THE SOCIAL LIFE OF JEWISH MUSIC RECORDS FROM 1948 CZECHOSLOVAKIA BY *HAZZAN* JOSEF WEISS[1]

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Abstract: *This article traces transnational "life" trajectories of two rare Jewish religious music records from 1948 Communist Czechoslovakia and of their main performer Josef Weiss (ca. 1912, Veľké Kapušany – 1985 Netanya), who was a* hazzan *(cantor) in synagogues in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Jerusalem, Ramat Gan, Manchester, and New York, but has remained mostly unknown to music history. It shows how these two 78-rpm records stand at the core of Weiss's grandson's family / music / memory project, which has revealed and prepared to reissue 52 audio recordings to preserve his grandfather's legacy. While following these and other digitized and technologically modified recordings of Weiss on their recent path between the Czech Republic, Israel, Hungary, and the US, the article sheds light on how this case fits into the broader framework of the social life of things and the context of musical remembrance. Already put to use during the life-cycle rituals of Weiss's children and grandchildren, as well as in a museum exhibition – this family project constructs a fragment of a Jewish sonic past for the present needs of its actors, while being entangled with the current practice of Jewish memory institutions, as well as with the activities of private record collectors and of one ethnomusicologist (myself).*

Keywords: *Cantorial records; ethnomusicology; hazzan; multi-sited ethnography; social life of things*

[1] This publication is affiliated with Charles University, Faculty of Humanities, and was supported by its SVV Grant no. 26060702 "Prague Soundscapes II", research area Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Scene I. Efrat, 2022. Waiting for a Pesach Carwash and Remembering the Family Surprise

"To preserve and even to make his legacy", said Avraham Ben-Tzvi (phone call, 4 April 2022) when I asked him about his motivation behind the synthesized orchestration added to some of the newly rescued, digitized, and sound-restored *hazzanuth*[2] (Jewish cantorial music) recordings, originally recorded on reel-to-reel tapes in Ramat Gan, Manchester, and New York in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. They will be part of a "a commemorative set" (Ben-Tzvi, text message, 18 June 2020) – a forthcoming triple-CD music album comprised of 52 audio tracks of his late grandfather, *hazzan* Josef Weiss (ca. 1912, Veľké Kapušany – 1985 Netanya; see Figure 1). Fifty-two-year-old Avraham, born in the USA, is an attorney in Jerusalem representing corporations and individuals in a variety of corporate and civil practice areas. He was sitting in his car, waiting in a long line for a carwash before shopping for the Pesach holidays, which he will celebrate with his family in Israel, when, in a call to Prague, he was explaining to me the incentives for this music project, which he has self-financed and self-produced in his free time.

Since 2015, Avraham has been on a quest to find and digitize sound records of his grandfather, who was *hazzan* (cantor) in synagogues in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Jerusalem, Ramat Gan, Manchester, and New York. It all began when his partner in his Israeli law firm, attorney and *hazzan* Daniel B. Schwartz, got involved in an internet discussion with *aficionados* and *cognoscenti* of historical cantorial records. They were wondering about two 78-rpm Supraphon records from Czechoslovakia (Weiss n.d. a, b; see Figure 2), with one of them having a gramophone record vignette stating "Josef Weiss, cantor of Jerusalem":

[2] Worship in the synagogue is the initial spatio-temporal framework for Jewish religious music. "Synagogue music" is the means of expressing the sacred texts. Therefore it is primarily a vocal practice, connected with the liturgical language, biblical Hebrew. Jewish practice of the performance of sacred texts is not the property of a religious elite. In the 8th to 10th centuries, however, the role of the *hazzan*, a liturgical specialist who leads the community with his sung recitation, was formalized. The *hazzan* has also been called "cantor" in Central Europe since the middle of the 19th century. The *hazzanuth* is the repertoire of cantorial songs and recitatives and the characteristic method of improvisation and ornamentation. For more, see Summit 2000, Slobin 2002, or Kligman 2015; for Ashkenazi liturgical music, see Schleifer 1995; for music of the Jewish service in Central and Eastern Europe, specifically in Communist Hungary, see Frigyesi 2018.

Figure 1. Josef Weiss in cantorial attire (Vienna or Budapest, c. 1936). Private archive of A. Ben-Tzvi. Used with permission.

> Daniel asked me if it wasn't my grandfather. He knew from me he was a hazz'n in Prague before he came to Jerusalem. I didn't know that he had ever made some recordings. Nobody in my family had ever talked about it. So, I wrote to Supraphon. And it turned out that the Jewish Museum in Prague has reissued his Supraphon recordings a few years ago. I ordered it online [...] And when it arrived, when I listened to it, I was stunned [...] I couldn't believe it. So, I sent it to New York, to my mum and her older sister, my aunt Elka [born in Prague], and they immediately recognized his voice as well (Ben-Tzvi, phone call, 4 April 2022).

