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Rebecca Frischling April 10, 2023

Freedom in Song: An Examination of the Workmen's Circle, Choral Music, and Theater within the American Yiddish Labor Movement, 1920-1940

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Abstract

Freedom in Song: An Examination of the Workmen's Circle, Choral Music, and Theater within the American Yiddish Labor Movement, 1920-1940
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My thesis investigates the relevance and utility of the performing arts in political advocacy organizations. Specifically, I look at the Workmen's Circle, a significant player in the Jewish labor movement. I focus on their choral program and explore why an advocacy organization would choose to develop artistic components. As a whole, I argue that the Workmen's Circle chose to devote time and funding into developing the Workmen's Circle Choruses because of a conviction that music provided accessible programming that would be more effective than traditional methods in spreading its cause and recruiting new members. It is my ultimate argument that music and the performing arts played a crucial role in facilitating the merging of the Workmen's Circle's political, religious, and cultural identities, forming a modern Jewish identity for Circle members that reflected the organization's political goals.

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Introduction:

"If singing these songs will obliterate the dismal picture they paint;
If singing them will bring the cooperative commonwealth one day nearer,
Then let us sing till our lips crack and our lungs burst." - The Call of Youth, Let Us Sing!
Workmen's Circle Youth Songbook [1]

The American labor movement is a well-studied topic within historical scholarship. Within this broader field, studies of the particular intersections between labor politics and various ethnic and cultural communities can be found as well. This is certainly true for Jewish Americans; Eastern European Jewish immigrants to America and their children were both active in the labor movement, and frequently identified by the public as symbols and scapegoats of leftism and rebellion. Several scholars have studied this development, one of the earliest and most influential being Melech Epstein. His broad-scale historical study of the movement, entitled *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.: An Industrial, Political, and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement, 1882-1914*, was initially published in 1950, and represents the first attempt at a comprehensive history of the American Jewish labor movement in English.[2] Across two volumes, Epstein compellingly narrates and details the background and development of Jewish labor activism in America, beginning with its roots in European Jewish life and tracing its changes to accommodate the contours of American life.

In his third chapter, "In the New World", Epstein explains why Jewish immigrants became so involved in the labor movement. He describes how the turn-of-the-century mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States, particularly to New York City, "radically changed the economic structure of the Jewish population," necessitating a turn away

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[1] Young Circle League of New York, "Let Us Sing! Youth Song Book," Box 6, Folder 2, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY, 1.
[2] Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.: An Industrial, Political, and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement, 1882-1914* (New York, NY: H. Wolff, 1950), 1:ix.

from independent peddling towards work in factories, most notably those of the garment industry.[3] The preponderance of Jewish garment workers meant that the brutal conditions of early 20th-century factories were a radicalizing force, motivating further efforts towards reform and unionization.

With respect to the study of Jewish radicalism in America, the scholarship of historians Tony Michels and Arthur Liebman are central as well. Michels' *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* details the landscape of Jewish leftism in turn-of-the-century New York, identifying the most significant players, as well as the major influences and motivations on these organizations. Liebman's scholarship examines similar themes with respect to Jewish leftism, again proposing that "the exploitative and arduous conditions of work in the garment industry created a constituency for socialism and reform among hundreds of thousands of Jewish needle trades workers."[4] Liebman's work also emphasizes the significance of the Yiddish language as an identity-constructing force for Jewish immigrants.

In addition to the brutality of factory work and the generally dismal economic traditions faced by Jewish immigrants, some scholars have argued that certain threads within Jewish culture prompted Jewish labor activism. Indeed, author Will Herberg identified "ideological fields" within Judaism that made Jewish participation in the labor movement both natural and uniquely impactful.[5] *Tzedek*, or justice, holds an important place within Jewish theology and discourse, and this principle has translated into a motivation for many Jews throughout history to participate in the social struggles of their time. Rabbi and jurist Uri Regev advocates this view,

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[3] Ibid, 37.
[4] Arthur Liebman, "Jews and American Liberalism: Studies in Political Behavior," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (December 1976): 288, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23880291.
[5] Will Herberg, "Jewish Labor Movement in the United States: Early Years to World War I," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 5, no. 4 (1952): 503, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2519135.

arguing that “the protection of the weak, the strengthening of the values of compassion and kindness, and of mutual responsibility” play “an essential role in the realization of Jewish teachings in the contemporary world.”[6] While recent scholars have challenged this theological motivation for Jewish advocacy, it is nonetheless true that it was invoked by many Jews throughout history to explain their own decisions.

Prompted by both these economics and theological motivations, a wide range of Jewish labor-oriented organizations sprang up in the first decades of the 20th-century. Given the heavy Jewish involvement in the garment industry, many of the earliest and most notable unions were centered around this trade, including the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU), founded in 1900. Other groups - including but not limited to the Jewish Labor Committee, the Labor Zionist Farband, the Jewish People’s Fraternal Order, and the Workmen’s Circle - developed concurrently as well. Labor reform was central to all of these organizations, but their particular political beliefs varied greatly, with some remaining firmly within moderate liberalism, while others advocated communism.

While political advocacy always remained central, these groups also offered many other programs. They stressed education, offering programs on political theory, Yiddish culture, American life, and more. Some even developed artistic sub-organizations. The ILGWU, for example, began developing theatrical productions telling stories in support of their cause. While a variety of labor organizations developed artistic programming, none did so to a greater extent than the Workmen’s Circle.

The Workmen’s Circle, or Arbeiter Ring in Yiddish, was founded in 1900, and serves as the central focus of this study. The Workmen’s Circle, generally socialist in its politics, spread

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[6] Uri Regev, "Justice and Power: A Jewish Perspective," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 40, no. 1 (2007): 150, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41443884.

from its founding in New York throughout the country over the first decades of the 20th-century. While the Circle's political efforts are significant and merit study in their own right, in this thesis I investigate the specific role of the Circle's artistic wings: the Workmen's Circle Choruses, primarily, with some consideration for the Folksbiene Theater Company as well. Focusing on the Choruses' activity between 1920 and 1940, I seek to interrogate why a labor-oriented organization such as the Workmen's Circle would devote time, funding, and effort into developing a choral program, as well as what distinguished the Workmen's Circle Chorus from other Yiddish-language choirs of the time. Lastly, I wish to identify the degree of success and impact achieved by the Chorus, both within and beyond members of the Workmen's Circle.

NEW YORK WORKMEN'S CIRCLE CHORUS, which celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary with a gala concert this afternoon at Town Hall. Front (l. to r.) are Lazar Weiner, conductor, who has been with the chorus twenty years; Esther Feldman, manager, and I. Mollot, founder of the chorus.[7]

I argue that the Workmen's Circle Chorus played a crucial role in the organization's efforts to preserve both Yiddish language and culture, as well as to promote and disseminate messages in support of its political cause. As a whole, the Workmen's Circle organization chose to devote time and funding into developing the Workmen's Circle Choruses because of a conviction that music provided accessible programming that would be more effective than

[7] *New York Workmen's Circle Chorus*, 1951, photograph, Box 13, Folder 181, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY.

traditional methods in spreading its cause and recruiting new members. Though perhaps less explicitly articulated, it is also clear that another extremely significant draw towards musical programming can be found in the emotional and philosophical intersection between workers' unity and unified music making. In many ways, efforts to deepen the audience's devotions to labor causes emphasized their overlap with Judaism, which in turn increased Judaism's cultural significance within the labor movement. Rehearsals and performances served both to build unity among Chorus members, and also to strengthen the bond between members of a secular, radical labor organization and their Jewish heritage, bridging a divide that would have otherwise been difficult to cross.

Propelled by these motivations and ideological goals, the Workmen's Circle Chorus emerged as a key element of the organization's success in furthering both its cultural and political goals. Indeed, it is my ultimate argument that music and the performing arts played a crucial role in facilitating the merging of the Workmen's Circle's political, religious, and cultural identities. I will demonstrate that the Workmen's Circle Chorus and its performances allowed the Circle to modify and modernize their Jewish beliefs to better match their socialist convictions, thus forming a new Jewish identity that could be carried forward throughout the organization.

Despite the admirable work conducted by the historians mentioned above, there is relatively little scholarship on the Workmen's Circle specifically. Michels addresses the group in his fourth chapter, "Purely Secular, Thoroughly Jewish: The Arbeter Ring and Yiddish Education."[8] In this chapter, Michels does an excellent job capturing the significance of the Workmen's Circle with respect to cultivating secular Yiddishism in America. Like Michels, many other scholars of the Jewish left acknowledge and incorporate the Workmen's Circle in

[8] Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 179.

their works, but there is a dearth of scholarship addressing the organization by itself, and thus a great deal of nuance and significance has been left unaddressed.

Given this general lack of scholarship, it follows that the gap in the literature is even deeper with respect to the Workmen's Circle Chorus. In this instance, the only dedicated study of the Chorus comes from Marion Jacobson's doctoral dissertation, tilted "With Song to the Struggle: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of the Yiddish Folk Chorus." Focused on the Workmen's Circle Chorus and taking up the significance of Yiddish folk choruses as a whole, Jacobson's study is compelling, well-researched, and provides a valuable reference study for my own effort. That said, her work is predominantly ethnomusicological in its orientation; Jacobson is a scholar of music, and thus describes her study as one of performance, looking at the ways that people "perform" various elements of identity in a literal sense.[9] As such, her text provides great insight into the character and philosophy of the Workmen's Circle Chorus but less detail on its historical context and significance.

In answering the questions of why the Workmen's Circle Chorus existed and why it reached such significance in the context of the organization, my thesis will be divided into three primary chapters. In chapter one, "Backgrounds and Beginnings", I will provide a brief history of the Workmen's Circle as a whole. I will trace the evolution of the organization, from its initial founding as the Workingmen's Circle Society that functioned as a mutual-aid society, to its expansion and increasing political alignment as the Workmen's Circle. This chapter will also provide context about the contours of Jewish leftism in America in the early 20th century, detailing the predominant movements and organizations of the moment. Then, I will turn to the Workmen's Circle Chorus, providing a history of the organization's founding, growth, and rise

[9] Marion S. Jacobson, "With Song to the Struggle: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of the Yiddish Folk Chorus" (PhD diss., New York University, 2004), 15.

to prominence. In this section, key players emerge in the form of the Chorus' directors and conductors.

Chapter two, "Politics on Stage: Performing Arts in the Workmen's Circle and Labor Movement" delves further into the relevance and utility of the performing arts in leftist spaces. I once again begin with a broader context, providing examples of choirs, songbooks, and theatrical productions mounted by other socialist and labor organizations, both Jewish and secular. While the connection between art and politics was neither exclusive to socialism nor Judaism, the character of the Workmen's Circle's programming was heavily shaped by both.

This chapter then focuses in on the Workmen's Circle Chorus, analyzing the pieces performed and adopted by the Chorus, and noting where they do or do not diverge from other similar organizations. I demonstrate that the majority of pieces in the Workmen's Circle Chorus' repertoire reflected - either overtly or otherwise - their political ideals. As such, I argue that music and performance served as crucial vehicles for the Circle to convey their beliefs to a broader audience, capturing the attention of those who would not necessarily be receptive to traditional methods of education and recruitment. This chapter also demonstrates how the Chorus' repertoire and performances changed over time along with the broader organizations' affiliations, as well as touching on the philosophical associations between collective music making and collective action.

The third chapter of my thesis is titled "Orchestrating Identity: Music as a Medium for Developing Jewish Culture." Here, I again analyze the music performed by the Workmen's Circle Chorus, but this time with attention focused on the ways in which it reflected, advanced, and modified Jewish identity. I begin with an analysis of the relationship between labor and religion more broadly: a relationship that is sometimes antagonistic and at other times mutually

beneficial, but in any case one that, I argue, is far more relevant than it is often portrayed. I then examine the role of Judaism, and religion as a whole, in the Workmen's Circle, identifying the unique nature of this relationship and its effect on distinguishing the Workmen's Circle from some of its contemporary organizations.

Attention then turns again to the music; I examine a wide range of pieces adopted by the Workmen's Circle Chorus, using the integration of religious themes with political and cultural concerns to argue that music was the key vehicle bringing Circle's politics and Jewishness together in harmony. This point is further clarified with the case study of the Chorus's Third Seder programs. I detail the elements of these retellings of the story of Passover, set to music sung by the Chorus, and position them as a prime example of the identity-conferring function of music. Ultimately, I argue that the Workmen's Circle Chorus allowed the organization to forge a modern Jewish identity, one in which Judaism and socialism were not only able to coexist, but to thrive together.

Finally, my conclusion looks forward, analyzing the impact and continued existence of the Workmen's Circle Chorus after the Second World War. Here, I explain the effect of increased patriotism during the war, as well as virulent American anti-communism in its aftermath, in shifting the Workmen's Circle away from socialism and towards liberalism. I also explain the continued relevance of performances in the Yiddish language, as well as those aimed at advocating political messages, demonstrating that such performances are still of critical importance today. In closing, I argue that the work of the Workmen's' Circle Chorus provides valuable examples for not only Jews, but other immigrant communities as well, with respect to how to preserve and integrate their culture in the context of American life.

Chapter 1: Backgrounds and Beginnings

A Brief History of the Workmen's Circle and its Founding:

In order to understand the Workmen's Circle and its role in the Jewish labor movement, it is necessary to take a brief step back and examine the history of mutual aid societies in the Jewish American immigrant community. With the spike in Jewish immigration from the 1880s until the 1920s, many mutual aid societies emerged in the form of *landsmanshaftn*. Most often found in New York's Lower East Side, *landsmanshaftn* were organizations formed by immigrants from specific Eastern European *shtetls*, or villages, with the goal of providing new immigrants from those towns both vital resources and a sense of belonging.[10] The significance of these societies to the Jewish immigrant community cannot be exaggerated; by the late 1930s, over a quarter of New York City Jews were members of one *landsmanshaft* or another.[11] As such a prominent feature of Jewish life in America, *landsmanshaftn* can be a useful tool through which to examine the prevailing attitudes towards mutual aid, support, and Jewish community building, as each of these values would continue to be advanced by organizations such as the Workmen's Circle.

Landsmanshaftn functioned to bring new Americans into contact with their immigrant community. Members contributed whatever they were able, and received the benefits that the group provided in return. The resources made accessible by this mutual aid setup ranged from medical care, insurance, and employment resources to English instruction, civic education, and

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[10] Daniel Soyer, "Landsmanshaftn and the Jewish Labor Movement: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Building of Community", *Journal of American Ethnic History* 7, no. 2 (1988), 22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27500598..

[11] Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939: Jewish Landsmanshaftn in American Culture*, American Jewish Civilization Series (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 1.

exposure to the American democratic process, all of which helped their members develop the tools to become equal and active participants in American society.[12] Many *landsmanshaftn* were set up to allow their members to better acculturate - to learn the necessary skills for American society while not giving up their cultural heritage - rather than to assimilate entirely into the American sociocultural model. Also key to the mutual aid structure of *landsmanshaftn* was the concept that these services were being provided *to* members of the community, *from* members of the community. This philosophy of reciprocal support and unity would prove a core value of many labor and socialist organizations, the Workmen's Circle among them.

This theme forged a link between the *landsmanshaftn* and the burgeoning Jewish labor movement, both of which provide crucial context for the evolution of the Workmen's Circle. Indeed, scholar Daniel Soyer has argued for a revised viewing of *landsmanshaftn* in this labor context, emphasizing that both *landsmanshaftn* and early Jewish labor unions such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) focused on "bringing the Jewish people into contact with the wider world" and revising what it meant to be Jewish towards the goal of "creating a modern American Jewish identity."[13] From this perspective, Soyer presents *landsmanshaftn* and organizations such as the Workmen's Circle as two elements of the same movement, both aiming to improve Jewish quality of life in America and bring about positive social change in the country as a whole while doing so.

