, in Munich.

The present selection of Yiddish songs and arias has been taken from both his recordings in the Soviet Union in 1968 for Melodya, and in Israel in 1972 for RCA.
All information about the authors of the lyrics and the composers, the orchestras and the conductors of the accompaniments follow the indications of Maestro Misha Alexandrovich.
Likewise, the research for the Yiddish song texts has been done upon the instructions of Maestro Alexandrovich. The final version, however, printed in this booklet has been completed or adjusted by direct transcription from the recordings.
The English versions of the Hebrew texts from the Jewish Prayer Books quoted in songs no. 10 + 15 were given to us by Chief Cantor Misha Alexandrovich.

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"The innermost history of the Jewish people is expressed in its Folksongs." - Aaron Jellinek
01. **SHPIL ZHE MIR A LIDELE IN YIDISH**  
   **Play me a little song in Yiddish**
   3.02

02. **KINDER-YORN**  
   **Childhood Years**
   3.51

03. **YUNGE YORN**  
   **The years of youth**
   2.57

04. **A PASTEKHL, A TROYMER**  
   **A little shepherd, a dreamer**
   4.04

05. **IN ROD ARAYN**  
   **Join the circle**
   2.14

06. **MEKHUTONIM GEYEN**  
   **The in-laws are coming**
   2.41

07. **BAY A TAYKHLE**  
   **By a little pond**
   3.16

08. **A KHAZN AF SHABES**  
   **A cantor for Sabbath**
   5.30

09. **DER FURMAN**  
   **The coachman**
   5.26

10. **DER KHAZN UN DER GABE**  
    **The Cantor and the Gabe**
    5.41

11. **VARNITSHKES**  
    **The dumplings**
    3.58

12. **LEYG DAYN KOP OYF MAYNE KNI**  
    **Lay your head upon my knees**
    1.48

13. **MOYSHELE, MAYN FRAYND**  
    **My friend Moyshele**
    4.58

14. **UN DOKH-LEB IKHI!**  
    **And yet I live!**
    3.23

15. **DOS YIDISHLE LID (DOS LID FUN GOLUS)**  
    **The Jewish song**
    9.23

16. **A GLEZELE LEKHAYIM**  
    **To make a toast**
    2.25

**Gesamt:** 64.63

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Songs no. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 have been recorded in Moscow and published in 1958 by Melodiya.
Misha Alexandrovich is accompanied by a chamber music ensemble conducted by L. Kogan.
Songs no. 3, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16 have been recorded in Tel Aviv and published 1972 by RCA.
Misha Alexandrovich is accompanied by an orchestra conducted by A. Levahon.

(Detailed booklet information including the song texts in Yiddish and English)