While listening to the two records – four tracks in total, recorded on 17 September 1948, in Rokoska Studio, Prague, published presumably between the years 1948–1950[3] in at least four different pressings, and republished six dec-

[3] Contrary to the documented recording's date and place, the years of publication are not given – neither on the records, nor in the original recording protocols (scanned copy shared by Gössel, e-mail,

Figure 2. Photograph of one of the Josef Weiss's 1948 Prague record. Private archive of A. Ben-Tzvi. Used with permission.

ades later by the Jewish Museum in Prague (Gössel and Bloch 2008) – Avraham, a modern-Orthodox[4] Israeli Jew, born and raised in the USA, who, according to his words, had only had a moderate interest in cantorial music before, experienced an intensely transformative moment. The voice of the dead *hazzan*, his ancestor, moved him profoundly (Ben-Tzvi, phone call, 17 March 2018).

Following the scholarly discourse of ethnomusicology, this article attempts to show, how Avraham's listening to the sound recordings from Prague triggered an act of "musical remembrance" (Jurková 2017), which took a form of a family / music / memory project to preserve his grandfather's legacy. Inspired also by material culture studies in anthropology, especially the concept of the "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986) and the perspective of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), I trace the transnational trajectories of rare Jewish religious music records from 1948 Communist Czechoslovakia as a core of Avraham's seven-year (and continuing) engagement done during his free time, when these and other digitized sound tracks of the late *hazzan* Josef Weiss travelled between Prague, Jerusalem, Budapest, Brooklyn, Efrat, and Ra'anana. While

4 May 2017), nor in the inner database system of the Supraphon company (Rulf, e-mail, 16 November 2015). As the company was privatized in 1992, its archive is not accessible to public. The years of original publication have been estimated by the author according to the period Supraphon vignettes in Müller and Prajzler 2017.

4 For the term Jewish "Orthodox", see Caplan 2016 and Brink-Danan 2008.

also situating myself in the story and reflecting on my (rather engaged) role as ethnomusicologist in the memory production process, I follow (in physical or mediated ways) the recordings of Josef Weiss to diverse social and cultural contexts: from the Prague homes of non-Jewish record collectors to the National Library in Israel and the permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Prague, as well as to the bed of a *hazzan's* dying daughter in New York and a *Hassidic* wedding in Israel.

During this process, the biography of the performer is also constructed, as well as the original cultural and social context of the recordings. I therefore show how Weiss's Prague records circulated in different "regimes of value" (Appadurai 1986, 4) in different spaces and times. Rooted in the soundscape of the cantorial "Golden Age" era (roughly 1901–1950), during which the recording industry transvalued the sounds of Jewish ritual into economically exchangeable physical artefacts – the mentioned records were made as a commodity for export from Communist Czechoslovakia. This is rather paradoxical, as this state's anti-religious and anti-Semitic policy, erasing memories of the ethnic minorities, severely affected its Jewish minority and its music. Belonging to the few cantorial recordings published in Czechoslovakia, Josef Weiss's records became a historical rarity, mostly unknown, like Weiss himself.

Further, I focus on two additional historical moments: firstly when these records were discovered by a private collector in Prague and returned to the commodity phase as a publication by the Jewish Museum in Prague (JMP) in 2008 (nevertheless with the performer's biography obscured). And secondly, when they were rediscovered by the cantor's family in 2015 in Israel, and found their way to family ritual events as well as to the permanent exhibition of the JMP, while also being prepared to be part of a cantor's family commemorative music album focusing on "cantorial revivalists" (Lockwood 2021). Thus, I not only demonstrate how in the case of Josef Weiss's sound records, the values ascribed to the same audio object change, depending on their context, but also how music memory production is entangled with materiality and the commoditization process in complex ways.

Sound Recordings and Musical Remembrance

Situating Avraham ethnographically as a key actor could have been just one of the many possible openings of this story, in which music, as part of cultural production, is seen as a situated practice (e.g., Berger and Stone 2019: 54).

Musical practices, being part of various current global soundscapes, are often inextricably connected with collective memory practices. Ethnomusicologists have systematically explored the relationship between music and Jewish memory at least since the late 1990s (e.g., by Kay Kaufman Shelemay in her 1998 work on Syrian Jews in the diaspora and their performances of liturgical hymns; or by Edwin Seroussi in 2014 on nostalgic Zionist soundscapes). I have been inspired by Zuzana Jurková's (2017) concept of "musical remembrance" – the idea that musical practices can become both the object and the means of both individual and collective memory constructed for the needs of the present. I applied Jurková's conceptualization in my previous work on the negotiation of musical remembrance within Jewish ritual performance in Prague's Old-New Synagogue in the case of particular music tunes (Seidlová 2018), as well as in my study of the social life of musical instruments as sites of cultural meaning and memory production in the case of a newly revived synagogue organ in the Czech Republic (Seidlová 2020a). I examined the story of this music instrument from the anthropological and material culture studies perspective of "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986), which I utilize in this article as well.