Given this ideological history, it is evident that the Workmen's Circle in its earliest iteration was, for all intents and purposes, a broad-scale *landsmanshaftn*. The Workmen's Circle (or Arbeiter Ring in Yiddish) first came together in 1892, when a group of Jewish workers

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[12] Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 187.
[13] Soyer, "Landsmanshaftn…", 23.

coalesced to form the Workingmen's Circle Society of New York.[14] In this first version of what would grow to become the international Workmen's Circle order, the organization bore many more similarities to traditional *landsmanshaftn* than it did to the politically charged group that it would become. Indeed, the group originally founded in 1892 was "never oriented toward hard-line political platforms", but rather focused on helping workers assimilate, providing various forms of mutual aid and facilitating access to medical insurance, as well as ensuring the continuation of Yiddish culture in America.[15] That being said, even in this early form, the Workingmen's Circle Society was oriented towards the education of its members in causes that followed the organization's values, with the 1893 constitution requiring educational programming be held twice monthly.[16]

The Workingmen's Circle Society first separated into branches in 1898 and 1899, establishing locations in Harlem and Brooklyn respectively.[17] When taking into account the challenges of administering services in two separate locales, as well as the barriers to access faced by many members living and working in the Lower East Side, the Workingmen's Circle faced a strong impetus to develop an overarching infrastructure, which would guide the existence of multiple branches. Thus, the 300 members of the Workingmen's Circle Society took steps to convert their organization into the multi-branch Workmen's Circle Order on September 4, 1900.[18]

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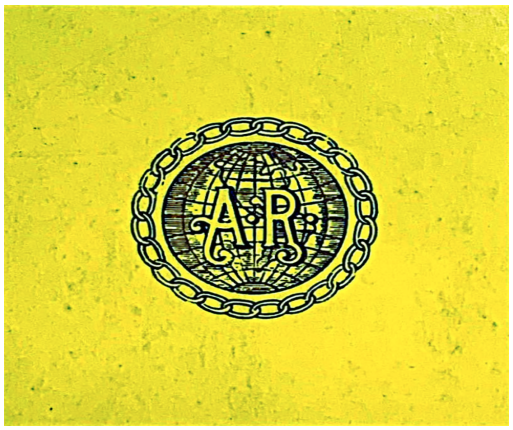
[14] Maximilian Hurwitz, *The Workmen's Circle: Its History, Ideals, Organization, and Institutions* (n.p.: Workmen's Circle, 1936), 13.
[15] Marion S. Jacobson, "With Song to the Struggle: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of the Yiddish Folk Chorus" (PhD diss., New York University, 2004), 82-83.
[16] Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 182.
[17] Hurwitz, 13.
[18] Ibid, 17.

The Workmen's Circle's Place in Debates Over Jewish-American Culture:

The Workmen's Circle was founded at a moment in Jewish American history when the growing immigrant community wrestled with a variety of ideas on how best to maintain Jewish culture in the context of American life. The late-19th and early-20th century was one of the most significant and well known periods of Jewish immigration into the United States, with record numbers of Eastern European Jews entering the nation fleeing pogroms and persecution. These immigrants brought a wide array of beliefs about Jewish culture with them, ranging from Hasidism, a religiously conservative form of Judaism which draws heavily on the Kabbalah and Jewish spirituality, to Bundism, a Jewish yet secular socialist movement that formed in opposition to the Russian Empire.



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The preexisting Jewish population in the United States, predominantly of German origin and relatively more acculturated, met the incoming wave of coreligionists with mixed emotions. Some feared a wave of backlash from gentiles against the Jewish community as a whole due to the distinctiveness of the new Jewish population. Given the interplay between desires for cultural

[19] Arbeiter Ring Logo, as seen on the cover of The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, New York, N.Y., 1915-1940," 1940, Box 6, Folder 1, Workmen's Chorus, YIVO, New York, NY.

preservation and assimilation, a wide range of organizations sprung up within the Jewish immigrant community, each taking up a different position along this spectrum.[20] In her dissertation on the ethnography of Yiddish folk choruses, Marion Jacobson argues that fraternal voluntary societies such as the Workmen's Circle reflected "the conjunction of class-consciousness, persecution, and the centrality of Yiddish", while other sorts of organizations for Jewish immigrants formed along the lines of different concerns.[21]

With this backdrop of change and competing visions of the future, it should not come as a surprise that the early years of the Workmen's Circle were marked by debates and conflicts over the organizations' political stance and identity. In his commissioned history of the Workmen's Circle published in 1936, Maximilian Hurwitz categorizes the period between 1911 and 1917 as one of "spirited, at times acrimonious controversy".[22] A number of issues proved divisive among the Circle's early members. Some revolved around practical concerns pertaining to the organization's operation; the degree of centralization among branch activities, for example, and how much focus should be placed on developing educational programming and Yiddish schools.[23]

The biggest divide, however, was over the core character of the organization. Original members of the Workingmen's Circle Society wished for the new order to remain fraternal and in the pattern of the *landsmanshaftn*, while newer members saw a future focused on political ideals and education, as well as maintaining insurance benefits for members.[24] It is also worth noting that the old line view was most popular in the New York branches; New York, by the

[20] Jacobson, 79.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Hurwitz, 35.
[23] Ibid, 36.
[24] Ibid.

early 1900s, already had its share of socialist organizations, and as a result these members did not feel like this was a necessary niche to fill. In contrast, members from newer branches expanding elsewhere in the country felt the need to take on such activism.[25]

Hurwitz suggests that this debate was resolved rather poetically in 1917, after the "Massachusetts Affair.". He describes that the Massachusetts State Committee had a long held law with respect to life insurance policies which "made it illegal for the Workmen's Circle to operate in the state as long as it adhered to the post-mortem assessment plan," which provided insurance benefits to families.[26] According to Hurwitz, this very nearly resulted in the Massachusetts branch splitting off into their own independent organization, since state leaders such as J. Weintraub did not believe the national organization could adapt quickly enough to the situation.[27]

Hurwitz presents the resolution to this conflict as a model in compromise and coming-together. He explains that, over the course of several conferences, members worked together to adapt their policies, realizing it was necessary to "cater to the whole of the member, the soul as well as the body…[and] that it must endeavor to bridge the widening spiritual gulf between its Old World members and their American children."[28] In essence, while the Massachusetts Affair centered around a rather technical rule, Hurwitz positions it as a prime example of early Circle members' ability to coalesce around shared beliefs and compromise in order to grow the organization. Of course, it must be noted that, as an officially sanctioned history of the organization, it is almost certainly true that Hurwitz's account smooths over much of the ugliness in this debate in favor of exemplifying solidarity. At least in this presentation, the Workmen's

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 45.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 38.

Circle was able to unify around their central values and goals, and this sense of agreement allowed the organization to overcome its growing pains.

What is equally significant, however, are the broader priorities shared by the Workmen's Circle's membership. The essential components of programming agreed upon by members in 1917 included "establishing Yiddish schools for the young in which [they] would be imbued with the radical spirit of their parents and become acquainted with the cultural possessions of their people."[29] These three emphases - Yiddish language, radicalism, and Jewish culture - would remain consistent among branches of the Workmen's' Circle throughout the 20th century. Thus, as Hurwitz so neatly puts it, "In the long war between the 'Young' and the 'Old' there were neither victors nor vanquished. The only winner was the Workmen's Circle."[30]

In the aftermath of this resolution, the Workmen's Circle soared, and its early decades were ones of growth and success. Indeed, in the first decade of the organization's existence, it grew in numbers from a mere 872 members to over 38,000. The steepest increase in membership occurred between 1908 and 1909, likely at least in part due to the desire for economic security and support in the aftermath of the 1907 economic depression.[31] The Circle continued to grow both in membership and in geographic reach over the coming decades. By 1943, the Workmen's Circle boasted 750 branches across North America, with approximately 75,000 total members between them.[32] Naturally, with the expansion of the group's scope came the expansion of its services. Providing financial and practical support for members in times of struggle had been a primary goal of the Circle since its days as the Workingmen's Circle Society, but soon more overt political action and educational programming emerged as equally significant goals.

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[29] Ibid, 38-39.
[30] Ibid, 39.
[31] Ibid, 26.
[32] 1943 Concert Playbill

Throughout its first decades of operation, the Workmen's Circle became increasingly politically aligned. As its number expanded, the Circle's members increasingly brought with them a dedication to socialist politics and labor causes. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that many of the Workmen's Circle's members drew inspiration from the Bund, as well as socialist organizations in America, and thus the ideology was integral to the growing organization's culture. The strong socialist identity held by the Circle's members can be discerned not only by looking at the group's own programming, but also at the organizations with which it aligned.

One of the defining voices of the Jewish socialist movement in America was *Der Forverts*, or the *Jewish Daily Forward*, a newspaper founded in 1897 under editor Abraham Cahan. The *Forward* was distinctly socialist, and Cahan himself attributed a sense of near religiosity to socialism, stating that "For the worker the socialist ideal is a necessity. It sweetens his sad life. It gives him a spiritual pleasure which is higher than all."[33] The Workmen's Circle developed a very strong relationship with the *Forward*, with the paper regularly praising the Circle as representing "the finest ideas and aspirations" of Jewish immigrants.[34] The group was not similarly praised by communist papers such as *Die Morgn Freiheit*, a fact illustrating the Circle's particular niche on the leftist political spectrum and helping define the Workmen's Circle as a socialist, not communist, organization.

Education too came into the forefront of the Workmen's Circle's efforts in the 1910s, in keeping with the surrounding currents of Jewish life in America. 1910 marked the start of a Yiddish secular movement among Jewish immigrants, particularly those aligned with the political left. In this context, many organizations began educational initiatives dedicated to

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[33] Michels, 80.

[34] Nathaniel Zalowitz, "Workmen's Circle to Win Jewish Youth," *The Jewish Daily Forward* (New York, NY), February 7, 1926, Our English section, https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/?a=d&d=frw19260207-01.1.3&e=-------en-20-frw-1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-workmen%27s+circle----------1

Yiddish language and culture, as well as social and cultural values, but not necessarily religious practices or traditional Hebraic instruction.[35] In the years to come, the Circle would play a pivotal role in the development of *yiddishkeit*, a Jewish-American movement focussed on cultural practices that created an identity described by a member of the Circle as both "purely secular" and "thoroughly Jewish".[36]

The Workmen's Circle took a major step towards cultivating *yiddishkeit* in 1915 with the establishment of their Education Committee (EC).[37] Prior to 1915, the Workmen's Circle had taken on a fair bit of educational programming, but it was never consolidated under a national committee with articulated goals, and the majority of the funding burden was carried by individual branches.[38] The first programs organized by the EC took the form of lecture series, many of which brought in leading minds from the Jewish labor movement to speak on topics pertaining to leftist ideals, while others actively engaged Jewish subjects generally overlooked in the socialist sphere.[39] Importantly, these lectures were in Yiddish, bridging the divide between the Circle's cultural and political programming and fusing them into one. As scholar of Jewish radicalism Tony Michels puts it, "Never before had such a comprehensive series of lectures been attempted in Yiddish."[40] From this point on, the Yiddish language remained a crucial component of the Workmen's Circle's programming, as it served as a vehicle not only to preserve its members' culture, but also to adapt a Jewish identity focused on cultural institutions in addition to - or indeed instead of - religious devotion.

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[35] Howe, 203.
[36] Michels, 179.
[37] Jacobson, 83.
[38] Michels, 189.
[39] Ibid, 193.
[40] Ibid.

Beyond the desire to simply preserve the language that its members spoke, Yiddish was important to the Workmen's Circle, as well as several of its contemporary organizations, for several reasons. A language comprised of German, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Slavic elements, Yiddish holds particular significance in Ashkenazi Jewish history and culture because of its role as a vernacular language. Before coming to the United States, Jewish communities in central and eastern Europe primarily spoke Yiddish, rather than the dominant language of whatever nation or kingdom they found themselves inhabiting. In some cases this separation was coerced, as Jewish communities within the Russian Empire were denied access to Russian-language schooling for much of history. At the same time, the language was a point of pride, as it came to unite and define Jewish culture in these communities. It is also important to acknowledge the distinct role of Yiddish in these communities, as opposed to Hebrew. While Yiddish was the language of community, commerce, and culture, Hebrew was solely used for prayer and liturgical purposes. Thus, by continuing to emphasize the Yiddish language, Jewish communities in America were making a claim at cultural preservation, not merely religious expression.

With these goals in mind, in 1916 the Workmen's Circle began operating its own schools. These were regarded as "quite the most ambitious of those devoted to Yiddish, with careful training of teachers…pedagogical aids, and the issuance of Yiddish books composed for American children."[41] These schools were focused not only on maintaining Yiddish language and culture, but also on introducing new ways to interpret this culture in ways which incorporated the values of the labor movement.[42] In addition to educating the young, these schools would also put on lectures for working adults, making them a key feature of all life stages for Circle members.

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[41] Howe, 203.
[42] Jacobson, 80.

With the establishment of the Education Committee, the Workmen's Circle's programming began to expand in both quantity and variety. By 1915, the Workmen's Circle was not only holding lecture series and continuing more traditional programming, but also operating everything from specific union meetings to Yiddish literary clubs to, most crucially, choirs and theater troupes.[43] It was this variety of programming, including artistic endeavors, which allowed the Workmen's Circle to become considered "one of the marvels of the Jewish labor movement."[44]

The Workmen's Circle Chorus Enters the Stage:

The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York City was officially founded not long after the founding of the Education Committee in 1915, with the choral program expanding into multiple branches in the years to come.[45] The first steps towards creating a chorus began slightly earlier; members of the New York City branch decided to form a chorus in 1914, driven by "the belief in the power of music to heal the spirit and to nurture a feeling of community among fellow downtrodden laborers."[46] The first meeting of prospective members occurred the same year, hosted in the *Forward*'s Manhattan headquarters and advertised by the Education Committee.[47] Nicholas Zaslavsky was chosen as the first musical director for the chorus in 1915, having gained popularity previously from a handful of independent concerts.[48]

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[43] Michels, 179.
[44] William M. Feigenbaum, "Twenty-Five Years of the Workmen's Circle," *The Jewish Daily Forward* (New York, NY), May 10, 1925, Our English section, https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/frw/1925/05/10/01/article/33/?srpos=2&e=-------en-20-frw-1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-workmen%27s+circle----------1.
[45] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, New York, N.Y., 1915-1940," 1940, Box 6, Folder 1, Workmen's Chorus, YIVO, New York, NY, 1.
[46] Jacobs, 84.
[47] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 1.
[48] Ibid.

A few months into his tenure, however, what was then the "Workmen's Circle Singing Society" merged with the Halevy Singing Society, bringing on Leon Kramer as the director.[49] The Halevy Singing Society had been in existence for over a decade, performing concerts of primarily Hebrew music around the city.[50] Kramer brought with him an instructional model for music reading, as well as a repertoire of music in Hebrew, much of which had religious overtones. This latter development did not go over well, however, as Kramer's repertoire was far too traditionally religious to appeal to the Workmen's Circle's membership; "When he brought them [Workmen's Circle Singing Society] 'Oh God of Israel' for rehearsal, they refused to sing. The Educational Committee was then forced to ask for Mr. Kramer's resignation."[51]

Kramer's dismissal not only caused a change in leadership, but it also revealed the primacy of Yiddish in the minds of the choir members, as well as the need for music that centered around social concerns of the day rather than religious epics or traditions. A committee of Circle members intervened in the aftermath of Kramer's resignation to reorganize the Workmen's Circle Singing Society into the first full Workmen's Circle Chorus, laying down principles as it did so. The committee defined the chorus by three key points: "First, that the chorus must sing in Yiddish. Second, that it sing revolutionary and workers' songs, folk songs, and classical music. Third, the choral rehearsals were to take place every Friday evening."[52] Points one and two clearly establish the ethos that would define the Workmen's Circle Chorus for decades to come, centering the choir around very much the same values as the broader organization. Point three is interesting in and of itself, for holding rehearsals on Shabbat says a

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[49] Ibid.
[50] "Halevy Singing Society," *The Hebrew Standard* (New York, NY), April 29, 1904, City News, https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/?a=d&d=hebstd19040429-01.1.1&e=-------en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI----------1.
[51] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 1.
[52] Ibid, 1-2.

great deal about the religiosity, or lack thereof, of a Jewish organization. Indeed, this decision was defiant and shockingly bold, as rehearsing on Shabbat essentially demarcated the Chorus as an organization exclusively for secular, or at least non-Orthodox, Jews.

