The Prophet Isaiah by Michelangelo.

A cantor is a modern prophet of his people and Yossele Rosenblatt was the greatest of the cantors of this century.

Allegorically speaking Rosenblatt and Isaiah were one and the same in teaching the word of God.
Music, especially vocal music, extends back histriomically speaking some 25,000-30,000 years. One does not know what type of song or croon was sung to a young boy in Cro-Magnon times, but the drawings on the walls of the grottos in France and Spain by artists now deceased some 25 to 30 millennia, indicate that singing was not unknown to these people. The Egyptians of the first dynasties of five and six thousand years ago had musical instruments and musical horns have been found by the Danes near the bones of the mammoth, the great Irish elk and the woolly rhinoceros, indicating music was known to a breed of man who existed 10,000 years ago at least. Songs of these peoples do not exist nor do any notes or indications of what was sung in ancient times. Of all the world's people, the ways, the customs and the ancient songs of the Jews have best survived. One cannot with accuracy say what was sung in the time of Moses, of Abraham, of David. But the basic rhythms and some of the ancient prayers have come down to us through 4,000 years of father to son, so that we can with reasonable security feel we know these people of another time, yet so near to us.

Cantors who proclaim the faith of today with the faith of our fathers have been interpreters of the Jewish faith for countless generations. The names of the first cantors are lost in the eons of time. History speaks of this or that man as possessed of a phenomenal voice or great interpretive ability, yet again it becomes word of mouth enhanced in the telling to each new generation until where the man ceases to be and fantasy begins is lost in the repetition. Yet since the advent of the phonograph record in the middle 1890's and the first cantorial records of that period, we are better able to judge voices and what they may be able to tell us. Certain it is that in the sixty-five year history of the phonograph, the king of the cantors, monarch of them all, was a tiny five foot man with a heavy black beard, born in the Ukraine in Russia on May 9, 1882, known to the world as Joseph Rosenblatt. What Caruso was to the operatic world, Rosenblatt was to the cantorial field, and the reputations of both were founded on solid ground.

How then may we best describe the voice of Rosenblatt to those who never heard him in person? Rosenblatt, almost completely self-trained, had a pure lyric tenor voice of extraordinary sweetness and carrying ability. The placement of the voice was fantastic. It could be said that Rosenblatt could hit a fly in the gallery with a high B Flat. The voice itself was not large in size or in volume, but so well was it placed that it carried to the furthest part of any auditorium with the utmost ease, whether in a heavenly pianissimo or in a ringing forte. Rosenblatt's range was phenomenal. He sang into the bass clef with no effort whatsoever and was able (in falsetto) to reach a sustained E above high C, a male range extending some three octaves, about a third more than is customary for an average good operatic tenor. The singer's control of his voice was something that had to be heard to be believed. His ability to sing runs, trills, sustain a legato, handle coloratura passages and to color his voice all came from a technique no longer taught and which has not been known for more than three-quarters of a century. The voice itself was capable of an Italianate warm in its coloring and like many good Italian tenors, was noted for its plaintive sob — so much so in fact, that the Rosenblatt sob became world famous as such.

It was not only in cantorial singing that Rosenblatt excelled. On one occasion, Cleofonte Campanini, managing director of the Chicago Opera Company, and one of the great operatic impresarios of the world, after having heard Rosenblatt sing, offered him a contract at $1,000 a performance to sing Eleazar in La Juive and offered to grant virtually any condition wished by Rosenblatt to make these performances satisfactory to the cantor's religious beliefs. The offer was rejected, but it indicated Campanini's concern and desire to have an adequate competitor for Caruso, who was singing the role at the Metropolitan.

What of the life of Rosenblatt? What was his background and how did he live? The Jewish religion does not have saints, yet of Rosenblatt a prominent Cardinal declared, "He is a saintly man." Born of poor parents whom he supported all his life, despite his voice and art, Rosenblatt struggled all his life. He sang literally from the cradle, making his first public appearance at the age of four at home and then touring as a boy wonder. His first professional job came at 18, the year of his marriage. He came to America from Hamburg in 1912 and did an enormous amount as an orthodox Jew to acquaint Americans with Jewish customs and life through his concert programs and later appearances in vaudeville. People who came to scoff at the blackbearded five footer, stayed to cheer and shout after he finished his unfamiliar songs. He had unfortunately become involved with the publication of a Jewish newspaper which went bankrupt. While under no obligation to do so, the Cantor sacrificed himself and his family by turning over every cent of his earnings not actually needed to live upon, in order to pay off the debts of the paper.

A cantor must be a prolific composer. Rosenblatt composed hundreds of songs, many of which were so difficult that only he could sing them. His more than 200 records give an adequate representation of his remarkable abilities at writing music. He appeared (vocally only) in "The Jazz Singer", the first talking motion picture starring Al Jolson. It was while he was working on yet another film, "The Dream of My People", in Palestine, that he was stricken with a heart attack and died on June 18th, 1933.