Social Life of Things

Appadurai's theoretical perspective, published in the collective monograph *Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, "explores the conditions under which economic objects circulate in different regimes of value in space and time" (1986, 4; this also relates to the concept of "cultural biography of things" by Igor Kopytoff, see Appadurai 1986, 64). Appadurai claims in it that a commodity is often just one phase in a social life of things, which are otherwise moving in and out of the commodity state. This movement can be terminal or reversible, and considered normative or deviant. A particular object moving through these contexts and states becomes in this way culturally defined and redefined in meaning and value by its owners or users. Therefore, Appadurai speaks of "regimes of value", which account for the constant transcendence of cultural boundaries by the flow of commodities. This line of thought, supported by Appadurai's subsequent work on the cultural dimensions of globalization (2003), resonates both in literature on memory and materiality in art and popular culture (Muntean et al. 2016) and in ethnomusicological discussions of the social life of musical instruments, e.g., world music instruments caught up in the transnational movement of consumer

goods as sites of meaning production, their value and meaning being negotiated and contested in the process (Dawe 2003, 274; Bates 2012). I previously used this approach in the mapping of Prague's Jeruzalémská synagogue organ's "movement" across different cultural value domains (Seidlová 2020a), and Clara Wenz (2020), for example, incorporated it into her study of a biography of a Hebrew Baidaphon record. The material culture studies perspective, which is critical of the idea that objects only symbolize or represent aspects of one pre-existing culture or identity, therefore becomes attentive to the ways in which objects can produce particular social effects or enable certain cultural practices (Woodward 2013). This perspective is therefore helpful in examining the obvious yet complicated relationship between sound recordings, social, and individual history, and memory, which also became the current axis of interest in my research of religious soundscapes[5] of Jews from/in the Czech lands. I use the main theoretical framework explained above, but enriched by the current literature on the relation between Jewish music and media of sound reproduction as well as by the theoretical and methodological perspective of multi-sited ethnography.

Transnational Flow of Cantorial Records

It would be naïve to suppose that the *hazzan's* art, even in the most traditional liturgical context, was free from any aspect that could be, and indeed was, paid for and traded. The establishment of the "choral-synagogues" in 19th-century Central Europe enhanced the function of the bigger Ashkenazi synagogues as centres of music-making, combining ritual and entertainment, when the singing of cantor and his choir developed into virtuoso art performances, which attracted crowds of listeners (Schleifer 1995, 65). The period's re-conceptualization of *hazzanuth* also as an art further enhanced the process of professionalizing the cantorate, with side effects such as a demand for famous performers, competition for the best-paid jobs in central synagogues, or the emergence of cantorial concerts in a non-ritual context. However, the 20th-century recording industry, which established a "paradigm in which the music, the performer, and its material manifestation [the recording] were inextricably bound" together

[5] In soundscapes theory (Appadurai 2003; Jurková et al. 2014; Shelemay 2015), soundscapes are understood as various music cultures, examined in relation to their setting, sound, and significance (see Shelemay 2015, xxxiv–v).

(Meizel and Daughtry 2019, 182), influenced the transformation of multiple genres of (not only) Jewish music into physical commodities.[6]

At the start of the 20th century, recording studios in Central Europe, and later in the USA, began producing records of cantors, allowing their music – *hazzanuth* in Hebrew, *khazones* in Yiddish – to be purchased and collected for private listening, removing the previously necessary context of collective worshipping in the synagogue. The three- to four-minute capacity of each side of a recorded disc resulted in the division of the cantorial repertoire into short repeatable "hits". After listening to them repeatedly in privacy, one could assign to memory not only the music's text or its melodies and harmonies, but the particular cantor's interpretive cadences as well (Walden 2015, 59–60). The secular setting of the recording studio allowed the musical accompaniment of singing cantors by organ or ensembles of instruments (still forbidden in many synagogues during religious rituals),[7] and even enabled the emergence of a music figure banned in synagogue ritual by rabbinic law: the female professional singer of cantorial repertoire, or *khaznte* (ibid., 60). For the listeners of cantorial records, the commercial availability of these records emphasized that *hazzanuth* was also an art form, and it was also listened to as such. For some cantors, nevertheless, entering into the commercial world of making and selling sound recordings created friction with their religious values (Walden 2015, 59), especially with their conceptualization of the appropriate role of a ritual leader as a spiritual messenger.