The Chorus's first significantly successful performances came under the leadership of Kramer's successor, M. Pirozhnikoff. Pirozhnikoff was well liked by the ensemble for his belief in the groups' purpose as a workers' chorus. He composed various workers' anthems himself and taught them to the choir for their first performance at the Brownsville Labor Lyceum in 1916. He also took it upon himself to translate other pieces into Yiddish for the Chorus' use.[53] He accompanied the Workmen's Circle Chorus on concertina through several successful concerts throughout the following years. His tenure ended in 1919, however, when members of the choir urged him to step into the position of conductor, directing the Chorus' singing throughout rehearsals and concerts, rather than just accompanying them. He refused, prompting the EC to once again request the resignation of a Chorus musical director.[54] It is unclear whether Pirozhnikoff's refusal to conduct was a matter of skill or philosophy. It is likewise unclear exactly how the group functioned without any conductor. However, the issue over conducting appears to have been the final straw in a series of disagreements in which the Chorus's ambitions were greater than what Pirozhnikoff was willing or able to provide.[55]

Pirozhnikoff's resignation set the stage for a pivotal figure in the history of the Workmen's Circle Chorus to take on the role of musical director. Beginning in 1920, Meyer Posner led the Chorus, and had a tremendous impact on the group's development. Indeed, the late 1910s through the 1920s were described by Hurwitz as the Circle's "period of…greatest

[53] Ibid, 2.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Jacobson, 86.

growth and glory." Posner immediately set about addressing members' concerns about the level of music-making in the group, reorganizing the singers into four voice parts when they had previously only sung in two or three parts.[56] He quickly realized a major challenge that the chorus faced, however; the dearth of Yiddish choral music, and more specifically, the scarcity of work in Yiddish with the desired workers' messaging.[57]

Posner found a solution, however, by taking on the work of developing this cannon himself, using both original texts and one adapted from Yiddish social poets. This included creating "The Workmen's Circle Hymn", which serves as an anthem for the organization. In fact, Circle members put forward that "it may justly be said of him [Posner] that he contributed a great deal to the storehouse of materials for workers' choruses", creating a catalog that was sung by other groups as well as the Workmen's Circle Chorus.[58] In many ways, Posner's work brought the members of the group much closer to the vision of a choral experience that they had been yearning for, both in terms of the caliber of their work and its nature.

By all accounts, Posner was well liked by both his choristers and their audiences, having been described by Circle members as "devoted…sincere…and earnest."[59] His character, as well as his dedication to expanding the group's repertoire, cemented his place in the hearts of his members. He had already increased the skill and status of the organization, and had plans in 1931 to go a step further by having the Chorus perform Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, a major work with orchestra, with text he personally translated into Yiddish. He was preparing the choir for a

[56] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 2.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

performance of this piece in April of 1931 when he suddenly died in rehearsal.[60] His death was a major blow not only to his singers but also to members of the Workmen's Circle at large.

Given both Meyer Posner's beloved reception by the group and the suddenness of his death, there was a period of several months in which his vacancy was not filled, and though "there were several candidates…they did not seem to have his qualifications."[61] Although the specific "qualifications" are not easily discernible, it seems likely that the sudden, traumatic loss of a beloved leader would make any potential successor appear inadequate. When a replacement was selected later in 1931, it was on a provisional basis, with the condition that he would lead the ensemble in rehearsals only for a year, before he would be granted permission to lead the group in performance.[62] Despite the slow trial period, the next musical director, Lazar Weiner, would prove to be the second key figure in the development of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, and he would be extremely successful despite any initial reservations.

Weiner's career as a composer began before his time with the Workmen's Circle Chorus, and his continuous creation of original work aided greatly in the expansion of their repertoire. He wrote for choir, orchestra, and solo voice, as well as composing major works such as cantatas which combined all of the above.[63] Indeed, Weiner is widely regarded to this day as the foremost composer of Yiddish art music.[64] His music was lauded by members of the Workmen's Circle and beyond. It was described as "so vital, in its appeal of melody, setting and form, that large masses of music lovers and workers in music want to hear or perform Lazar Weiner's

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[60] Jacobson, 87.
[61] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 3.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 5.
[64] Neil W. Levin, "Lazar Weiner," Milken Archive of Jewish Music, https://www.milkenarchive.org/artists/view/lazar-weiner.

compositions."[65] Likewise, his work was also included in scholarly classical music journals of the time, such as the *Jewish Music Journal*, giving him a legitimacy not possessed by the former Circle directors.[66]

Unsurprisingly, Weiner's tenure maintained the process of professionalization that Posner began, as Weiner put a great deal of work into organizing and refining their repertoire, advancing the choir's skills, and expanding their audience. He reformed the manner in which the choir was taught to read music, and he also took on the work of revising the choir's repertoire to conform to a single Yiddish dialect in order to increase uniformity and consistency.[67] His instruction was fairly formal and strict, but the choir seemed to adjust well, and are reported as having been "fascinated by his inflexible earnestness and his power of interpretation."[68] His work appears to have paid off, as the chorus grew in "number and quality", garnering increasingly significant and positive press coverage as well.[69] Indeed, it was under Weiner's leadership that the *New York Times* first began covering Workmen's Circle Chorus performances, further cementing the legitimacy of the organization.[70] This change is highly demonstrative of the Chorus's expanding success; the evolution of the choir from an organization covered solely by Jewish papers such as the *Forward* to being regularly reviewed by the *New York Times* illustrates the Chorus's successful reach into non-Jewish audiences, as well as its growing artistic legitimacy.

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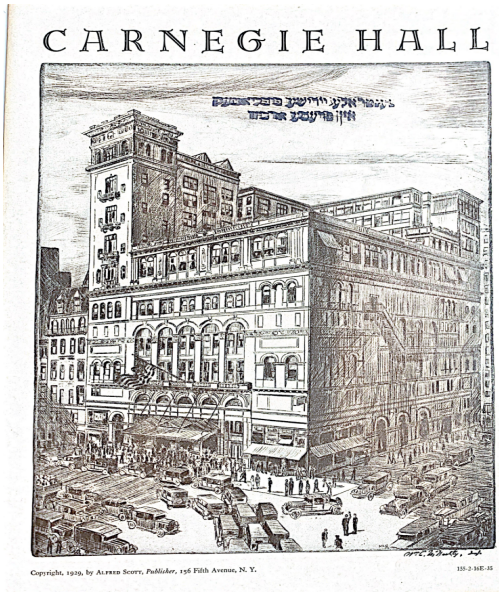
[65] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 5.
[66] "Jewish Music Journal," March 1935, Box 13, Folder 181, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY.
[67] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 3.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] "Workmen's Circle Sings: 120 in Chorus in Town Hall under Lazar Weiner," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), April 12, 1937, https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/workmens-circle-sings/docview/102235289/se-2.

One of the defining moments for the Workmen's Circle Chorus as an artistic institution was its 1935 Carnegie Hall performance. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the choir, the group performed what were likely their most ambitious pieces at that point in their history: "Songs of Miriam/Miriam's Song of Triumph", a cantata-like work by Franz Schubert, again translated into Yiddish, as well as a cantata composed by Weiner called "Once Upon a Time," whose text was adapted from Yiddish socialist poetry.[71] Posner's "Workmen's Circle Hymn" was also performed, and would be at almost every concert of note given by the Chorus.[72]



Carnegie Hall Program

SEASON 1934-1935

FIRE NOTICE—Look around *now* and choose the nearest exit to your seat. In case of fire walk (not run) to *that* Exit. Do not try to beat your neighbor to the street.
JOHN J. McELLIGOTT, *Fire Commissioner*

CARNEGIE HALL
Saturday Evening, February 16th, at 8:30 o'clock
CONCERT
In celebration of the 25th Anniversary
of the Workmen's Circle Sanitarium
by the
WORKMEN'S CIRCLE CHORUS
LAZAR WEINER, *Conductor*
assisted by
MINNA YSAEVA-TULCHIN, *Soprano* MOSHE RUDINOV, *Barytone*
MAX SPIVAK, *Tenor*
(Member of The W. C. C.)
STRING ORCHESTRA
and
TOSCHA SEIDEL, *Violinist*
I.
Workmen's Circle Hymn (Liessin).....*Meyer Posner*
The Oath .....*arr. by Meyer Posner*
For Chorus and Orchestra

PROGRAM CONTINUED ON SECOND PAGE FOLLOWING

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The concert was a resounding success, so much so that the entire program was repeated at a Workmen's Circle Town Hall soon after, a practice which would become common in the years to come.[74] Now that we have seen how the work of Posner, Weiner, and the chorus members themselves brought the organization from performances at the Brownsville Labor Lyceum to

[71] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 3.
[72] 1934/35 season Carnegie Hall concert playbill
[73] Carnegie Hall, "Carnegie Hall Program: Workmen's Circle Chorus," 1935, Box 6, Folder 1, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY.
[74] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 3.

Carnegie Hall in less than two decades, we can turn to the question of what these performances revealed about the character of the organization, and how they both reflected and shaped its identity.

Chapter Two: Politics on Stage: Performing Arts in the Workmen's Circle and Labor Movement

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Workmen's Circle Chorus was founded under the Education Committee (EC) in 1915, and served a crucial role in bringing the organization's beliefs to a broader audience. By examining the repertoire selected by the Chorus, as well as their other artistic endeavors, such as the publication of songbooks and productions of Yiddish theater, it becomes clear that disseminating socialist ideals and workers' solidarity were primary goals of the organization. Thus, as the Workmen's Circle's political stances shifted over time, so too did their musical projects. The Workmen's Circle Chorus's efforts in this regard gain elevated significance when placed in the context of how the arts were used to rally support for political causes in the broader labor movement. Indeed, in many ways the Workmen's Circle Chorus mirrored these efforts, although the organization's Jewishness often gave its shows a somewhat distinct character from those performed by entirely secular political groups.

Theater and Literature in the Labor Movement:

There was precedent for using the arts to further political goals, especially within the American labor movement. While many different art forms have histories of being used in political contexts, theater - both musical and otherwise - is a particularly significant category, and one that is crucially important when considering this history within the Jewish milieu. Even when Yiddish theater was not expressly political, Jewish playwrights, producers, and directors constantly tried to incorporate themes related to the political, cultural, and socioeconomic issues of the time.[75] Indeed, theater was identified as an impressively effective tool by multiple Jewish

[75] Irene Heskes, "Music as Social History: American Yiddish Theater Music, 1882-1920," *American Music* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 75, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3051563.

union organizers of note. Fannia Cohn, who was one of the most significant figures behind the educational programs of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union from the 1910s through the 1930s, expressed this sentiment best; as she put it, "Of all the arts…the drama makes the greatest appeal to man. It is the best medium for making people think, because it is a creative interpretation of their own experience. In a few hours it can enlighten and make the workers conscious of social and economic conditions which would require volumes to explain."[76]

Within the Jewish community in America, a vibrant culture of Yiddish theater emerged. Theater held a role in the Ashkenazi Jewish tradition stemming from the Middle Ages in the form of *Purimshpil*, or "Purim Plays", which were brief performances held in homes or synagogues on telling the stories of the holiday of Purim.[77] This theatrical tradition was transplanted to the United States at the turn of the century by Abraham Goldfaden, who is considered "the father of Yiddish musical theater."[78] Goldfaden had begun developing a catalog of Yiddish operettas in modern-day Romania when the Tsarist government banned all "Jewish theatricals" in 1883, prompting his immigration to New York, first in 1887, and then, after returning briefly to Romania, permanently in1902.[79]

As more and more Jews emigrated from the Pale of Settlement into New York City, the Yiddish theater scene in the city blossomed. The stage emerged as a vehicle to preserve familiar culture, as well as to find castmates to serve as surrogate families in the New World.[80] As scholar Moses Rischin so wonderfully puts it, "The Yiddish theater, bounding with life, and greater than

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[76] Fannia Cohn, as cited in Brian Dolber, *Media and Culture in the U.S. Jewish Labor Movement: Sweating for Democracy in the Interwar Years*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Media (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 136.
[77] Heskes, 74.
[78] Ibid, 75.
[79] Ibid, 75-76,
[80] Ibid, 76.

life…was educator, dream-maker, chief agent of charity, social center, and recreation hub for the family. All could share in its simple pleasures, adore the glorious players, and have a good cry."[81] Given such profound reasons for its popularity, the Yiddish theater community quickly grew, mounting countless performances in the Bowery district of New York City, and eventually expanding, both to the English language and to Broadway itself.

In both Europe and America, Jewish playwrights and dramatists took great inspiration from the Jewish literary tradition. Both contemporary writing and the stories of folklore often made their way to the stage through dramatic adaptations. While more modern in its theatrical form, the most obvious and well-known example is, of course, the series of stories about Tevye the Dairyman, written first in 1895 by Sholem Aleichem. Renowned for their success in fusing comedy and tragedy, Aleichem's Tevye stories were adapted into the widely famous musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, which premiered in 1964.[82]

While not directly adapted for theater in the same way, the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer were also extremely influential. Singer began his literary career in the 1920s in Poland, and continued to write in Yiddish after immigrating to the United States in 1935.[83] After arriving in America, Singer wrote as a columnist for the *Forward*, as well as continuing to write stories in Yiddish, for which he would be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1978.[84] While he continued to write almost exclusively in Yiddish, Singer quickly understood that he would need to translate his works in order for them to connect with the American audience, and in doing so,

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[81] Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 133., as cited in Heskes, "Music as Social…", 75.
[82] Dan Miron, "Sholem Aleichem," The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/sholem_aleichem.
[83] Joseph Sherman, "Isaac Bashevis Singer," The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Singer_Isaac_Bashevis.
[84] Ibid.

he became one of the most widely read authors of his time.[85] Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer are just two examples of the literary culture that inspired and intertwined with that of Jewish theater.

The theatrical scene in America also developed with particular robustness on the Jewish left. One of the best known organizations to take on the charge of presenting radical ideals to a Jewish audience was the Artef. Operating in New York in the first half of the 20th century, the Artef, or Arbeiter Teater Farband, was a communist-oriented Yiddish theater company. Indeed, so prominent were the Artef's communist ideals that scholars of the organization have argued that in order to understand the Artef's "artistic and organizational history", one must understand the progression of American Jewish communism.[86] Though the entirety of the Artef's repertoire of plays were centered around communist themes, the group was solely an arts organization. They utilized their productions to educate their audiences, and while they did not organize politically otherwise, the Artef still had a significant impact. Its messages managed to cross cultural boundaries, as various productions were covered and reviewed favorably by papers such as the *New York Times*.[87]

In addition to artistically focused organizations such as the Artef, the use of theater on both the Jewish left and the broader multicultural left more broadly extended into primarily political organizations. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) was one of the largest labor unions of the early 20th century. Though founded primarily by Jewish American

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Edna Nahshon, *Yiddish Proletarian Theatre: The Art and Politics of the Artef* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), xiii.
[87] William Schack, "ARTEF ON FORT-EIGHTH STREET: Notes on the Progress of the Jewish Workers' Art Theatre in Its Later Career on Broadway," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), January 20, 1935, [Page #], https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/artef-on-forty-eighth-street/docview/101494420/se-2.

garment workers, the ILGWU quickly evolved to be not merely inclusive of all ethnicities and races, but also to be enthusiastically oriented towards what scholar Daniel Katz describes as "mutual culturalism", in which cultural differences were not only accepted but embraced and used to unite around political goals. Katz argues that the mutual culturalism of the ILGWU emerged out of the linking of its founders' "revolutionary Jewish identity…to the construction of a multicultural movement that encouraged the revolutionary identities of workers from all ethnic groups."[88]

Given that the ILGWU was overwhelmingly dedicated to workers' rights and labor reform, many are unaware that the organization also launched a Broadway Review in 1937, performing in the Princess Theater on 39th Street in Manhattan.[89] One of the ILGWU's most well known productions was called *Pins and Needles*, a story of labor unity which was praised by the *New York Times* as showing "wit, humor, and sentiment" "which seemed to "spring logically from the culture of the union garment workers who play it."[90] *Pins and Needles* was written by Louis Schaffer at the behest of David Dubinsky, the organization's president, and performed primarily by actual workers and union members. The production premiered on Broadway in 1937, and ran in various forms until 1942. *Pins and Needles* was unique in its ability to appeal to affirmatively socialist ILGWU members, while also managing to strike "the right balance of memorable tunes and a social message" so as not to "offend the liberals with whom Dubinsky sought a political alliance."[91]

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[88] Daniel Katz, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism*, Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 5.
[89] Ibid, 201.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, 206.

