THE ART OF CANTOR
ISRAEL ALTER
Volume Two

Through the course of a half century of service to world Jewry, Israel Alter has become widely known and admired as a cantor, composer, and pedagogue. Born in Lemberg, the scion of a rabbinic family, he began cantorial studies at an early age with reluctant parental consent. Alter journeyed to Vienna to enroll in the State Academy for Music and Art where he studied under the famed Stefan Pollman; concurrently he studied hazzanut under the direction of Leibush Miller and Yitzhak Tzvi Halpern, the most distinguished cantors of Vienna.

Alter accepted his first cantorial position in 1921, succeeding Josef Basser at the Brigitteiner Tempelverein. Three years later he was named Chief Cantor of the Hanover Synagog Gemeinde. With the subsequent rise of Hitler, Alter left for South Africa (1935) where he served as Chief Cantor of the United Hebrew Congregation of Johannesburg. Since 1961 Cantor Alter has served as a member of the faculty of the School of Sacred Music in New York City.

During the years Cantor Alter served the Hanover community, he was widely known as a concert artist, singing in recital halls across Europe and twice touring the United States, in 1929 and 1930, with concerts at Carnegie Hall as well as most of the country’s most prominent synagogues. His reputation as a singer came to the attention of the Carl Lindstrom Company, a prominent German record firm now part of the EMI group, the world’s largest record concern. They signed Alter to a long term contract, and seeking to make the most of his talents, experimented with recording him in various varied musical forms. Alter was engaged to sing cantorial solos with a most magnificent choral ensemble, conducted by the noted synagogue conductor Leo Kopf and accompanied by Paul Mania at the organ. Together they recorded numerous selections from the classic West European synagogue choral literature, compositions by Sulzer and Lewandowski for the most part. Alter also recorded at this time a number of his own cantorial recitatives, which were and remain widely appealing. These recordings were released on the Parlophon label in Germany.

Subsequently a second project was initiated. Alter was introduced to discophiles as a secular artist, recording several airs by Handel and Rubinstein as well as several piano works by Liszt which had been specially arranged for solo, chorus and orchestra. However the latter, due to the rise of Hitler, were never publicly released by EMI.

The Hitlerian wave of “anti culture” aimed to eliminate all works of art by “non-aryans”. With the thought that the original masters of his Parlophon recordings had been destroyed, Alter journeyed to EMI headquarters in London shortly after the war, to seek professional advice on the preservation of those few discs from his personal library that had survived.

Upon hearing the recordings in question, which had been produced in the very dawn of electrical recording, EMI officials were amazed by both the voice of Alter and Kopf’s conducting, as well as the accoustical qualities of the records themselves. An intensive search for the original metal parts of these recordings was then initiated.

Beneath the charred remains of a Berlin building a number of masters were discovered. These recordings were later released on the Parlophon label by British EMI and in the United States by the Record Collectors Guild.

Cantor Alter’s Parlophon recordings not previously released on long playing records comprise side one of this disc.

Side two reflects Alter’s maturation both as a composer and a performing artist. Band one, Ani Maami, recorded from a live radio broadcast in 1952, is one of Alter’s earliest compositions, in which he evidences particularly a debt of inspiration from his revered teacher Leibush Miller, to whose memory the composition is dedicated. Modim, recorded during an open air Hakkel service (and consequently the Divine name is intoned) perhaps more so than all other recordings, exemplifies Alter as a master, cognisant of the meaning of prayer, a true Baal T’fila. Conversely, the next three bands, accompanied by Ray Smith, represent a totally different order of singing, the art song. These songs, recorded for the South African Zionist organization, were produced originally for special programs dedicated to the memory of Israel’s poet laureate, Hayim Nahman Bialik. Lo Lonu, published by the Sacred Music Press of Hebrew Union Colleges School of Sacred Music in the volume Halel, Tal and Geshem, (and accompanied here by Jack Barras) is representative of Alter’s continued vitality in his most recent exhaustive and comprehensive treatment of the liturgy for the entire year. He reveals herein an aspect of the character inherent within his printed notation, though often escaping the attention of even the most serious student. This selection is offered, as are the previous ones, for both educational and inspirational values, and it is hoped that the professional, student and layman will listen to these renditions with profit.

Notes
By
Barry Serota
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THE ART OF CANTOR ISRAEL ALTER
VOLUME TWO

SIDE ONE
33 1/3 RPM

1. HASHKIVEINU
2. ELOKEINU...R'TZEI
3. KEIL MOLE RACHAMIM
4. MA TOVU (Lewandowski)
5. YAALE, Pt. II

Leo Kopf, Conductor
Paul Mania, Organ
THE ART OF CANTOR ISRAEL ALTER
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SIDE TWO
33 1/3 RPM

1. ANI MAAMIN*
2. MODIM D'RABANAN
3. HACHNISINI
4. ACHAREI MOTI (Y. Edel)
5. UNTER DI GRININKE BOYMELAKH
6. LO LONU**

*N. Saslavsky, Organ
**Jack Barras, Organ
Ray Smith, Piano