The cantors' engagement in the recording industry also broadened their interest in secular repertoires, especially opera, with its "conception of transcendent beauty derived from 19th-century Romantic aesthetics, which represented vocal performers as heroic artists" (Lockwood 2021, 5). The recorded cantorial style typically featured a style of non-metered "recitative" singing associated with Eastern European Jewish styles of prayer leading, influenced by the model of European art vocal music. While drawing on discourses of the nation-building and the construction of ethnic identity that were part of the shared culture of European musicians in the early 20th century, Golden Age

6 Actually, ethnomusicologist Joshua Walden claims that the technologies of sound reproduction were the "central force in the development of definitions and genres of Jewish music, and in initiating modern modes of performing, listening to, and talking about Jewish repertories" (Walden 2015, 57).

7 Some Orthodox communities have accepted the organ and other musical instrument accompaniment for worship on weekdays, weddings, commemorations, filming, and concerts. Shabbat and holidays are characterized by male or full communal singing without instrumental accompaniment.

hazzanim cultivated a new stylized version of Jewish sacred music (ibid.) as a core of their music revival movement. They nostalgically sought an imagined sonic past by reanimating ancestors' ways characterized by the vocal practice of "small town *bal tefiles* (prayer leaders), Chassidic [*sic*] devotional music, and the noisy heterophony of *davenen* (chanting prayer texts [see Frigyesi 2018]), reconfigured as an art music influenced by opera and performed by hyper-dramatic singers" (Lockwood 2020, 1–2). While this repertoire became detached from some of its liturgical meanings, Joshua Walden shows how it also took on new cultural associations – for example immigrant nostalgia, ethnic solidarity, and the musical demonstration of Jewish identity for non-Jewish listeners (2015, 59). The records also brought an interest in "concert-services" (Schleifer 1995, 65–66), when Jews who listened to their favourite cantors on records wanted to hear and see them in live worship performance. As Eliyahu Schleifer remarks, entering the synagogue service led by the recording celebrities "was by tickets only and the congregation became an audience that demanded its money's worth of singing" (ibid.). After World War II, this kind of concert-service gradually declined, along with the demand for *hazzanuth* as art in Orthodox worship.[8]

In sum, the old cantorial records offer "an aestheticized version of prayer as it was practiced by star Jewish performers of synagogue music on record (1901–c.1950)" (Lockwood 2021, 5). Called a Golden Age of Jewish sacred music by its fans, these records have been reissued on anthology albums since the 1960s and are now globally available as free content on the internet (ibid.) As such, they have become the key component of a current soundscape of cantorial revivalists, i.e. historical cantorial records *aficionados* overlapping with a cohort of young, often *Hassidic* performers, animating these archival records during their performances, whom Jeremiah Lockwood calls "cantorial revivalists" (2021).

The transnational flow of the so-called Golden era of cantorial records, which started in Europe and culminated in the USA in the interwar period, being created mainly by Orthodox cantors migrating from Eastern Europe with their Eastern-Ashkenazic vocal-virtuoso and emotionally urgent music style, also manifested itself on the territory of the then newly emergent state in Central Europe: the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). In interwar Czechoslovakia, records of star cantors from abroad were manufactured (see Rosenblatt 1927; Kwartin n.d.). Nevertheless, it is still rather surprising that

[8] For reasons and consequences, see Schleifer 1995, 66.

we know so far[9] of only one Czechoslovak cantor who appears on a commercial record during the interwar period: Igno Mann (1932), the chief-cantor of Brno (Seidlová 2020b).

In Czechoslovakia after the World War II, the market for gramophone records was not only decimated by the war; it also became regulated by the state, as the two largest music publishing houses, Ultraphon and Esta, were nationalized in 1946 by president Edvard Beneš's decrees, becoming part of the national company Gramofonové závody (GZ). In 1946, Supraphon, originally an export trademark registered by Ultraphon, became an export sub-label of the GZ (Müller and Prajzler 2017). The February coup in 1948 started the second wave of massive nationalization, through which the ruling Communist Party gradually destroyed private business in Czechoslovakia.