Pins and Needles was massively successful, even touring outside New York in cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago. It was so impactful, in fact, that a version was performed for Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House in 1938.[92] While the play's audience continued to grow, its text was progressively watered down, both with respect to both the play's Jewishness and radicalism, reflecting concerns of both Dubinsky and the creative team that "the play had a greater capacity for militant interpretation by performers and audience members" than was originally intended.[93] The final blow to *Pins and Needles*' status as a leading progressive play came about because "Dubinsky, violating the spirit of racial equity that permeated many of the local unions and his own earlier actions, chose to omit Olive Pearman, the only African American in the cast at the time, from the White House performance."[94] While this choice was a major mistake, the prominence that *Pins and Needles* reached at its peak still indicates the opportunities gained by incorporating artistic programs into labor unions.

It was not only labor unions such as the ILGWU that mounted plays with strong social messaging in the 1920s and '30s. Indeed, in a time where art and advocacy were so closely intertwined, the idea of making political statements through the stage was common. Both in America and elsewhere, a growing number of playwrights took on the challenge of expressing their politics through their work in this period. One of the best known examples is Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright whose Marxist politics have defined him firmly as a "political artist."[95] Though many of his most famous works were created while Brecht was living in Weimar Germany, they were international in their reach and relevance.

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[92] Ibid, 213.
[93] Ibid, 210.
[94] Ibid, 213.
[95] Marc Silberman, "Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy", *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (2012): 169, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23350303.

While not a musician himself, Brecht forayed into the realm of musical theater, and his 1928 collaboration with composer Kurt Weil, *Threepenny Opera*, was not only one of his most successful shows, but also one that demonstrates the way Brecht's art expressed his politics. As author Marc Silberman explains, the satirical commentary on commercialization and capitalism embedded in *Threepenny* is particularly sharp and effective because, for Brecht, "there are no ideals, and his satirical barbs are aimed at the not so obvious horrors of 'normal reality.'".[96] With such comprehensive critique inherent to his writing, Brecht's work created a standard for political theater, and he and Weil would have been likely sources of inspiration for artists within the Workmen's Circle and other similar organizations.

Music in the Labor Movement:

Music also played a significant role in labor politics. Formal choirs such as the Workmen's Circle Chorus were relatively uncommon, although not unheard of, especially within the Jewish labor movement. Indeed, examples of leftist Jewish choruses date back to radical movements in pre-revolution Russia and Germany.[97] Arguably, The Workmen's Circle Chorus's closest counterpart was the Freiheit Gesang Ferein, a Yiddish-language chorus founded in Paterson, New Jersey in 1923, with more expressly communist ideologies.[98] Though further left than the Workmen's Circle and its chorus, the Freiheit Gesang Ferein's members were similar to those of the Workmen's Circle in that they were predominantly working-class immigrants and union members who sought to sing music that represented their political beliefs and fostered a

[96] Ibid, 171.
[97] Jacobson, 61-62.
[98] Robert Snyder, "The Paterson Jewish Folk Chorus: Politics, Ethnicity and Musical Culture," *American Jewish History* 74, no. 1 (1984): 30, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23882496.

sense of unity.[99] Indeed, members of the Freiheit Gesang Ferein described their participation in the chorus as something of a transformative relief after the toils of their workplaces; one such member recounted that "When I go to the chorus, it's a holiday…I forget about my boss and I forget about the eight hours I'm sitting at the machine and I get a rebirth."[100]

Despite the rarity of fully-developed choral programs, it was not at all uncommon for labor organizations to incorporate elements of music into their work. Songs were performed by labor union members to draw attention to important causes, as well as to memorialize significant events. One example of such is the song "Mameniu" ("Dear Little Mother"), sung by a variety of labor organizations in memory of the 146 women who perished in the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.[101] When tragedies like this struck, union members often united via song in order to express both their grief and their hope for change for the future.

A variety of labor unions actually developed their own catalogs of songs, with the most well known being the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW's) *Little Red Songbook*. The first edition of the *Little Red Songbook* was published in 1909, and the IWW continued putting out revised editions until 1970.[102] Intended to be carried and referenced on a daily basis, these books were distributed to all members of the union along with their membership card.[103] This is worth noting in and of itself; the fact that a major union like the IWW distributed these songbooks to all

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[99] Ibid, 29-30.
[100] Ibid, 27.
[101] Heskes, 84.
[102] Terese M. Volk, "Little Red Songbooks: Songs for the Labor Force of American," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 37, https://www.jstor.com/stable/3345808.
[103] "The Wobblies," *Equal Times* (Boston, MA), February 1980, https://go-gale-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=5&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CTNJIVB953175212&docType=Review&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZHSI&prodId=GDCS&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CTNJIVB953175212&searchId=R1&userGroupName=emory&inPS=true

members reveals that they saw these songs as significant tools to promote unity and spread their message among their members and beyond.

Indeed, the *Little Red Songbooks* were used by a variety of newly founded labor colleges, which were established with the purpose of educating young members, recruiting more to the cause, and preparing the youth to become the next generation of union leaders. These schools included but were certainly not limited to the Work People's College, founded in 1907, Commonwealth Labor College, founded in 1922, and Highlander College, founded in 1932. And while some of these schools compiled their own song books, many relied primarily on the *Little Red Songbook* as a tool for their students.[104] It is clear that throughout the labor movement, it was commonly understood that having a shared base of musical repertoire could help bolster both solidarity and a deeper connection to socialist ideals among union members. By curating these songbooks, labor leaders created something of a shared gospel for their followers, providing an easy and enjoyable way to spread their principles.

When looking at the texts of songs included in the *Little Red Songbook*, their educational purpose becomes even more apparent. Many of these songs had very straightforward and easily identifiable messaging in their lyrics. For example, one commonly featured song was simply titled "It's a Good Thing to Join a Union," and included lyrics such as "Goodbye unfair wages, Farewell, long hours too / It's a fine, fine thing to join a union / For it will help you."[105]

The music to which these labor-focused lyrics were set was often notable as well. The song "Solidarity Forever" exemplifies this, as it was set to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which is significant for a number of reasons.[106] Adapting the melody of the most well

[104] Volk, 35-37.
[105] Ibid, 39.
[106] Ibid, 38.

known song associated with the Union and its values throughout the Civil War demonstrates an appeal to patriotism that was not a given among IWW members and other labor advocates. The choice to use this tune also implies a parallel between the cause of the Union soldiers fighting against the Confederacy and that of modern union members battling the evils of capitalism. Indeed, this parallel is emphasized in the lyrics, which state that "...the Union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run…/the union makes us strong."[107]

In summary, the majority of the songs included within the IWW's *Little Red Songbooks* met the criteria scholars such as R. Serge Denisoff use to classify "propaganda songs". These songs worked towards goals including but not limited to "[soliciting] outside support or sympathy for a social movement, [reinforcing] the value system of individuals who are priori supporters of a social movement or ideology, [promoting] cohesion and solidarity", and more.[108]

The Workmen's Circle and its Songbooks:

The songs composed and the books distributed by the Workmen's Circle followed many of the same goals as the *Little Red Songbook*. Indeed, the Workmen's Circle officials leading this charge acknowledged these goals, writing that "Singing these songs will help forge a stronger bond of unity and a truer comradeship."[109] However, one way in which the Workmen's Circle songbooks differed from those of the IWW and other organizations was with respect to the diversity of their intended audience. As stated previously, the IWW songbooks were primarily aimed at existing or prospective union members, as well as up and coming leaders. While the

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Serge R. Denisoff, *The Sociological Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1968): 229, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4105044.
[109] Young Circle League of New York, "Let Us Sing! Youth Song Book," Box 6, Folder 2, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY., inside cover.

Workmen's Circle certainly distributed songbooks to all within their ranks, they also had a unique collection of songbooks directed towards their youth membership.[110]

The Youth Circle League focused exclusively on programming for students at Workmen's Circle schools and the children of Circle members more broadly. This reflects several key elements of the Workmen's Circle that distinguish it from other labor organizations of the time. As Maximilian Hurwitz explained, the Circle attempted not only "to cater to the whole of the member", but also aimed to serve their members' families and communities as a whole.[111] Thus, providing programs that brought young people into the organization and instructed both socialist ideals and Yiddish culture from a young age was a consistent priority. Interestingly, the majority of the songbooks intended for children were composed entirely in English, while those intended for adult audiences contained many more songs in Yiddish. This difference reflects the generational divide in language skills, as well as the attempt to cater to a more acculturated audience.

Some of the songs included in Youth Circle songbooks, such as the various editions of *Let Us Sing*!, originated in the *Little Red Songbooks* or other similar works. For example, "Solidarity Forever" was featured in the Circle's booklets as well.[112] That being said, the organization also put out a variety of original works in their *Let Us Sing!* youth songbooks and other similar compendia. These songbooks included the "Young Circle League Song", a counterpart to the Workmen's Circle Hymn discussed in Chapter 1, this time aimed specifically towards children.[113]

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Hurwitz, 38.
[112] Young Circle League of New York, "Let Us Sing!", 23.
[113] Ibid, 16-17.

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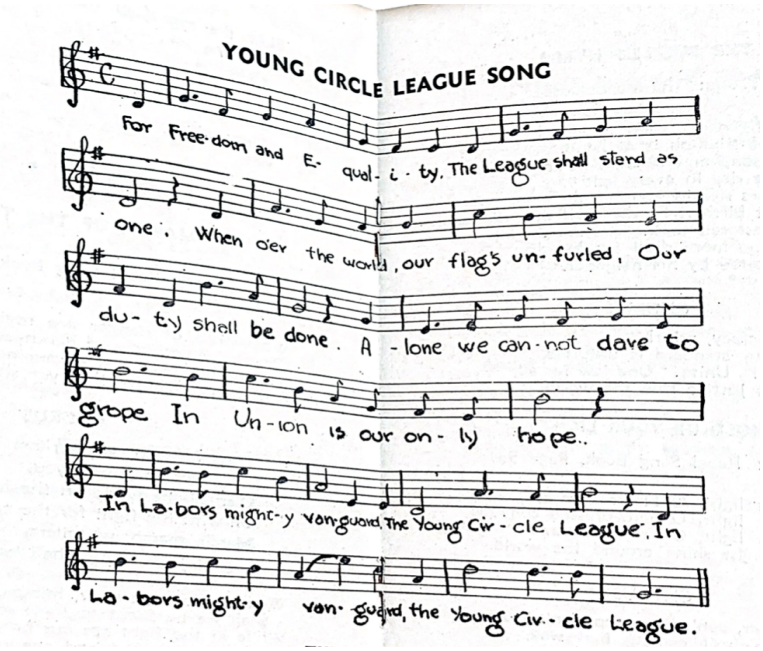

Several other examples, however, offer greater insight into the unique role of the Workmen's Circle. Included in the same *Let Us Sing!* books, "The Oath" speaks to the unique cultural character of the organization. With both text and music lifted from a Yiddish song, "Die Schvuoh," "The Oath" had a socialist, and even revolutionary fervor emblematic of the organization. The final verse of the song reads:

"We swear we will battle for freedom and right,
Assail the oppressor and trample his tools,
We swear we will conquer the darkness that rules,
And storm the gates of tyranny or fall in the fight.
Come, swear we'll bear it onward, living and dead."[115]

The extremity of the messaging in "The Oath" is significant; not only do the lyrics call for resistance to the oppression of workers, they call for the carrying out a revolution even at the

[114] Young Circle League Song sheet music, as seen in Let Us Sing!
[115] Ibid.

risk of death. While a rather dire sentiment for a children's song, these lyrics are emblematic of how intensely Workmen's Circle members held their values. Lastly, the use of the phrase "storm the gates" appeals directly to revolutionary imagery, evoking thoughts of the events of past revolutions, such as the storming of the Bastille in France, or that of the Winter Palace in Russia.

One additional point of note within "Let Us Sing!" is the inclusion of the song "Go Down, Moses," which is interesting for a number of reasons. This song originated as a spiritual by enslaved Africans in the American South, with lyrics telling the story of Moses leading the Jews out of slavery in Egypt, an apt comparison for those hoping to escape the horrors of slavery in America.[116] The chorus of the song is a powerful cry for freedom, stating "Go down, Moses, / Way down in Egypt land. / Tell old Pharaoh, / Let my people go."[117] This song remains one of the most well known spirituals today. Indeed, the lack of any attribution to a writer or composer in "Let Us Sing!" emphasizes both its folk nature and its ubiquitousness.[118]

Even when taking into account its popularity, the inclusion of "Go Down, Moses" in the Workmen's Circle's youth songbooks is significant for several other reasons. First, the acceptance of African American spirituals implies a willingness to achieve solidarity across racial boundaries that was not a given in the 1920s and '30s as the Workmen's Circle was expanding. This is especially true for organizations with strong ethnic identities such as the Workmen's Circle. Additionally, though the text has since taken on another life in the context of resistance to slavery and oppression, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that the Circle was willing to include songs with textual connections to religious stories when other far left organizations would not. Finally, the continued relevance of songs and ideologies of abolitionism

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[116] Anonymous, *Go Down, Moses* (1800).
[117] Young Circle League of New York, "Let Us Sing!", 28.
[118] Ibid.

yet again emphasizes a belief amongst Circle members - and labor reform advocates as a whole - that their fight against capitalist abuses was not dissimilar to the fight against slavery.

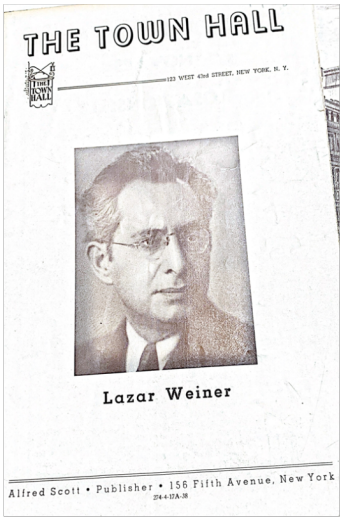
The Workmen's Circle Chorus and its Repertoire:

Like those included in their songbooks, the songs performed by the Workmen's Circle Chorus represented the organization's political beliefs. These songs were more complex than those contained in the songbooks. The songs in those compilations were intended to be accessible to all, utilizing simple and often commonly known tunes, while the Workmen's Circle Chorus's repertoire was comprised of pieces sung in four part harmony with accompaniment. Interestingly, many of the texts and tunes that served as the basis for these choral pieces originated from "Jewish Workers' Songs" written in Europe, but arranged by Jewish American composers to fit the choral setting.[119] The increased attention to musicality did not in any way diminish the political messaging in these songs, however. If anything, the opportunity to put on long-form pieces allowed the Chorus to engage its audience with stories of workers' struggles that were even more persuasive than those included in songbooks.

Examining the pieces on concert programs for various Workmen's Circle Chorus performances reveals several key themes, figures, and tropes, all of which helped the Chorus to communicate the political beliefs of the Workmen's Circle as a whole. The Chorus's 1938 Town Hall concert under the baton of Lazar Weiner provides one strong example of such. Opening with the Workmen's Circle Hymn composed by Meyer Posner, the performance unfolded over

[119] Lazar Weiner and The Educational Department of the Workmen's Circle, "Songs for Chorus, Book Two," 1940, Box 4, Folder 39, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY, 1-8.

the course of a five act program, with several other songs demonstrating the ideological nature of the Chorus' repertoire.[120]



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In this concert, the Chorus performed a song dedicated to Hirsh Lekert, a Bund member and revolutionary in Imperial Russia, who was executed in 1902 for attacks against Vilna's police and government.[122] This song was performed by the Chorus in Yiddish, although an English language dedication and explanation was included in the program, reading "Hirsh Lekert, the cobbler, a revolutionary, shot the governor. Before being hanged, he utters these words: 'Oh, brothers, remember the cause for which I am dying.'"[123] Songs such as this emphasize that choral concerts were an opportunity for the Workmen's Circle to not only express

[120] Lazar Weiner and Alfred Scott, "The Town Hall," 1938, Box 12, Folder 175, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY, 7.
[121] Weiner and Scott, "The Town Hall", Program Cover, featuring image of Lazar Weiner
[122] Dov Levin, "Lekert, Hirsh," The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lekert_Hirsh.
[123] Weiner and Scott, "The Town Hall", 6.

their revolutionary ideals, but also to pay tribute to fallen figures and share their legacy to a broader audience.