This writer, his son, remembers one occasion when he was at the home of Sergei Rachmaninoff, the great Russian pianist-composer. Following a request, Rachmaninoff played one of his songs while Feodor Chaliapin sang it. The applause was deafening. The composer and artist looked at one another. Chaliapin then spoke in his thickly accented English, "If you liked that, you should have heard Rosenblatt sing it," he said. No greater tribute could be paid to the art of Joseph Rosenblatt, cantor extraordinary, tenor without peer, artist of the first rank, and a man of whom is was said, "He was an angel walking on Earth."
YOSSELE ROSENBLATT

(1882-1933)

Yossele Rosenblatt at the age of 25. He was then cantor at Hamburg, Germany.

The official offer of the Chicago Opera Company to sing in La Juive.

THE ROSENBLATTS, October 3, 1926. Standing from left to right: Henry, (author of the notes about his father) Samuel, Leo, Marcus, Ralph. Seated from left to right: Gertrude, Taube (Kaufman) Rosenblatt, Josef Rosenblatt, Nettie, Sylvia.

Chicago Opera Association

General Director

HERBERT H. JOHNSON

Mr. Morris Newman,
President, First Hung. Congregation,
Chabad Zedek,
15-25 West 116th street,
New York City.

Dear Sir,

I heard Mr. Rosenblatt during his recent stay in Chicago and was so impressed with his voice and his art of singing that I made him an offer to sing with the Chicago Grand Opera Company, the part of Eleazar, in the opera THE JUIVE, by Halevy.

I suppose the story of the opera is familiar to you. It is a glorification of the Jewish religion, and the role of the Jews will be sung by Rosa Nais, who is a Jewess, a native of Odessa.

I offered Mr. Rosenblatt three performances in Chicago, with an option of an additional one in New York and an additional one in Boston, each to take place two to three weeks apart. He would have to be in Chicago only one week for rehearsals prior to the first performance. For all other performances, he would only have to come to Chicago for each performance. His salary for each performance would be one thousand ($1,000) dollars and railroad fares to and from Chicago.

Mr. Rosenblatt personally has agreed to this proposition, under the condition that his Congregation will allow him to accept. There will be no performances for him on Friday or Saturday, nor would he, in any way, have to take off or cut his beard, and there will be nothing in the performances, or his appearances upon the operatic stage that would in any way be a reflection upon the Orthodox Jewish faith. Mr. Rosenblatt has also given us an option on his services for the season of 1919/1920.

I expect Mr. Rosenblatt to make a great success in opera, as he did in his concert appearance here.

Espering to have a favorable answer at your early convenience, I am,

Yours very truly,

[Signature]

General Director
NINETY MINUTES WITH
YOSSELE ROSENBLATT

SIDE 1
1. Rachel Mevakeh
2. Oshamnu Mikol Om
3. L'El Oirech Din
4. Kvokoras
5. Ve Korev Besurenu
6. Melech Rachmon
7. V'lerushelayim

SIDE 2
1. Yehi Rotzen
2. Es Zemach David
3. Reze Astrosom
4. Veal Yday Avodecho
5. Yevonim
6. Tka Beshofar
7. Viyom Simchasenu

SIDE 3
1. Umipne Chatoenu
2. Weaf Hu Hayoh Mischaven
3. Ovnu Malkenu Galeit
4. Melech Al Kol Hoolom
5. Haben Yakir Li
6. Omar Rabbi Elazar
7. Zorea Sidakos

SIDE 4
1. Rachem
2. Shivisi
3. Vecheol Maaminim
4. Yisgadal Veyiskadasch
5. Yaale
6. Kol Nidre

SHIRIM
S-1001
NINETY MINUTES WITH
YOSSELE ROSENBLATT

1. Rochel Mevakeh
2. Oshamnu Mikol Om
3. L’EL Oirech Din
4. Kvakoras
5. Ve Korev Besurenu
6. Melech Rachmon
7. V’Lerusholayim
SATRIM RECORDS
NINETY MINUTES WITH
YOSSELE ROSENBLATT
S-1001
SIDE 2
33 1/3 RPM

1. Yehi Rotzon
2. Es Zemach Dovid
3. Reze Asirosom
4. Veal Yday Avodecho
5. Yevonim
6. Tka Beshofar
7. Viyom Simchasenu
NINETY MINUTES WITH
YOSSELE ROSENBLATT

S-1001
SIDE 3
33 1/3 RPM

1. Umipne Chatoenu
2. Weaf Hu Hayoh Mischaven
3. Ovinu Malkenu Galeit
4. Meloch Al Kol Hoolom
5. Haben Yakir Li
6. Omar Rabbi Elozar
7. Zorea Stdokos
NINETY MINUTES WITH

YOSSELE ROSENBLATT

1. Rachem
2. Shivisi
3. Vechol Maaminim
4. Yisgadal Veyiskadasch
5. Yaale
6. Kol Nidre