The story of cantorial recordings from the former Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1989 is a puzzle that I have been putting together since 2002. In this article, I draw on my previous research data on the cultural history of cantorial recordings which were either made in Communist Czechoslovakia or were featured or owned by Czechoslovak Jews who stayed in or escaped from Communist Czechoslovakia and which appeared on various media, i.e., on gramophone discs, reel-to-reel tapes, or audiocassettes (Seidlová 2007, 2009, 2020a, b; Seidlová and Knapp 2008). The Communist Czechoslovak state, oppressive to its citizens of Jewish origin and their culture, controlled the local music production through censorship. So far, my research data has shown that the few discs of Jewish religious music published during the Communist Era (1948–1989) in Czechoslovakia were mostly aimed as commodities for export, mainly beyond the Iron Curtain. The timings of their publication coincide with political circumstances: since 1971, the early years of Normalization era, no recordings with Jewish music in general were published on the local, state-controlled market. Furthermore, out of those few cantorial records published in Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1971, only three featured Czechoslovak cantors-performers (Josef Weiss, ca. 1912–1985; Salomon Weisz, 1911–1992; and Alexandr Singer, ca. 1916–2007), singing on only seven music tracks in total (Weiss n. d. a, b, four tracks; Weisz in Weisz, Katz and Katz 1965, two tracks; Singer 1971, one track). The rest were cantors from Romania (Shalom

[9] This statement is based on Gössel's and my own finding. Copies of Rosenblatt (1927) and Mann (1932) are part of the small audio collection of the JMP, mostly acquired from Gössel's donation.

Katz) and Hungary (Eugen Katz, and Marcel Loránd[10] and his trio). Following the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, even the already scarce appearance of local cantors on radio stopped. (The last one seems to be Neufeld, Neufeld and Neufeld 1967; see Fousková 2010, Seidlová 2020b.) Nevertheless, there existed other categories of cantorial recordings in Czechoslovakia: those made unofficially or even secretly by the local Jewish people themselves,[11] with a few of them circulating as gifts; or those "smuggled" into Czechoslovakia as gifts from beyond the Iron Curtain.[12] Field recordings from the Old-New Synagogue in Prague made by Judit Frigyesi in 1980 (1980; see also 2018) then represent the only case of ethnomusicological research of Jewish religious music on the territory of Communist Czechoslovakia. These data offer not only a counter-narrative to the usually-taken-for-granted story that the rich musical culture of Czechoslovak Jews was completely decimated after the holocaust, but also offer a platform for tracing some of these historical recordings of Czechoslovak cantors on their current transnational (and rather unexpected) "life" trajectories, such as in the case of records by Josef Weiss.

The Constitution of Multi-Sited Ethnography

The aim of tracing these trajectories calls for the employment of the approach of multi-sited ethnography, which examines the circulation of people, things, and ideas, flowing across national boundaries (Marcus 1995; Appadurai 2003).[13] "Following a thing" represented a suitable strategy for my current topic as well. In this way, I could trace Josef Weiss's records along their path, describe their trajectory, and construct their cultural biography, while analysing the regimes of value, through which they have been defined and redefined on this way. This framework then enables me to gain a deeper understanding of how music memory production is entangled with materiality and the commoditization process.

10 See Stellmacher 2014.

11 Discovered by the author (Seidlová and Knapp 2008), as well as in the case of the unpublished recordings of cantor Samuel Landerer made in Prague in 1960s, discovered by the same researcher only in 2018.

12 As shown from the estate of cantor Ladislav Blum (see Seidlová 2009).

13 This type of ethnography suggested by Marcus (1995) stems from Appadurai's work on social life of things (1986) as well as from his well-known concept of –scapes (2003), or five specific global flows (*ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape, ideoscape*). The researcher follows, maps, or "tracks" the object along its path. The object being either a specific community, thing (physical object, commodity, works of art, or intellectual property), metaphor, story, or conflict.

In accordance with George E. Marcus (1995, 100), and his explication of multi-sited ethnography, however, not all fieldwork sites are treated by a uniform set of fieldwork practices of the same intensity. While I am based in Prague, which constitutes one site of this strategically situated fieldwork, Jerusalem became the main destination of my intense one-week field trips in June 2018 and October 2019, with a preliminary stay in November 2017.[14] Due to the subsequent Covid-19 pandemics, the other interconnected sites of the trajectory were treated only via internet-based communication. Nevertheless, as my story of tracing cantor Weiss's records begins back in 2007, I first offer a recollection of my own encounter with them in a manner of autobiographical ethnographic writing (inspired by e.g., Frigyesi 2018). The aim is not only to position myself but also to reflect on how the multi-sited ethnography is in this case conditioned by circumstances surrounding different research methods, for example, a research of documents from mostly private archives, and oral history interviews and informal communication. The fieldworker in this way becomes part of a broader network of actors, ranging from historians, ethnomusicologists, private collectors, cantors and cantorial aficionados to cantors' family members.