In this same performance, the Workmen's Circle Chorus also sang a small number of pieces with text translated into English. One example of such was the piece entitled "Work for All", translated by a member of the Workmen's Circle for the Chorus to perform. The text of this piece reads as follows:

"Millions of men
Worn and gaunt with hunger and pain
In despair are seeking work.
With growing strength and vengeance in their hearts
Waiting for the day
When war upon power and greed
Shall bring freedom and work for all."[124]

It is significant that a piece with such overtly revolutionary messaging would be performed by the Workmen's Circle Chorus in English. While it is generally acknowledged that the first generation Yiddish speaking members of the Workmen's Circle would understand and sympathize with - or even actively endorse - hopes for change through active protest and uprising, these are beliefs that may have been considered extreme and alienating to the broader American audience. The choice to translate this text into English for performance implies not only that the Workmen's Circle Chorus performed in part for a non-Yiddish speaking, and likely non-Jewish audience (which is a noteworthy barrier to cross in and of itself), but also that the Chorus was unafraid to express the whole extent of its political beliefs to such an audience. This boldness arguably makes it clear that the Workmen's Circle Chorus functioned primarily to educate its audience on leftist beliefs, rather than to meet traditional benchmarks of success. In

[124] Ibid.

contrast, performances such as *Pins and Needles* appear to have been ultimately aimed at achieving fame, making a profit, or even becoming a commercial hit. Additionally, the inclusion of English repertoire is evidence of the Chorus' success in their ability to communicate these philosophies to a multicultural, if politically aligned, audience.

One final point of interest from the 1938 Town Hall Concert is the continued presence of religious themes in the Workmen's Circle Chorus's repertoire. In fact, the final set of pieces in the concert was Lazar Weiner's "Biblical Suite". Composed of three movements successively titled "Abraham and Sarah", "Three Angels visit Abraham", and "Celebration", the Biblical Suite told the story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming the birth of their son, Isaac.[125] The piece was performed by the Chorus and two soloists, Nina Valli voicing Sarah and Fritz Lechner representing Abraham.[126]

The inclusion of a piece telling an Old Testament religious tale in a program also filled with radical works such as "Hirsh Lekert" and "Work for All" is both perplexing and particular to the Workmen's Circle. The story told in Weiner's Biblical Suite is not one that is particularly transferable to the labor cause, as "Go Down, Moses" and the story of Exodus can be. Rather, this story is simply one of the foundations of Judaism, and seems to represent solely the religious and cultural dimension of the Workmen's Circle. Thus, in its own way, the inclusion of the Biblical Suite further asserts the identity-affirming purposes of the Workmen's Circle Chorus and its repertoire, as well as further distinguishing the choir from the Freiheit Gesang Ferein, or any other similar organizations of the time. The choice to combine both the organization's religious and radical identities into one program also reveals that Weiner - as well as members of

[125] Ibid, 5.
[126] Ibid.

the Chorus more broadly - was eager to demonstrate the ability of these seemingly disparate beliefs to coexist, or at the very least willing to work comfortably within the tension.

Finally, examining the Workmen's Circle Chorus' repertoire allows one to gain an understanding of the changes over time in the organization's political sensibilities. One of the most clear cut examples of this phenomenon is the changing of the Circle's attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Unsurprisingly, given both the overall politics of the Workmen's Circle and the number of former Bund members among its ranks, the organization was, early on, strongly in favor of the revolutionary movement in Russia. In fact, the Chorus itself was enthusiastically demonstrative of this support, singing in 1917 at a rally held in Madison Square Garden for the visit of Boris Bakhmetiev, ambassador of the provisional Kerensky regime to the United States.[127] This was one of the Chorus's biggest performances, certainly significant so early after its founding, as the group was enlarged for the occasion to include 500 members and rehearsed a variety of Russian selections exclusively for the performance, including "Da Zdravstvuyet Rossya", the newly created "Anthem of Free Russia".[128]

But such strong shows of support were not long lasting. In the aftermath of the revolution, word got out about the harsh conditions of life for Jews under the new communist regime, and the Workmen's Circle and its Chorus quickly distanced themselves from the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Workmen's Circle put out a variety of educational materials highlighting the struggles of Soviet Jewry, criticizing leaders in the Soviet government for their persecution of Jews as class traitors and capitalists despite their involvement in the revolution.[129] This anger

[127] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.", 2.
[128] Ibid.
[129] "Soviet Anti-Semitism," Box 6, Folder 74, Workmen's Circle, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

only increased in the aftermath of the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact in 1939 and the waves of antisemitism in the USSR that followed World War II.

In keeping with the Workmen's Circle's beliefs, the Chorus then avoided singing works that praised or endorsed the Soviet Union, and when singing about the Russian Revolution often focused on Jewish figures, such as Hirsh Lekert. Likewise, by the 1940s, the Russian language was virtually absent from the group's repertoire. Not only does this shift mark a further distancing from communism by the Workmen's Circle, the corresponding changes in the Chorus's repertoire demonstrate the extent to which the Chorus's work mirrored that of the broader organization. This continuity illustrates once again that a primary function of the Chorus was to express the Circle's political ideals.

All in all, examining the repertoire of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, as well as the songs collected and shared by the Circle, reveals that music was not a mere hobby enjoyed by members of the organization. Rather, music was seen as an extremely effective way to convey their political ideals, allowing these messages to reach a broader audience, including both children to whom political theory would not be accessible, and adult audiences who could be better swayed by musical storytelling. In this manner, the Workmen's Circle Chorus fits in with the broader history of the use of performing arts within the labor movement. Still, the Chorus remains unique in its capacity to maintain and assert its Jewishness while not sacrificing its radicalism, not only through the continued use of the Yiddish language but also through the inclusion of repertoire telling stories of the Torah. Thus, the Workmen's Circle Chorus played a crucial part in projecting all aspects of the Workmen's Circle's identity to the broader world.

Chapter Three: Orchestrating Identity: Music as a Medium for Developing Jewish Culture

As has been established, the Workmen's Circle Chorus played a fundamental role in the Workmen's Circle's ability to express their political ideals to a broader audience. In addition to this fundamental purpose, the Chorus also was integral to the organization's ability to maintain its Jewish identity. In developing a repertoire devoted to the Yiddish language, labor politics, and elements of Jewish tradition, the Workmen's Circle Chorus helped the organization more broadly to negotiate their Jewish identity. The Chorus facilitated an adaptation of its members' experience of faith to better fit both with their leftist politics and the conditions of modern life, without abandoning religion entirely. Once again, this function of the Chorus elevates its significance within the Workmen's Circle as a whole, as the Chorus is shown to play a crucial part in the creation of the organization's character and identity. It played such a role with respect to both politics and culture.

Religion and the Socialist Labor Movement: Friends, Foes, and the In Between

The fact that religion played any meaningful role within the Workmen's Circle distinguishes the organization from many of its peers within the labor movement. The labor movement has often been characterized as antagonistic to organized religion, with popular understandings of its attitude towards religion drawing upon notions of the determined atheism of Soviet Russia. There is certainly truth to this perception; many socialist and labor leaders viewed all other markers of difference and subjugation as "secondary to class struggles" and were thus opposed to political mobilization grounded on these other categories of difference.[130]

[130] Gary Dorrien, *American Democratic Socialism: History, Politics, Religion, and Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 18.

Prominent socialist thinkers also contributed to the perception that religion was, at best, irrelevant to their cause. For example, Daniel Bell, a well known 20th century academic and commentator on socialism, argued that socialism was "always religious", given that it was eschatological, or focused on the final judgment and destiny of humanity, and as such there was no need to engage with any religious practices; doing so would simply be redundant.[131]

Additionally, in turn-of-the-century America, there was a great deal of hostility directed towards the burgeoning labor movement by religious institutions and leaders, particularly the Protestant church.[132] Indeed, when seeking to answer the question of why there is no labor party in the contemporary United States, Robin Archer dedicates a whole chapter to the factor of religion, in which he analyzes at length the impact of middle-class constituencies on Protestant church politics throughout the 20th century. He explains that, as benefactors of the church, parishioners could be viewed as "consumer-employers", and given that these individuals were primarily middle-class, it made both financial and social sense for the church to oppose the labor movement.[133]

While it is certainly true that tensions were high between labor leaders and organized religion, recently scholars have been pushing back against viewing the labor movement as merely inherently areligious. Indeed, in his study of *American Democratic Socialism*, Gary Dorrien argues that the explicit role of religion in leftist political movements has been underrepresented in scholarship.[134] Dorrien examines the development of the "Social Gospel" amongst Christian socialists, noting how, in the early years of the labor movement in the United

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[131] Ibid, 19.
[132] Robin Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 184.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Dorrien, 2.

States, Christian leftists coalesced around the notion that the wage system as it existed was "antisocial, immoral, and anti-Christian," thus bringing their faith into the center of their politics.[135]

Indeed, even some of America's most identifiable socialist figures invoked religion in ways that are not often acknowledged. There is no more compelling example to this effect than that of Eugene Debs, arguably the most well known socialist activist in American history. Famous for his five presidential runs - the last of which took place from his jail cell after his arrest under the 1918 Sedition Act - Debs is not typically associated with religion, in either scholarship or public memory. But religion in fact did play a role in Debs' beliefs and rhetoric. To be clear, Debs did not have a particularly fond relationship with organized religious institutions. Indeed, he remarked early in his career that "If I were hungry and friendless today, I would rather take my chances with a saloon-keeper than with the average preacher."[136] He had a particularly antagonistic relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, which he derided due to both its hierarchical leadership and its "nearly monolithic condemnation of socialism as atheistic, materialistic, immoral, and anti-family."[137] However, Debs saw - or at least utilized to great effect - inspiration in the original texts and figures of Christianity.

Through invoking the figure of Christ himself, Debs advocated for values of solidarity and compassion. In his 1910 speech, "Prostitution of Religion", Debs argued that religious institutions were themselves the hypocrites, missing the true meaning of the texts to which they clung. He argued that "of real religion, the spiritual influence which exalts man and consecrates

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[135] Ibid, 58.
[136] Eugene Debs, as cited in Jacob H. Dorn, "In Spiritual Communion: Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Christians," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 3 (July 2003): 308, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25144337.
[137] Dorn, 309.

him to the loving service of his fellow man, they [mainline Catholic and Protestant churches] are as destitute as the arctic region is of sunflowers. Christ knew them perfectly and denounced them as hypocrites."[138]

Essentially, Debs put forward the proposition that, in modern times, the true values exemplified by Jesus Christ in the Bible were better expressed by socialists themselves than by the churches who claimed to purport them. Whether or not Debs truly believed that Christ was such an admirable example of loving one's fellow man is difficult to say, but regardless it is clear that religion was a key rhetorical tool for Debs, used in many speeches to connect to working-class Catholics and Protestants, as well as to inspire his existing followers. In the same speech, Debs described the relationship he saw between socialism and religion quite clearly, stating that "It is false and slanderous to charge that socialism aims to destroy religion. The truth is that socialism proposes to destroy the conditions that make religion impossible."[139]

Debs' belief in the potential to blend religion and socialism actually resulted in his appreciation of the Workmen's Circle. On the occasion of the organization's 25th anniversary, Debs offered a "Salutation to the Workmen's Circle", in which he lauded a great deal of praise towards the organization. While some of his compliments had nothing to do with religion, such as considering the Workmen's Circle "a vital factor in the American labor and socialist movement", Debs did not shy away from the Circle's religious affiliations, instead applauding them.[140] Indeed, in praising the Workmen's Circle's schools, he remarked that "I still thrill with the hand-clasp of those splendid Jewish teachers, real educators, true teachers of the young, and I

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[138] Eugene V. Debs, "Prostitution of Religion," speech, April 23, 1910, Eugene V. Debs Internet Archive, 1, https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1910/100423-debs-prostitutionofreligion.pdf.
[139] Ibid, 2.
[140] The Workmen's Circle, Eugene Debs, and Meyer London, "25th Anniversary Workmen's Circle: 1900-1925," 1925, Box 1, Folder 1, Workmen's Circle, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY. 1.

still look into the bright, sparkling, seeing eyes of those fine Jewish children, girls and boys, an experience that has been an inspiration to me ever since."[141] Debs emphasized the significance of religion in the Workmen's Circle, and praised the organization for its cultural particularity, as well as its educational and political prowess. Through the examples of Debs and others, it is clear that religion and socialism have been far more intertwined than is often considered.

Jewish Socialism, its Complexity, and the Workmen's Circle:

All of that being said, there was particular tension for American Jews who desired to adhere to both socialism and Jewishness. And it was within this tension that the Workmen's Circle existed and operated. The Circle and many of its fellow Jewish organizations had to reckon with the strained and tenuous nature of their' Jewish identities. While for some, Jewish values were central to their socialist beliefs, others saw the religion as playing a minimal role in their politics. In essence, some identified firmly as Jewish socialists, while others viewed themselves first and foremost as socialists, who happened to also be Jewish. For the vast majority, however, the relationship between their political and religious beliefs was more tangled than either of these categories, and it was difficult to determine where one identity ended and the next began.

For example, when discussing *Forward* founder Abraham Cahan, Dorrien argues that "Cahan's Jewishness was simultaneously defining and irrelevant to him."[142] He quotes Cahan himself, who stated that "We regarded ourselves as human beings, not as Jews. There was only one remedy to the world's ills, and that was socialism."[143] With these words, it appears that

[141] Ibid, 2.
[142] Dorrien, 35.
[143] Abraham Cahan, as cited in Dorrien, 35.

Cahan fell firmly into the latter of the two aforementioned categories. Yet Dorrien also details the ways in which the *Forward* was central to maintaining and promoting Yiddish culture within the United States. The "Bintel Brief", for example, was an advice column featured in the *Forward* that helped immigrant Jews and their children negotiate life in America. There was no political aim involved here, but rather Cahan was aiming simply to help his fellow Jews navigate this difficult transition. In essence, Dorrien argues that the *Forward* "was deeply Jewish while denying that its socialism had a Jewish character."[144]

Like many of their socialist peers, the Workmen's Circle's programming was sometimes characterized as "anti-religious", despite the organization's Jewish identity.[145] This same sentiment can arguably be detected in some iterations of the Chorus. Recall, for instance, that Leon Kramer of the Halevy Singing Society was spurned by members of the Workmen's Circle Chorus for his emphasis on religious repertoire, and also that the group regularly rehearsed on Shabbat.[146] Indeed, the mere existence of the Workmen's Circle Chorus can be seen as a rejection of traditional expressions of Judaism. Dating back to their forerunners in Russia, Jewish revolutionary choruses were founded with the intention of being subversive of, and antagonistic to, Jewish law. After all, if one were to follow the principles of Orthodoxy, singing in a coed choir would be a nonstarter, as would performing collective music outside the context of a synagogue.[147] By coming together at all, these choirs presented an opposition to rabbinical authority, and in doing so magnified their own revolutionary character.[148]

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Neil W. Levin, "Third Seder of the Arbeter Ring," Milken Archive of Jewish Music, https://www.milkenarchive.org/music/volumes/view/legend-of-toil-and-celebration/work/third-seder-of-the-arbeter-ring/.
[146] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary," 1.
[147] Jacobson, 62.
[148] Ibid, 62-63.

