Hazan Yehudah Leib Mandel (1904 – 1994)

Hazan Yehudah Leib Mandel, 1904-1994, was born in Csepe, Hungary, later Czechoslovakia, now in the Ukraine. Cheder in Nagyszolos and Munkach was followed by Yeshivot in Ungvar and Pressburg with Smicha from each. While in Pressburg, after service in the Czechoslovak army, he supported himself by davening on weekends in neighboring communities. As the eldest son he was responsible to send funds home where younger brothers were still in Cheder. In these smaller communities his reputation grew by word of mouth and he received an invitation to nearby Vienna where new studies commenced. His musical and cantorial education stems from the well known Kantorenschule, in this Austrian capital, where mentors included Hazzanim Fischer, Margolius and Muller. At graduation in 1927, he was offered the pulpit of the Seitenstettengassen “Sulzer’s” Temple. The prestigious synagogue where the legendary Sulzer had served was a special honor. Nevertheless, he chose to accept a different position in Novisad, Yugoslavia. Training received in Vienna was to be his lifelong guide but a career start was best elsewhere. Novisad (Ujvidek, in Hungarian) is ethnically Hungarian and he felt his prospects for a post in the Hungarian capital of Budapest were enhanced by this location. He served as Oberkantor in Novisad until 1933.

Ella Klein and Yehuda Leib Mandel were married in Novisad in 1930. As a Czech citizen, having served in the Czech army, it was not possible to secure the necessary Hungarian working papers and prospects for a move directed him to probes in London, Groningen, Hoek van Holland and eventually to Riga, Latvia where Mandel was one of three candidates in competition with Yisroel Alter, later of Johannesburg, South Africa, and Riga native, Hermann Jadlowker, who had returned following a leading tenor career at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Selected as Oberkantor at the Great Choir Synagogue in Riga, Hazzan Mandel became the successor to the renowned Baruch Leib Rosovsky. In the middle 1930’s, as spheres of political influence changed, he was able to accept appointment as Oberkantor at the Rumbach Street Temple in Budapest at the young age of 32. Predecessors there included Baruch Schorr and Yaacov Bachman. The Moorish styled Rumbach Street Temple, with its seating for 3000, and the even larger and nearby Dohany Street Temple formed the center of the Budapest Neolog Jewish Community. Two Chief Rabbis and four Chief Cantors served
these two Synagogues enhancing their worship services with an organ in the Dohany and large choirs in each. The great Oberkantor Zavel Kwartin had officiated for 10 years in the Dohany Street Synagogue prior to his coming to New York in 1920. While the Dohany has been recently rededicated and refurbished, the Rumbach ceased service the community shortly after the second World War with Hazzan Mandel being its final Oberkantor.

During the war years, Mandel was conscripted into forced labor camps, his immediate family was deported to Bergen Belsen and other family members perished in Auschwitz. In 1946, he arrived in Palestine on the maapilim ship, Dov Hoz, to join his Wife and Son and he served in the Carmia Synagogue in Haifa. Emigrating to New York in 1948, he was appointed at the “Romanische Shul,” Shaarey Shomayim Synagogue. His contract required no teaching or communal duties. He appeared with the professional choir once a month and during holidays. As a matter of fact, for a time, he lived in Philadelphia and commuted monthly to these performance appearances. Desiring a community base he settled in Philadelphia in 1950 where he served at Beth Judah of Logan until his retirement. After the death of Ella Mandel in 1967, Hazzan Mandel married Lilly Miklos. Active in community and professional organizations, he was elected President of the Cantors Assembly of America in 1971.

Hazzan Mandel's discography is very limited and this retrospective is a selection of available material as a sampling of his voice, command and nusach. As an outstanding interpreter of Central European and Austro-Hungarian school of Hazzanut, he delivers a master class in his recital material and particularly in the Slichot service. He is a Shaliach Tzibbur who accepts at all times the dictum of Da Lifney Mi Atah Omed. This admonition resounds in all of his work.