Scene II. Prague, 2007–2008. The Weiss and Weisz "Mystery"

I could have been one of the first people in the Czech Republic in 2007 who heard those four freshly digitized sound tracks of the two original shellac records (Weiss n.d. a, b), unavailable to the public for decades. Now burned on a compact disc with a handwritten sleeve note, the legendary gramophone record collector Gabriel Gössel (1943–2020) gifted me the copies in front of his apartment on the picturesque Kampa, an island on the Vltava river in central Prague. "This is so far the only thing I have got, apart from those three or four records by other Jewish cantors we talked about" (see Rosenblatt 1927; Mann 1932; Katz n.d.; Weisz n.d.), said the kind owner of probably the most extensive private collection of old music media from Czechoslovakia, while shrugging his shoulders.

I rushed home to play it. There were four liturgical pieces in Hebrew (Eastern-Ashkenazi pronunciation): "Ano Awdoh", "Birchos kohanim",

[14] If data from Prague are based mostly on (auto-)ethnographic field notes, the data from Jerusalem are constructed mainly from formal and informal in-situ interviews preceded and followed by e-mails, messages, and phone calls.

"Ribon ho-olomin", and "Weseorew lefonecho", accompanied by an orchestra. Later, we listened to it together with my field consultant at that time, Michal Foršt, a local cantor and professional singer of Western art music. He was excited:

> The sobs and general phrasing is the East-Ashkenazi way [...] it is a spinto tenor, his coloraturas are great, absolutely confident, large range usable from b2, to sounding c5 ["high c"]. [...] He concentrates on middle and high positions, [...] high vocal intelligence, the tone is set in the mask, as in the Italian bel canto, no technical problems, knows *messa di voce*, in a higher position from g above, I hear *voix mixte*, it sounds to me like classical opera training. I hear Fritz Wunderlich, maybe Beno Blachút with his softness and warmth in the background... Very beautiful... (interview, 15 February 2007).

We both admired Weiss's mesmerizing, powerful tenor voice of a timbre between lyric and dramatic, with an extensive range and exceptional vocal control, handling large musical climaxes with self-confidence, with a bit of narrow, Eastern-Ashkenazi nasal tone in some Hebrew phrases, and rapid melismas and ornaments of the "recitative" compositions.

As I have known that Gabriel Gössel had access to the archive of the Supraphon company, otherwise unavailable to the public, I, the eager student, troubled the collector with questions and he replied patiently: "Who was the singer? Is there anything more written about the records?" "I have told you already, in the protocol of the recording session on 17 September 1948, as well as on the vignettes, there is just 'cantor Josef Weiss'. Nothing else", he replied. "Rare gems, but painfully without any other context. A disaster for ethnomusicological research!", I dramatically scribbled in my notes, while also pondering about the date of the recording session: September 1948, half a year after the Czechoslovak coup d'état in which the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, with Soviet backing, assumed undisputed control over the government. After that year, all Czechoslovak citizens, including Jews, became objects of arbitrary policies of the Communist state. The authoritarian model severely restricted political initiative or agency on the part of its citizens. Starting in the 1950s, the state policy was anti-Semitic, although this attitude was covered under the term *anti-Zionism*.[15] This state policy severely impacted the remaining few local

[15] For more, see Heitlinger 2017.

cantors, all of them holocaust survivors, in performing and publishing their music, and importantly contributed to the fact that very few sound recordings of cantors who officiated in (or were from) the former Czechoslovakia are known in general (cf. Seidlová 2007).

I contacted Gabriel Gössel as a graduate student, desperately searching for more context of precious personal audio recordings made by cantor and opera singer Ladislav Moše Blum (1911 Veľké Kapušany – 1994 Prague), which I discovered during my undergraduate research in Prague in 2002, from interviews with his wife, vocal teacher Terezie Blumová (1909 Budapest – 2008 Prague). Ladislav Blum recorded himself in the 1970s and 1980s semi-secretly and secretly in the Jeruzalémská Synagogue in Prague. In Communist Czechoslovakia during this period, no cantorial music records (and no Jewish music per se) were published (because of the ideological censorship of the government). Therefore, cantor Blum recorded himself in essence secretly, even during services. His audiocassettes thus document a little-known part of religious life during the Communist era (Seidlová and Knapp 2008). His personae also got to play an important part in uncovering the story of cantor Josef Weiss and his recordings.