Yet despite demonstrations of resistance towards taking on a Jewish identity in religious terms, the Workmen's Circle was established, to a great extent, *because* its founders understood their distinctiveness as Jewish laborers, falling under the category in which their Jewishness was not at all incidental to their political beliefs. Indeed, Marion Jacobson argues that, due to the heightened antisemitism of the early 20th century, the Jewish working class experienced a high degree of "cultural self-awareness."[149] Given their understanding of their own minority status within the United States, Jewish socialists were motivated to establish organizations such as the Workmen's Circle, in which their cultural identity and politics could coexist more easily.

Interestingly, it was not only the Circle's Jewish constituency that provided a religious influence on the Workmen's Circle, but rather, a shared sense of sacred secularism emerged with respect to the cause itself. It seems as if socialism and revolutionary advocacy took on a semi-religious quality to members of the Workmen's Circle, with such messaging seeping into their public-facing materials. Indeed, Maximilian Hurwitz demonstrates this repeatedly throughout his official history of the organization. When discussing the inspiration given by the Bund to leftist activists in America, Hurwitz leans heavily on religious imagery, even as he denies embracing religion entirely, for he calls out for "Jewish workers, [to] awake! Stand up and fight for your rights as wage earners, as citizens, and as Jews!...Look not for reward in some heavenly paradise after death; create a paradise here on earth! Do not wait for the Messiah to come and deliver you from your sufferings; be your own Messiah!".[150]

Hurwitz bestows a sacred importance upon the ideas of advocacy and revolution that is impossible to miss, as he presents socialism as a possible harbinger of heaven on earth and argues for all revolutionaries to see themselves as potential messiahs bringing about such change.

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[149] Ibid, 55.
[150] Hurwitz, 30.

In addition to such overt examples, Hurwitz also emphasizes the importance of Judaism to the organization in a more subtle way, as he advocates for his readers to stand up for their freedom, not only as workers and laborers, but "as Jews".[151] This inclusion is significant, as it suggests that the Circle's founders were as self-aware of their own distinctiveness as Jacobson suggests. Additionally, it distinguishes the Circle and its leaders from socialist thinkers who viewed religion (or any marker of division other than class) as irrelevant to their struggles. Through Hurwitz's language here, it appears that for the founding members of the Workmen's Circle - and quite possibly for Jewish laborers more broadly - advancing their rights as Jews was deeply intertwined with their activism, even when it did not appear as the primary goal.

Given the wave of increasing antisemitism in early 20th-century America, it is not particularly surprising that organizations like the Workmen's Circle would rally their members around advancing Jewish acceptance into American society. What is both interesting and quite surprising, however, is that Hurwitz appealed to the imagery of other religions to convey his messaging as well. Indeed, within the same context of Bundist inspirations, Hurwitz contended that " just as the message of Christianity, with its gospel of redemption and salvation for all, spread like wild fire among the slaves of ancient Rome and helped to undermine the Roman Empire, so the message of the Bund, with its gospel of political and economic emancipation, now spread among the Jewish workers of Russia and contributed no little to the downfall of Czarism two decades later."[152]

Here, Hurwitz is not only comparing the popularity of Bundism amongst Russian Jews to that of early Christianity, but identifying a degree of commonality between their messaging. Though described in somewhat different language, Hurwitz is suggesting that both Christianity

[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid, 31.

and socialism can be seen, by their respective followers, as possible pathways for freedom and deliverance for humanity. While of course the inclusion of such a statement demonstrates the further relevance of religion to the Workmen's Circle and socialist causes more broadly, the mention of Christianity in his description of the heroism of Russian Jews is noteworthy in its own right. There are several possible interpretations to this comparison. It is possible that Hurwitz is attempting to make any potential Christian readers more sympathetic and eager to collaborate with his cause, or that he is attempting to anticipate a widespread proliferation of Bundist ideals, much like Christianity spread throughout the world. Regardless, his willingness to reach across the religious divide further emphasizes the extent to which their political beliefs were sacred for the Workmen's Circle's members, as well as the unique position of the organization with respect to faith as a whole.

The Workmen's Circle Chorus, Yiddish, and a New Jewish Identity:

With this perspective in mind, it is clear that Judaism was a key element to the Workmen's Circle's ethos, but that the organization's particular identity was often in flux, and the relationship between many of its members and religion, while strained, echoed the organization's goals. Despite its inherently subversive nature, the Workmen's Circle Chorus was arguably a crucial component in carving out a space for Judaism to be highlighted within the Circle. Likewise, the Chorus and its programming were also integral to facilitating the evolution of Jewish practices and values for Circle members to fit more effectively within the organization's ideals and culture. Through examining both their repertoire and concert programs, it becomes evident that the Workmen's Circle Chorus was essential in helping to bring the organization's Jewish character and socialist ideals into harmony.

Dating from the Chorus's founding in 1915, it is immediately evident that identifying both as a worker's chorus and as a Jewish community was of the utmost importance to its members. Indeed, this emphasis is reflected in the concert program celebrating the Chorus's 25th anniversary in 1940, which stated that "They [early choristers] had dreamed of a *Jewish* Workmen's Circle Chorus; they were immigrant workers who were eager to sing a workers' revolutionary song or a folk song in their mother tongue."[153] The above quote emphasizes again the very clear significance of Yiddish to these singers. Additionally, it underscores that the singers would be unsatisfied with their choral experience if either their language or their political beliefs were abandoned; they would sing messages of solidarity and resistance, and they were to do so in their native tongue.

The primacy of Yiddish in the choir would prove incredibly fruitful in furthering both the group's goal of preserving their Jewishness, and doing so while singing repertoire reflecting their socialist beliefs. As the decades progressed, maintaining and preserving the Yiddish language, even as it became generally less common, became an evermore important purpose of the Chorus. As Yiddish became increasingly viewed as one of the primary components of Jewish culture by members of the Circle, they viewed the Chorus as inherently carrying forward a Jewish identity, even in their secular repertoire.

It also is worth noting that positioning Yiddish as such a central component of Jewish identity was highly indicative of the makeup of the Workmen's Circle's membership; this decision clarifies yet again that this group represented Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their children, and was not necessarily reflective of German Jews, Sephardic Jews, or other Jewish communities. Circle members were proud of their particular heritage, and this cultural

[153] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary," 1.

heritage was integral to their understanding of Judaism. The role of Yiddish in the Workmen's Circle Chorus' repertoire also demonstrates yet again a conscious sense of distinctiveness. As Jews, they *were* different from their secular socialist peers, and they were unafraid of using language to demarcate this difference, both through music and otherwise.

Additionally, as discussed briefly in the previous chapter, some of the Workmen's Circle Chorus's repertoire drew upon Jewish stories and themes. Lazar Weiner's aforementioned "Biblical Suite", for example, was an extremely popular set of pieces, and was programmed at a variety of Chorus performances throughout the 1930s and 1940s.[154] The Chorus performed a variety of other pieces drawing on Biblical themes, and even ones adapting traditional prayers into choral settings. Indeed, Lazar Weiner arranged a number of such pieces for the choir, adapting common prayers such as the Mi Chamochah and V'shamru, both staples of synagogue services.[155] Nor was he the only composer from which the Workmen's Circle Chorus found pieces with traditional Jewish themes. Other composers for the Chorus contributed such pieces, including George Fairman and Herbert Haufrecht, who together wrote pieces such as "My Jerusalem", drawing upon imagery of the Jewish homeland.[156]

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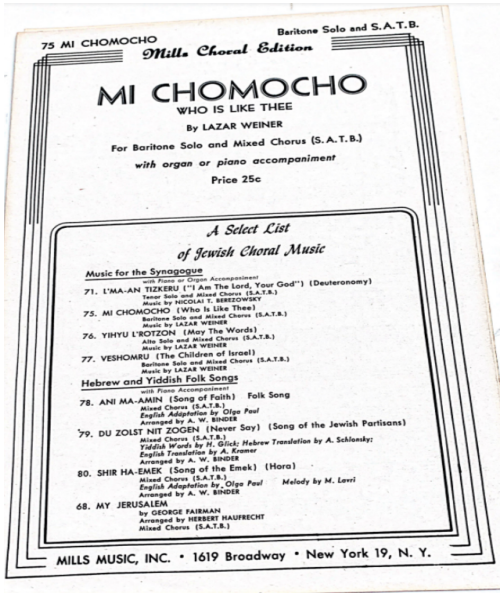
[154] Weiner and Scott, "The Town Hall."; The Workmen's Circle Chorus, "Let's Sing Workmen's Circle Choir Program," 1944, Box 6, Folder 1, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY; The Workmen's Circle Chorus, "Let's Sing Workmen's Circle Choir Program," 1946, Box 6, Folder 1, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY;

[155] Lazar Weiner, "Mi Chomocho," 1948, Box 4, Folder 31, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY.

[156] Ibid.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English Translation by A. Kramer
Arranged by A. W. BINDER

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Mixed Chorus (S.A.T.B.)
English Adaptation by Olga Paul Melody by M. Lavri
Arranged by A. W. BINDER

68. MY JERUSALEM
by GEORGE FAIRMAN
Arranged by HERBERT HAUFRECHT
Mixed Chorus (S.A.T.B.)

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Just as the expression of their politics through song was a crucial goal for members of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, so too was including their religion via music. In fact, not only was some of the repertoire sung by the Chorus Jewish in character, but the entire act of singing in the Chorus became sacred to some members. As was described by Circle member Reuven Kosakoff on the occasion of the Chorus' 35th anniversary, "It has become almost a religious duty. They must sing, preserve Jewish songs and they WILL sing to their last day."[158] Interestingly, the emphasis on Judaism expressed by Kosakoff did not necessarily originate from strict adherence to religious practices or even from a belief in God, but rather from the experiences of Jewish survival in a hostile world. Kosakoff addressed this, saying "We know that elements beyond our

[157] Lazar Weiner, "Mi Chomocho," 1948, Box 4, Folder 31, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY., listing religious music by Lazar Weiner and assorted artists

[158] Reuven Kosakoff, "35th Anniversary of the Workmen's Circle Chorus: The Workmen's Circle Chorus and Jewish Culture," 1950, Box 12, Folder 177, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY, 3.

control will make us exist as Jews whether we want to or not! Shall it be a colorless existence? No. We will have pride in our past, in today and in our future."[159]

Kosakoff's sentiments once again emphasize the cultural self-awareness described by Jacobson. Beyond that, he touches on the interesting and complicated issue of the varying ways in which Judaism was perceived by the non-Jewish world. In this piece, he seems to find it inevitable that Jews will be identified and othered. In particular, the use of the phrase "whether we want to or not" seems to imply a belief that efforts towards assimilation are futile, and that Jews will be identified as Jews regardless of whether they cling to or reject their cultural practices. Thus, in Kosakoff's view, the Workmens' Circle Chorus represents a necessary step towards not only preserving Jewish culture, but adapting it to the conditions of modern life in a way that will allow for cultural pride, yet again demonstrating the sacred secularism inherent to the Circle's work.

The Third Seder: A Case Study

Perhaps one of the most interesting and enlightening vantage points from which to look at the evolution of Jewish identity within the Workmen's Circle is that of their Third Seder programs. The Third Seders were performances and celebrations in which the Workmen's Circle Chorus participated regularly, held either during or leading up to the holiday of Passover.[160] The name "Third Seder" was meant to differentiate the occasion from the seders traditionally held on the first and second nights of Passover, and these programs were opportunities for both celebrating the holiday and melding the Circle's socialist values with its Jewish culture.[161] The

[159] Ibid.
[160] Levin, "Third Seder," Milken Archive of Jewish Music.
[161] Ibid.

holiday of Passover presented a particularly natural opportunity for this blending of the Circle's identities; as the holiday recalls the tale of Moses leading the Jews out of slavery in Egypt, its messaging is highly applicable to other stories of resistance to oppression, and allowed the Workmen's Circle to evolve this sacred heritage.

The Labor Zionist Farband, another politically left Jewish organization, hosted their own Third Seders, and it is unclear as to which group originated the program. Regardless, the Workmen's Circle held their first Third Seder in 1922, at this point solely as an educational program for children, and launched their first version for all ages in 1933.[162] The Circle's Third Seders grew in scale throughout the following decades; indeed, "By the mid-1950s it was being held at such venues as the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria, with more than a thousand people in attendance."[163] The Workmen's Circle Chorus played a crucial role in these Third Seders, interspersing the reading of the Haggadah - the text used to tell the story of Passover - with the singing of pieces that complemented and enhanced its stories. The emphasis on music in the Workmen's Circle's Third Seders also appears to have been a distinguishing factor between those held by the Circle and those held by the Labor Zionist Farband, again emphasizing the unique position of the Workmen's Circle Chorus.[164]

[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.

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By examining a variety of the songs performed at Third Seder celebrations, the capacity of the Chorus to help bridge the gap between the Circle's Jewish and political values becomes clear. Some of the songs performed by the Chorus were adaptations of traditional Passover pieces. Third Seder performances often performed versions of Ma Nishtana, or the Four Questions, sung by the choir, as well as other familiar tunes such as Dayenu and Chad Gadya.[166] All of these pieces are common components of the celebration of Passover, and can be heard at seder tables throughout the world.

A crucial factor distinguishing the Third Seder from traditional seders is that even these familiar pieces were sung in Yiddish, rather than the traditional Hebrew. This reflects the Eastern European demographic of the Circle's members, as well as how critical preservation of the Yiddish language was to them. Additionally, it can be seen as a small - yet significant - measure

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[165] Third Seder Haggadahs from throughout the 20th century: The Workmen's Circle, "Passover Haggadah," Box 9, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY.; The New York Region of the Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring, "Cultural Seder Hagode," Box 9, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY.

[166] Milken Archive of Jewish Music, prod., *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*, conducted by Zalman Mlotek, performed by Amy Goldstein, et al., 2013, compact disc, https://open.spotify.com/album/7sMax1DYKpZk3VXFpiznpf?si=S3ljhiAsRYatSljVG_vcoA.

of resistance in and of itself to present these religious texts in a language other than Hebrew, which is the language of Jewish prayer throughout the world, no matter the language spoken day-to-day in Jewish communities. In fact, one of the only instances of Hebrew in Third Seder performances is in a small portion of the popular "Opening Medley", which begins with a small portion of the prayer Hineh Matov sung in Hebrew.[167]

Other pieces found on Third Seder programs diverged entirely from the traditional Passover celebration, however, and reflected the Workmen's Circle's political ideals to a greater extent. One of the most interesting examples of such is the piece "Zog Maran", composed by Samuel Bugtach, which translates to "Tell Me, Marrano".[168] Marrano is one of the terms used to refer to Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity leading up to and during the Spanish Inquisition. In this piece, a haunting piano melody enters immediately, and a dialogue is presented between a female and a male soloist, supported by the choir.[169] The female voice asks questions of her "Marrano brother", pertaining to how he has managed to continue his practices in secrecy and through persecution.[170] He answers with tales of Seders held in caves, and Haggadahs hidden in the cracks of walls. The final question and answer provided by the song is arguably the most impactful of all:

"Say, Marrano, how will you defend yourself
When your voice will be heard?

When the enemy will take me captive,
I will die with song."[171]

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[167] Ibid
[168] Levin, "Third Seder," Milken Archive of Jewish Music.
[169] Samuel Bugtach, "Zog Maran," lyrics by Avraham Reisen, on *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*, produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music, conducted by Zalman Mlotek, performed by Amy Goldstein, et al., 2013, compact disc, https://open.spotify.com/track/5eYgrSm21xga4egHjdsEQT?si=0bbd94c00c8d4962.
[170] Levin, "Third Seder," Milken Archive of Jewish Music.
[171] Ibid.

By situating this piece in the context of the Inquisition, Bugtach and lyricist Avraham Reisen have departed from the story of Passover, and instead are recounting the broader story of Jewish persecution over millennia. In the final line, "I will die with song", music is held up as the ultimate act of defiance, as well as the final remnant of faith that cannot be extinguished. "Zog Maran" is thus a piece that not only recounts the many horrors of the Jewish past, but also presents the Circle's stance towards any future persecutors; they will stand united and unafraid, giving up neither their religion nor the music through which they can express it.