Please note that the pre-war recordings survive with some damage and we alert the listener to some unavoidable surface noise. The discs in this retrospective are presented in three sections. The Hinneni and M'loch that open the set are from about 1940, and represent the Hazzan in his early career. The Hymn of Spezia, M'loch, Mussaf Kedushah, Ani Maamin and Zochreynu L'chayim, as well as the Slichot Service (on disc two), are from mid career, 1950 to 1965. The Ma Tovu, Sheva Brachot and Weekday Maariv display Mandel’s powers during his later years. The composer is listed in parenthesis next to each number.
THE PROGRAM
(Running time is noted in parenthesis)

Disc 1 (49.03)

Hinneni, (Mandel) (3.28) the Shaliach Tzibbur can be seen through his words and voice as he walks “Asher Ani Holech” to beseech the Almighty and make his journey successful as he asks for mercy for himself and those who commissioned him.

M’loch Al Kol Haolam Kulo, (Mandel) (2.49) from the Malchuyot section of Musaf Rosh HaShanah is presented only in part, with piano accompaniment.

Hymn of Spezia, (words and music by Mandel) (2.38) written on the docks of the small Italian port of La Spezia, during a 96 hour hunger strike by 1100 post-war displaced refugees. This act forced the British government to permit passage to Palestine for the Hagana ships, Dov Hoz and Eliahu Golomb. The performance in Yiddish and Hebrew is aided by attempted water sound effects that represent waves.

M’loch Al Kol Haolam Kulo, (Mandel) (5.00) in a later recording, this time to the end of the prayer.

Mussaf Kedushah, (Mandel) (4.25) a performance piece offered mostly in concerts.

Ani Maamin, (Y.L.Muller) (4.07) radio broadcast recorded on 78 rpm home equipment.

Zachreynu L’chayim, (A. Singer) (6.15) recorded in performance.

Mah Tovu, (Traditional) (1.51) and the following Sheva Brachot (Sulzer) (4.39) recorded at the wedding of the Hazzan’s granddaughter in 1987.

Weekday Maariv, (13.50) in traditional Nusach, recorded at the 1989 Convention of the Cantor’s Assembly of America, where the Hazzan was honored. The Baruch Adonaj B’yom, (Muller) was part of the Hazzan’s graduation performance – as part of Maariv – in Vienna in 1927. Sixty two years later is was sung in the original key. The introduction in “dialect” is by Hazzan Daniel Gildar of Philadelphia.

Disc 2 (50.09)

Slichot Service, in traditional Nusach, recorded live at Beth Judah of Logan in Philadelphia where the Hazzan served for 35 years. The listener’s attention should be directed at the whole performance, the articulation, the use of words, the expression of text with musical emphasis, and personal vocal interpretation.

The introductory Ashrey, the Kaddish with the Nusach specific for Slichot, and Haneshama Lach calls for the Hazzan to converse with the Almighty, to struggle with Him and to be a supplicant for the congregation. Sh’ma Koleynu is the call of the Shaliach Tzibbur in its most expressive form.

Please note that the Slichot Service was recorded live with congregational prayer and response. The re-mastering of the recording required editing and gaps may appear in the Service.
Hazzan Yehudah Leib Mandel
1904 – 1994
a Retrospective

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2. M’loch Al Kol Haolam Kulo, (Mandel) (2.49)
3. Hymn of Spezia, (words and music by Mandel) (2.38)
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6. Ani Maamin, (Y.L.Muller) (4.07)
7. Zachreynu L’chayim, (A. Singer) (6.15)
8. Mah Tovu, (Traditional) (1.51)
9. Sheva Brachot (Sulzer) (4.39)
10. Weekday Maariv, (13.50) in traditional Nusach

Disc 2 (50.09)

1. Slichot Service, (50.09) in traditional Nusach

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