In 2008, I was collaborating on the digitization of Blum's audiocassette collection with the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, and with the Phonogrammarchiv's support also on a publication of a selection from Blum's collection published by the Jewish Museum in Prague (JMP). This became in 2008 the first published anthology of a Jewish cantor from the former Czechoslovakia (Seidlová and Knapp 2008). Leo Pavlát, director of the JMP, brought to my attention that in 2004, the JMP published a reissue of historical records of a number of interwar dance ensembles of the legendary Jewish bandmaster, violinist, arranger, and composer Dol Dauber (1894 Vyžnycja – 1950 Prague) from Gössel's private collection (Gössel 2004). Pavlát had been in further touch with Gössel as Gössel made an offer to the JMP to digitize and donate other Jewish music sound recordings from his collection. Pavlát suggested I contact Gössel, as he heard from him that Dol Dauber's orchestra recorded a few cantorial pieces too. He was right, and I became the proud owner of a homemade copy of records by unknown "cantor Josef Weiss". Neither of my field consultants from the Jewish Community in Prague at that time had ever heard of Josef Weiss, nor the sources to which I had access.

In 2008, Gössel, together with musicologist David Bloch (founder of the Terezin Music Memorial Project), prepared those four sound tracks of Josef

Weiss – "Ano awdoh", "Birchos kohanim", "Weseorew Lefonecho", and "Ribon Ho-Olomim" – arranged and accompanied by Dol Dauber's orchestra, as part of a music album *Dol Dauber: Musical Fantasies and Jewish Liturgical Songs* (Gössel and Bloch 2008).[16] This CD contained pieces for violin and piano, fantasias and arrangements of arias from famous operas, "high popular" music, arrangements of Jewish melodies, and original compositions by Dol Dauber. The sleeve notes of the album mention Josef Weiss:

> The next four liturgical songs, arranged and played by Dol Dauber and his reconstructed orchestra after the Second World War, are unique not just for their beautiful melodies, but also as an example of supreme cantorial art. Josef Weiss was a cantor at the Old-New Synagogue in the postwar period until the 1960s, when he immigrated to Germany. He was one of several *hazzanim* (cantors) whose singing allegedly was admired even by several high-ranking Nazis. Many concentration camp prisoners also heard his calming voice as they were being marched to their deaths (Gössel and Bloch 2008).

The problem was that Josef Weiss was not "a cantor at the Old-New Synagogue until the 1960s", never "immigrated to Germany" and was never "imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp". (I found these biographical details only ten years later.) The authors unintentionally confused Josef Weiss with another Prague cantor from that time named Salomon Weisz.

I am afraid I partially contributed to that confusion, as I had been in touch with Gössel in 2008, discussing with him another record in his collection: Supraphon 15218, recorded one year later, in 1949, with a vignette stating that the two cantorial pieces "Jehi rozoun milfonecho" and "Weshomru", were performed by "Shalom [*sic*] Weisz, Principal Cantor of Prague, Organ Max Berkovič" (Weisz n.d.). The same two tracks appeared as a re-edition in a compilation by Supraphon in 1965 (SUA 12605), released during the period of political liberalization, stating "Salomon Weisz, from Moravia, first cantor of Prague" (Weisz, Katz and Katz 1965).

I shared my doubts with Gössel that perhaps Salomon Weisz and Josef Weiss could actually be one person with a civic name Josef and a Jewish name Shlomo (Salomon/Šalamoun in Czech), confused with similarly sounding name Shalom. This idea arose from conversations with my field consultants

[16] Gössel later donated some of the Jewish cantorial records from his collection to the JMP.

of the parallel music-ethnography research (Seidlová 2009), cantor Daniel Vaněk and rabbi Michael Dushinsky, with whom we listened to the recordings together. They suggested that the Hebrew pronunciation of both of the cantors is Hungarian and that their way of music interpretation is very similar, as well as their tenor voices: am I actually certain that these are two different people? On the other hand, ethnomusicologist Zuzana Jurková strongly opposed this idea, stating that the colour of these two voices is different. I also shared with Gössel, what I found from various sources (e.g., Věstník ŽNO 1964): that there was indeed a person named Salomon (Šalamoun) Weisz, who was a chief-cantor of the Old-New synagogue in Prague since late 1940s until he emigrated to Wiesbaden in 1960s. Gössel commented:

> For a long time now, I had a suspicion that (S.) Weisz and (J.) Weiss would be one and the same person. [...] unfortunately, everything was still obscured by incomplete record sheets and then also by the legends of [anonymized person] who remembers some LP of Supraphon, where in the text on the cover there was supposed to be a story about the popular cantors of the Nazis. I did not find anything myself, because the institutions are very unfriendly to me - a private individual (Gössel, e-mail, 24 November 2008, translated by author).