The bulk of the songs included in Third Seder programs fell in between these two categories, taking textual or thematic inspiration from the Haggadah, while broadening the messaging to be applicable outside of the holiday's specific context. For example, "Dos Iz Dos Oreme Brot", or "This is the Bread of Affliction" is a piece with text lifted directly from the Haggadah.[172] That being said, the final line is changed to further reflect the Workmen's Circle's politics. The final line of the song reads "This year slaves, next year we'll all be free."[173]

In most seders, it would be commonplace to have this line read "next year in Jerusalem." The decision to change the language not only minimizes the centrality of Israel in the Jewish faith - a choice in keeping both with the Circle's focus on the Yiddish language rather than Hebrew and their leftist politics - but also emphasizes ongoing struggles for freedom. By saying "This year slaves", the piece draws upon "the image of slavery as a current condition", possibly referring to abusive labor practices, ongoing religious and racial discrimination, or any number of other injustices in 20th century society.[174] Given this modification, "Dos Iz Dos Oreme Brot"

[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.

serves as a prime example of how the Third Seder could serve as a vehicle to incorporate modern political values into traditional Jewish practice.

The Third Seder tradition carried on throughout the 20th century, modified with each successive decade to reflect the social dilemmas of the time. In later seders, the holiday's themes were applied more broadly, not only to Jewish or labor concerns, but to a wide range of social justice issues. For example, a Third Seder program from the turn of the 21st-century included an entire page quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., using his words as an invocation to encourage the fight towards justice for all.[175] In addition to adding new content such as King's speech, this seder also modified existing practices to better reflect their members' political concerns. This can be seen by looking at the handling of the plagues in the seder. Traditionally, the ten plagues are listed at the seder table, and each participant removes a drop of wine from their glass to represent the plagues. Rather than reciting the ten Biblical plagues, participants in this iteration of the third Seder removed drops from their glass of wine for five modern day plagues: child labor, discrimination against women, xenophobia, neglect and apathy towards the AIDS crisis, and capitalist drains on the environment.[176] By positioning these societal ills as plagues, participants used the seder as a form of protest, concluding the recitation of the plagues by saying that, with these plagues' continued existence, "Our cup of freedom is diminished."[177]

Given the continual modernization and broadening of the Passover story throughout Third Seders, it is clear that these programs were a unique opportunity to better blend Jewish practices with the political and social convictions of Workmen's Circle members. The Third Seders were conceived in this spirit, for they were described by Circle leaders as opportunities

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[175] The New York Region of the Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring, "Cultural Seder Hagode," Box 9, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY., 13.
[176] Ibid, 15.
[177] Ibid.

for “the reinterpretation of holidays to reflect the quest for social, political, and economic justice” as “a body of poetry, song, and music made their way into the seder”.[178] Thus, the Third Seder clearly emphasizes the powerful role of music and performance for the Workmen’s Circle. Song could be used to synthesize the organization’s cultural and political values, creating a Jewish identity that better reflected its members’ political beliefs. The temporal longevity of the Third Seder programs also suggests that they were not only popular events, but highly reflective of the organization’s goals.

The Third Seders also demonstrate the mutually beneficial effect of joining religion and labor together for the Workmen’s Circle. By positioning labor struggles and social justice abuses in parallel to the story of Passover, there is an implied religious obligation to take action. In this way, Circle members who might feel stronger connections to their Jewish faith were spurred on towards more overt political involvement. Likewise, modernizing the seder program and other religious practices provided an incentive for members moving towards secularization to maintain elements of their religion and culture. In all, musical programs such as the Third Seder were crucial in forging a more modern Jewish identity, and one that could not only coexist with leftist political beliefs, but reinforce these beliefs through a version of religious practice. The centrality of the Circle’s choirs to these programs emphasizes the power of the arts within the labor movement, even in deeply unexpected ways. By incorporating and modifying stories from Jewish texts into their repertoire, the Workmen’s Circle Chorus played an instrumental role in the organization’s ability to maintain both its Jewish culture and its socialist ideals.

[178] Ibid, 2.

Conclusion: L'dor Vador (From Generation to Generation)

"Tog-Ayn, Tog-Oys, *Sunrise, Sunset*
Tog-Ayn, Tog-Oys *Sunrise, Sunset*
Dos is dayn basher. *Swiftly fly the years.*

Loyfn di yorn nokh anander, *One season following another,*
Trogn zey fredin mit a trer." *Laden with happiness and tears*
- 2018 Folksbiene "Fiddler on the Roof"
Yiddish Production Translation, "Sunrise, Sunset"[179]

The Remaining History: Workmen's Circle Choruses, 1950s-Present

Over the decades, the Workmen's Circle Chorus's repertoire, performances, and general character saw several shifts. As should be expected, many of these changes came in the aftermath of corresponding developments in the broader organization's political beliefs and viewpoints. Unsurprisingly, the rise of Nazism and the Second World War were formative experiences for the organization's identity in the 1940s. As was discussed briefly in chapter one, the offering of peace between the Nazis and the Bolsheviks in the form of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in 1939 was a significant step in leading American Jews to reject communism, pushing many to move away from affiliation with the movement. Indeed, the Workmen's Circle publicly called this decision on behalf of Communist Russia "the 'greatest betrayal' in contemporary history", as well as a devastation to the "holiest traditions of the Jewish socialist and labor movement."[180] While the Workmen's Circle was formed around socialism, rather than communism, the organization had previously been generally optimistic about the potential of Bolshevism in Russia, with the choir even singing at a rally in honor of the Kerensky Regime in

[179] Sheldon Hamick, "Fiddler on the Roof Complete Song Lyrics for the 2018 Cast Recording," trans. Shraga Friedman, National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene, https://nytf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Fiddler2018_Lyrics.pdf.
[180] Jacobson, 120.

1917.[181] Thus, the Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 had an extremely significant role in clarifying the line between socialism and communism for the Workmen's Circle.

When America entered the war on the side of the Allies, an even more decisive shift began with respect to the politics and patriotism of organizations like the Workmen's Circle. Socialist parties in the United States had in the past been broadly non-interventionist and opposed to conflicts such as World War I, and the Workmen's Circle was no exception.[182] Their leftist and sometimes revolutionary beliefs had previously left little room for effusive support of the government and its military activity, but this changed in the context of World War II. Beginning in 1939 and accelerating during the 1940s, the Circle began supporting the United States government and the war effort vigorously, and the Chorus was a key part in this. Indeed, many concerts were held as fundraisers, raising money for veterans' funds through ticket sales.[183]

In addition to monetary support, the Workmen's Circle Chorus demonstrated the organization's endorsement of American involvement in the war through their music itself. The songbooks released during and after the war reveal a stark contrast to those released previously. A clear example comes from the new version of "Let Us Sing!", the songbook series whose earlier editions' radical character was discussed at length in chapter two. In the 1946 edition of "Let Us Sing!", the opening two songs are the "Star Spangled Banner" and "My Country, 'tis of Thee" (listed under the name "America").[184] By not only including these songs, but positioning them before any of the politically-oriented or Yiddish language songs in the collection, the Circle

[181] The Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, NY et al., "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary," 2.
[182] Herberg, 44.
[183] The Workmen's Circle, "Fight for Freedom: Choral Ballet at Carnegie Hall," 1943, Box 12, Folder 176, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY.
[184] The Workmen's Circle, "Let Us Sing!," 1946, Box 6, Folder 2, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY.

took a significant step towards Americanization. In this context, embracing patriotism signified not only Circle members' approval of America's policies, but also their desire to be a part of the dominant culture. By including such identifiable American pieces in a songbook otherwise devoted to pieces representing the Workmen's Circle's ideology and culture, the Circle seemed to be seeking a place within a new American cultural pluralism.

Another significant example of the Workmen's Circle Chorus' shift toward patriotism came from one of Lazar Weiner's original compositions. Composed in 1943, Weiner's cantata titled "To Thee, America" is arguably one of his most significant pieces, in both scope and status. The piece is intended to be performed by a four-part choir, male soloist, and either piano or orchestra, along with a spoken narrator, and has a run time of over half an hour.[185] The text of the piece comes from a poem of the same name, written by Aaron Glanz-Leyeless (known often as simply A. Leyeless), a Polish Jew who immigrated to the United States in 1909 and was a significant figure in the Yiddish poetry movement.[186] Unsurprisingly, given its title, much of the text emphasizes the beauty of America. Indeed, the opening two stanzas, which in performance are read aloud by the narrator, do just that:

"I'm one with the audacious sky-line of Manhattan,
The mighty rivers, canyons, prairies, woods primordial.
I'm one with the roaming autos that seem the earth to flatten,
I'm one with all the things that ring and bravely call: America!

I hail the youthful fervor, the breath of dauntless spaces,
The free and hopeful voices, dialects and speeches manifold,
The blend harmonious of people, tribes, and races -
From sunny south to northern snows, what strength,
What pride, behold - America!"[187]

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[185] Lazar Weiner, "To Thee, America," 1943, Box 4, Folder 39, Lazar Weiner, YIVO, New York, NY.
[186] Ibid; "Aaron Glanz-Leyeless Is Dead," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), December 31, 1966, 15, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1966/12/31/90256641.html?pageNumber=15.
[187] Weiner, "To Thee…", 4.

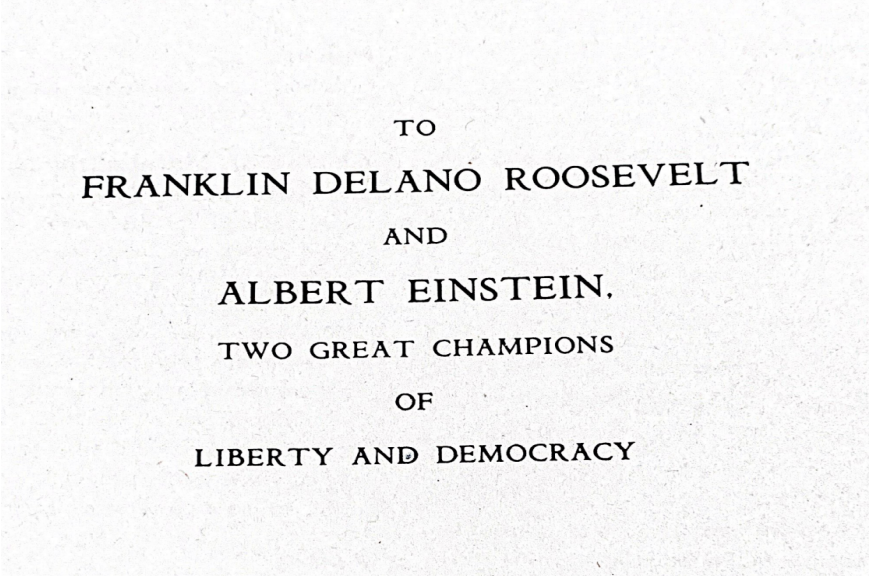
The theme of "the blend harmonious of people, tribes, and races" is one that is repeated throughout the text. Indeed, a great deal of the praise directed towards America in this piece centers on its diversity, and strives to unite the nation's peoples in accordance with their shared hopes and visions for the future. The chorus, referred to in the piece as the "chorus of nationalities", lists over a dozen of the ethnic groups comprising American society, and describes them as having "The same ideal: / Freedom, work, equality, faith, / Hope that future years will be / Free from want and slavery."[188] Indeed, this emphasis on unity is repeated throughout the piece, which escalates at the conclusion to a call for solidarity: "To brotherhood of all the human tribes and nations, / To happiness and freedom universal, glorious!"[189]

"To Thee, America" seems a very fitting example of how the Workmen's Circle and similar organizations modified their labor advocacy to fit the patriotism of the time. While the piece is an ode of love to the country at its core, politics and leftism do make their way into the text as well. In Weiner's piece, many of the most labor-centered lyrics are spoken by the narrator, rather than sung by the choir. Such lines include "Labor is the world's foundation, / Work is starting point!", and the call for "trade unions, night schools, classes, / Free education for the masses."[190] Positioning both political reform and patriotic support as issues that can coexist is a significant change for the Workmen's Circle, but one that makes a great deal of sense given the context of World War II.

In addition to bringing together the political and the patriotic, "To Thee, America" also deepens the ties between American history and Jewish culture. Although this is done throughout the text, one of the most compelling examples comes towards its end. Interspersed with verses

[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid, 5.
[190] Ibid, 4.

sung by the soloist, the narrator reads three sets of names aloud; the first being "Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt…", the second "Moses, Samuel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah…", and the final "Haym Solomon, Emma Lazarus, Cardozo, Brandeis, Einstein…".[191] Here, Leyeless is drawing parallels between some of the most notable American presidents, Old Testament religious figures, and influential Jewish Americans. While the first list is fundamentally American, and the second fundamentally religious, the third brings both together, emphasizing the flourishing of Jewish life in America, as well as the importance of Jewish individuals to American history more broadly. Indeed, this theme is captured as well in Weiner's dedication at the beginning of his piece: "To Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Albert Einstein, Two Great Champions of Liberty and Democracy."[192]



Given all of these themes, it is not surprising that "To Thee, America" would be chosen as a fitting text for Weiner and the Workmen's Circle Chorus. Beyond its significance in reflecting the Circle's beliefs and values, this piece is also noteworthy because of its successful

[191] Ibid, 5.
[192] Ibid, 3.

reach into and reception by non-Jewish audiences. Indeed, the piece's premier, which took place on May 7, 1944, was covered in the *New York Times*.[193] While "To Thee, America" was certainly not the first Workmen's Circle Chorus piece and performance to achieve cross-cultural success, its dedicated *New York Times* coverage and the extent to which it was well-received demonstrates the artistic caliber of the piece, as well as the appeal of more patriotic programming.

As one might expect, learning of the mass-murder of Jews in Europe led to increased solidarity and cooperation across Jewish groups in America. Indeed, the Workmen's Circle was one of many Jewish organizations during World War II to work with groups they never would have previously. Specifically, the Circle worked hand in hand with "mainstream Jewish organizations" that normally were at odds with their socialist beliefs, attempting to coordinate relief efforts and help facilitate immigration to America for those fleeing Europe.[194]

Beyond motivating efforts to help mitigate the urgent crisis facing European Jews, World War II also prompted the heightening of cultural and artistic activities within the Workmen's Circle and its peer organizations. With the destruction wrought by the Holocaust, American Jewish organizations felt an obligation "to take up the creative role in the Jewish social and cultural domain which had been sustained by Eastern European Jewry."[195] Needing to fill this void of cultural creation and preservation increased the importance of groups such as the Workmen's Circle Chorus, as well as providing the impetus for other voluntary societies to form similar artistic wings.

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[193] "Weiner Cantata Heard: Premiere of 'To Thee, America' by Workmen's Circle Chorus," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), May 8, 1944, https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/weiner-cantata-heard/docview/106771277/se-2.
[194] Jacobson, 123.
[195] Ibid, 126.

In the aftermath of the War, the 1950s represent the peak for Yiddish choruses operating throughout America. The leadup to this peak began during World War II, with 19 new Workmen's Circle branches forming choruses in the year 1940 alone.[196] By the early 1950s, choruses had been formed in branches throughout the country, with a particularly significant increase on the west coast.[197] These choruses were widely popular and in high demand, many holding an average of 25 concerts a year during this period.[198]

The founding of the state of Israel in 1948 was another significant event for the Workmen's Circle and its choruses. Certain Jewish American labor organizations, such as the Labor Zionist Farband, were immediately thrilled, while other groups on the leftist spectrum were hesitant.[199] The Workmen's Circle fell somewhere in between, quickly planning fundraisers and concerts to serve as a "tribute to Israel", but also critiquing the newly founded state.[200] Indeed, in the opening address of a 1952 regional conference, speaker Joseph Duntov stated that "We have a positive attitude mingled with pride towards the new state of Israel and [will] attempt to help its development both morally and financially. At the same time, we do not approve of many happenings in that country."[201] One particular cause of concern for Circle members was the primacy of Hebrew in Israel. Indeed, one of the general resolutions of this conference was a statement of general support for Israel and hope for socialist leadership in its future, with the caveat that "At the same time, we oppose the discriminating against the Yiddish language and culture in Israel."[202]

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[196] Ibid, 130.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid, 128.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Joseph Duntov, "Opening Address of the 33rd Southern District Workmen's Circle Conference," September 1952, Box 5, Folder 1, Workmen's Circle, YIVO, New York, NY, 1.
[202] Ibid, 13.

Despite the success of the early 1950s, in the years to come Yiddish choruses began to face pressures that would eventually lead to a steep decline in their number and prevalence. One of the forces aligned against the continued existence of these groups was the looming threat of McCarthyism. In this period of heightened anti-Communism and severe scrutiny of leftist organizations, the Workmen's Circle's membership began to fall, and so too did the attendance of its choral performances. In response to this pressure, the Workmen's Circle Chorus and its peers further reduced any Soviet works in their repertoire. But nonetheless, audiences were often less inclined to attend performances from leftist groups more generally.[203] The McCarthy era also discouraged many singers from joining such choruses, as many were hesitant to associate themselves with socialist or otherwise leftist organizations.[204]

Indeed, this pressure prompted many Yiddish choruses to move away from political affiliation. By the 1980s, the Workmen's Circle Chorus was in fact the only such chorus to remain so closely tied to its parental organization.[205] Remaining connected to the Workmen's Circle brought both benefits and disadvantages for the Chorus. While the continued relationship guaranteed the Chorus a captive audience and allowed it to stick more closely to its original identity, it also meant that the broader decline of the organization would be inseparable from the Chorus itself.

Over the 1960s and 1970s, the Workmen's Circle Chorus still existed and performed, but both membership and concert attendance shrank. One exception to this trend, however, came with the hiring of Zalmen Mlotek in 1985.[206] Mlotek was extremely popular among Chorus members and the Circle more broadly for several reasons. First, both of his parents were heavily

[203] Jacobson, 127.
[204] Ibid, 370.
[205] Ibid, 143.
[206] Ibid.

involved in both the Workmen's Circle and Yiddish artistic and cultural preservation. Additionally, Mlotek was extremely knowledgeable about both klezmer music and Yiddish theater, and through his position as director of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, he revitalized the group's repertoire with new music.[207] Today, Mlotek serves as the director of the National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene, the Yiddish theater company which was founded under the Workmen's Circle and has since reached the status of the longest continuously running Yiddish theater company in the world.[208]

From the 1990s through present day, the strength and membership of the Workmen's Circle continues to decline, and with it comes a decrease in the number of branches investing time and funds into their choral programs. Still, there remain active and performing Workmen's Circle Choruses, such as those in Boston and Philadelphia.[209] Even though they are fewer in number today, it cannot be denied that these choruses played a tremendous role in the Circle's success in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. The ability to convey political messaging through song allowed the Workmen's Circle to share their ideals with a broader audience, and to use music to facilitate the blending of socialism with Jewish culture to form a modern Jewish identity.

The Songs of Today:

Despite the general decline in the status and scope of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, the organization nonetheless provides an effective and compelling model of the importance of utilizing the arts in political advocacy and cultural preservation. This can be seen in certain

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[207] Ibid, 143-144.
[208] "About Us,", National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, https://nytf.org/about-us/.
[209] "A Besere Velt Yiddish Chorus," Boston Worker's Circle, https://circleboston.org/arts/; "Philadelphia Workmen's Circle Chorus," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/PhillyYiddishChorus/.

projects and organizations today. The most well known example of the cultural side of this work comes from the National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene, still under the leadership of Zalmen Mlotek. In 2018, the Folksbiene premiered their Yiddish language production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, in which the widely popular musical was performed entirely in Yiddish. The show was extremely successful, playing Off-Broadway in 2018 and 2019, followed by a seven-week return in the winter of 2022.[210]

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Directed by Joel Grey, the production received wide acclaim from a variety of papers and critics, and even won a Drama Desk Award.[212] It is worth noting that the production included supertitle translations, presented in both English and Russian. This is interesting in and of itself, as it indicates that they are, in essence, looking both forward and backward with respect to their audience: forward in the sense that they are inviting a contemporary American audience to be

[210] "Fiddler on the Roof," National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, https://nytf.org/fiddler/.
[211] Image from "Fiddler Education Initiative," National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, https://nytf.org/education/.
[212] "Fiddler on the Roof," National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene.

immersed in the story, and backward insofar as they are welcoming members of the Russian-speaking Jewish population back into a story of their homeland.

Much of the philosophy behind this production of *Fiddler on the Roof* mirrors that of the Workmen's Circle Chorus. Both Joel Grey and Steven Skybell, the production's Tevye, have described a universality to the experiences of persecution and migration that are described in *Fiddler*.[213] This is a sentiment that was certainly held by Circle members. Beyond this, the Yiddish production of *Fiddler on the Roof* provides an example of performance with a political message. In the same interview, Grey and Skybell address the similarities between the plight of Jews in the time of Tevye and his daughters to that of those fleeing from other parts of the world today, and acknowledge the American government's complicity in failing to support immigrants, if not outright abusing them.[214] Going beyond simply talk, the cast of *Fiddler on the Roof* used the occasion of World Refugee Day in 2019 to perform entirely for a non-paying audience made up of refugees, and the cast and creative team also engaged in a talk-back after the show in which they discussed the themes and experiences shared between the groups.[215] Much like the Workmen's Circle Chorus did when performing at political rallies or singing songs of labor struggle, the team behind *Fiddler on the Roof* are effectively using their art to call attention to the need for change and solidarity in the world.

One significant difference between this production and that of Workmen's Circle Chorus, however, is in its participants' initial unfamiliarity with the Yiddish language. The vast majority of the cast performing in *Fiddler on the Roof* did not speak Yiddish before being cast in this

[213] Terry Gross, "Behind Yiddish 'Fiddler on the Roof,'" July 10, 2019, in *Fresh Air by NPR*, podcast, audio, https://open.spotify.com/episode/694sdR8L8hmOaroSlbPWC5?si=930b487c3af14dc9, 25:15.
[214] Ibid, 26:23
[215] Ibid, 26:39.

show, and thus had to learn together as a part of the rehearsal process.[216] The actors were coached by Yiddish language scholar Khane-Faygl Turtletaub, and Skybell compared the process to the experience of learning to perform Shakespearean English.[217]

This provides a critically important example of how to adapt *yiddishkeit* to modern life. Many call Yiddish a "dying language" in America today, as it is rarely spoken, and the majority of its remaining native speakers are elderly. As such, few opportunities exist to expand its cultural sphere, or to instruct and engage new speakers. Outside of Jewish institutions, it is extremely difficult to access Yiddish courses or otherwise learn the language, as it is not at all a priority for mainstream language learning services. According to one estimate, there are less than 60 colleges and universities in America offering Yiddish courses, and far fewer with fully fledged programs.[218] In fact, Duolingo, the most popular online language instruction site, has offered courses in the fictional languages of High Valyrian from *Game of Thrones* since 2017, and Klingon from *Star Trek* since 2018, but only began offering Yiddish courses in 2021.[219] This deemphasis on Yiddish - occurring at an extent to which its utility ranks behind non-spoken, fictional languages - suggests a predominant belief that few are interested in learning it, and that the door is more or less closed on new cultural genesis.

Fiddler on the Roof in Yiddish challenges this notion. Though they did not have a constituency of Yiddish-speaking artists to draw on, as was the case for the Workmen's Circle

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[216] Ibid, 15:30
[217] Ibid, 13:00, 24:30
[218] "Jewish Studies Degrees," HotCoursesAbroad, https://www.hotcoursesabroad.com/study/training-degrees/us-usa/jewish-studies-courses/loc/211/cgory/fm.22-4/sin/ct/programs.html.
[219] Cindy Blanco and Emily Moline, "Yiddish is Now on Duolingo!," Duolingo Blog, last modified April 6, 2021, https://blog.duolingo.com/yiddish-is-now-on-duolingo/.; Kaitlyn Tiffany, "Duolingo Will Soon Offer Lessons in Game of Thrones' High Valyrian," The Verge, last modified July 11, 2017, https://www.theverge.com/tldr/2017/7/11/15952124/game-of-thrones-high-valyrian-language-course-app.; Chaim Gartenberg, "Duolingo Can Now Teach Your How to Speak Klingon," The Verge, last modified March 15, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2018/3/15/17123836/duolingo-klingon-star-trek-learning-course-app-website-qapla.

Chorus in its prime, Mlotek, Grey, and their team were undeterred. Teaching the cast the language had a larger impact than simply increasing the number of Yiddish speakers in the world by 20 or 30. Rather, doing so allowed for the story of a culture to be told in the language of its characters, and for this cultural homecoming to be shared with a broad audience. Additionally, this production of *Fiddler* also helped carve out space and respect in the theater industry for productions in the Yiddish language, as well as other cultural productions more broadly. In essence, the Folksbiene's *Fiddler on the Roof* has continued on the legacy of groups such as the Workmen's Circle Chorus, in carrying forward the Yiddish language, as well as the ethos of Jewish culture, for a newer generation.

Educational institutions are working to increase access to Yiddish language instruction and cultural resources. This is true, at least to a certain extent, here at Emory. Courses in "Yiddish for German Speakers" seem to have been offered approximately once a year for the past five or so years, and even more opportunities exist here to engage in Yiddish history and culture.[220] Farther afield, one of the most significant institutions of Yiddish instruction is the Yiddish Book Center, which is housed on the campus of Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, and is closely tied to the school.[221] In addition to offering language courses and having created one of the most commonly used Yiddish language textbooks, the Yiddish Book Center has also been building up its Steven Spielberg Digital Yiddish Library since 2009, arguably the most comprehensive database of Yiddish texts, including over 11,000 titles.[222] The Spielberg Library intends to refurbish and copy Yiddish texts, with the ultimate goal of distributing them and making them accessible to a broad audience.

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[220] "Emory University Course Atlas," Emory University Course Atlas, https://atlas.emory.edu/.
[221] "Yiddish Book Center," Yiddish Book Center, https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/.
[222] "Steven Spielberg Digital Yiddish Library," Yiddish Book Center, https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/digital-yiddish-library.

The situation of Yiddish survival in America is not unlike those faced by other immigrant communities and their own languages. While perhaps made more extreme by the fact that so many of the world's Yiddish speakers were murdered in the Holocaust, as well as by the fact that Hebrew has supplanted Yiddish as the primary language of Jewish learning, the tensions between language preservation and assimilation are faced by a variety of immigrant groups in America. The model presented by the Workmen's Circle Chorus, of using the arts to carry both language and culture into the modern world, can be seen in several of these communities. For example, several Spanish-language theater companies thrive in America today, including the Repertorio Español in Manhattan, and the Thalia Hispanic Theatre in Queens.[223] Like the Workmen's Circle Chorus, these companies produce works primarily in their communities' native language, in this case Spanish, and, importantly, are not only spaces for the performance of traditional works from the Spanish theatrical canon, but also for the expansion of the tradition with new works. In fact, the Repertorio Español hosted the initial read-through of Lin Manuel Miranda's first Tony Award-winning musical, *In the Heights*.

Likewise, there are many contemporary examples of the performing arts serving a crucial tool in political expression today. Indeed, a variety of political choirs remain active. For example, the New York Democratic Socialists recently founded a choir called Sing in Solidarity, and in England the activity of political choirs such as Raised Voices saw its largest ever spike, with groups singing out in opposition to Brexit.[224] A particularly apt example, and one which

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[223]Jose Solís, "5 Theatres You Need to Know: Latinx Companies in NYC," TDF, https://www.tdf.org/on-stage/tdf-stages/5-theatres-you-need-to-know-latinx-companies-in-nyc/.

[224] Annie Levin, "Radicals Go Caroling: The Untold Story of Progressive Choirs," Yes Magazine, last modified December 22, 2021, https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2021/12/22/radicals-caroling-progressive-choirs.; Stephen Beard, "The London Choir Singing out against Brexit," Marketplace, last modified April 1, 2019, https://www.marketplace.org/2019/04/01/london-choir-provides-counterpoint-brexit/.

now blends the cultural and the political in ways not unlike the Workmen's Circle Chorus, is the Ukrainian Chorus Dumka of New York. For the past 70 years, this Chorus has preserved Ukrainian language and culture through a repertoire heavy with traditional folk songs, performing in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, and the Kennedy Center.[225] While founded as a cultural organization without political ties, the group has nonetheless taken on the role of advocating for the Ukrainian people in the face of Russia's invasion in February 2022. They have done so on a highly visible level, most notably performing a "Prayer for Ukraine" on *Saturday Night Live* soon after the onset of the war.[226]

When looking at such examples, it is clear that the lessons of the Workmen's Circle Chorus still hold significant relevance and importance today. Music has profound value in both the political and cultural realms, and this tradition cannot be ignored. For the Jewish tradition in particular, these four values - religion, culture, social idealism, and music - are deeply intertwined. In Steven Skybell's reflection on Tevye's final appearance in *Fiddler on the Roof*, he explains this quite well:

"...the hope of Fiddler on the Roof is the final gesture of Tevye, [in] which he nods to the Fiddler and says 'I don't know where I'm going, but I know I want you to come with me.' Whatever this emblem of tradition, Jewishness, God, or shtetl life is…he finally says 'come with me, we're in this together [and] I'm not going to deny you even if that is the reason why I'm being thrown out."[227]

In the example of the Workmen's Circle Chorus, we can find a thread of tradition to carry forward, and valuable historical guidance as to the significance of the performing arts in religion, culture, and politics.

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[225] "The Ukrainian Chorus Dumka of New York," Dumka Chorus, https://dumkachorus.org/.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Gross, "Behind Yiddish Fiddler", 27:10.

Music Appendix:

Third Seder pieces, in order of appearance in Chapter Three

"Ma Nishtano." On *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*. Produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Conducted by Zalman Mlotek. Performed by Amy Goldstein, Elizabeth Shammash, Robert Bloch, Richard Kosowski, Roberta Belson, and Russel Ashley. 2013, compact disc. https://open.spotify.com/track/3pmXS5UKSc27sXLOM7KMB8?si=d319b33132e74cbe.

Schwartz, I. J., adapt. "Dayeinu." On *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*. Produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Conducted by Zalman Mlotek. Performed by Amy Goldstein, Elizabeth Shammash, Robert Bloch, Richard Kosowski, Roberta Belson, and Russel Ashley. 2013, compact disc. https://open.spotify.com/track/5TXqiy3N7to2sAML85nycC?si=38b4c2d541d942eb.

Gelbart, Michl. "Khad Gadyo." Lyrics by I. Lukowsky. On *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*. Produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Conducted by Zalman Mlotek. Performed by Amy Goldstein, Elizabeth Shammash, Robert Bloch, Richard Kosowski, Roberta Belson, and Russel Ashley. 2013, compact disc. https://open.spotify.com/track/0ccWFgz32099ty4xrBi4MY?si=4b57ce02694f4a9c.

Almoni, P. "Opening Medley." On *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*. Produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Conducted by Zalman Mlotek. Performed by Amy Goldstein, Elizabeth Shammash, Robert Bloch, Richard Kosowski, Roberta Belson, and Russel Ashley. 2013, compact disc. https://open.spotify.com/track/2POzlOZVgmk6eOoN4mZuEN?si=3134b8ae9be14205.

Bugtach, Samuel. "Zog Maran." Lyrics by Avraham Reisen. On *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*. Produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Conducted by Zalman Mlotek. Performed by Amy Goldstein, Elizabeth Shammash, Robert Bloch, Richard Kosowski, Roberta Belson, and Russel Ashley. 2013, compact disc. https://open.spotify.com/track/5eYgrSm21xga4egHjdsEQT?si=0bbd94c00c8d4962.

"Dos Iz Dos Oreme Brot." On *Milken Archive Digital Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration*. Produced by Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Conducted by Zalman Mlotek. Performed by Amy Goldstein, Elizabeth Shammash, Robert Bloch, Richard Kosowski, Roberta Belson, and Russel Ashley. 2013, compact disc. https://open.spotify.com/track/3pmXS5UKSc27sXLOM7KMB8?si=d319b33132e74cbe.

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New York Workmen's Circle Chorus. 1951. Photograph. Box 13, Folder 181. Lazar Weiner. YIVO, New York, NY.

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Weiner, Lazar, and Alfred Scott. "The Town Hall." 1938. Box 12, Folder 175. Lazar Weiner. YIVO, New York, NY.

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