Later, thanks to Martin Šmok, researcher and the author of the first historical exhibition about the post-WWII history of the Jewish Community of Prague (2013), and Weisz's great-nephew Mordechai Pelta, I could finally put together some further details about Salomon (Šalamoun) Weisz (11 June 1911 [Petrova, Maramureș region, Austria-Hungary] – circa 1992 [B'nei Brak, Israel]) (Pelta, phone call, 15 July 2021). While working on his exhibition, Šmok accidentally found the Jewish Community of Prague's correspondence related to Weisz, and in 2013 was contacted from San Francisco by Pelta, who was searching for documents of his great-uncle's cantorial career. Drawing on that correspondence and on my subsequent communication with Pelta since 2020, Weisz's biography became clearer (and is also a subject of another article currently prepared by me). In relation to Gössel and Bloch 2008, it is important to acknowledge that Salomon Weisz did immigrate to West Germany in 1965 (also see Frühauf 2021, 142), but (according to his relatives) was never imprisoned by the Nazis (Pelta, phone call, 15 July 2021). Notes on Josef Weiss in Gössel and Bloch 2008 thus confuse Weiss with Weisz, and draw from a claim from sleeve notes by Weisz,

Katz, and Katz (1965), which state that "all [three vocalists] miraculously escaped death in Nazi extermination camps".

Martin Šmok's role has been crucial in helping me find family members of another important cantor from the Communist Czechoslovakia: Samuel Landerer (1898 [Bardejov, Hungary; today Slovakia] – 1972 [B'nei B'rak, Israel]; see Seidlová 2020a, b). Šmok's extensive knowledge of private family archives is essential to his research activities, because (as he comments, while also resonating with my own research experience): "Postwar history was not really preserved by the community itself, for reasons quite obvious: most of the active members emigrated, sooner or later, and the Communist regime was not interested in preserving any Jewish continuity or memory of shared identity whatsoever" (Šmok, e-mail, 8 January 2013).

Although since 1989, the interest in the postwar history of the Jewish minority has been revived in the Prague Jewish community as well as in local Jewish memory institutions such as the JMP; the change took its time. Therefore, the act of reissuing Josef Weiss's recordings six decades later by the JMP (Gössel and Bloch 2008) is important in this regard. The album, as well as the recordings of cantor Blum, published by the JMP in the same year of 2008, have been the very first two music albums with sound recordings of Czechoslovak cantors ever published in the post-Communist Czech Republic. From the perspective of Appadurai's theory, Weiss's recordings re-entered the commodity phase. However, as they were published by a Jewish memory institution, the primary goal was not commercial profit, but rather the institutional memorialization of the music of the Jewish minority in interwar and postwar Czechoslovakia. Interestingly enough, but symptomatic of the situation described by Šmok above, even the museum could not find any sources about the personality of the vocalist, who became confused with another person. Concerning Josef Weiss's biography, I had to wait for ten years since my first listening encounter with him to find more than just the name and the recording date.

Scene III. Prague, 2017–2018. Unexpected Encounters on YouTube

In 2017, I met cantor Yehuda Marx, who is from Manchester, at the European Cantors Convention in Prague. In an informal talk, he shared with me a brief yet accurate memory that there used to be cantor Josef Weiss from Prague who

officiated in Prestwich, Manchester, in the 1950s. In 2018, when I started working on the music part for "Jews in the Bohemian Lands, 19th–20th Centuries", the new permanent exhibition of the JMP at the Spanish Synagogue (Seidlová 2020b), I asked Alex Klein, the director of the European Cantors Convention (ECA), also from Manchester, for his help tracing Josef Weiss. Soon, he forwarded me a reply from another member of the ECA, David Prager:

> The Jewish Chronicle archive has a 43 [*sic*] years old Hungarian Yoseph Weiss appointed as Chazan alongside Rabbi Mendel Gurdus in 1958 at Prestwich in Manchester. He previously lived at Ramat Gan and had held posts in Vienna and Prague. No mention after '62 as to where he went. It says he had four children. Our email contacts a few years ago showed he'd gone to the USA. There are a few recordings of Weiss made in 1940s Prague (e-mail, 25 February 2018; see *Jewish Chronicle*, 1958).

Excited from the new precious information, I happened to type Josef's name into YouTube – an unlikely platform for such a research. To my surprise, I found all four of his 1948 recordings accompanying homemade music videos featuring photos of the original record vignettes. The video "Cantor Josef Weiss – Ribon Ho – Omim [*sic*] – Hebrew liturgical Song" (Doležal 2017b) even included a scan of a historical photo of an unknown cantor. What surprised me even more was the dominant musical and historical discourse of that specific YouTube channel. The sound tracks were uploaded in 2017 by Ivo Doležal, son of Ilja Doležal (1927–2007), a soloist of the Armádní Umělecký Soubor Víta Nejedlého (Czechoslovak "Army Art Choir of Vít Nejedlý") from 1949–1961. Ivo inherited Ilja's collection of gramophone records mostly from the 1950s, started digitizing them at home while uploading them on his YouTube channel "Fousadlo" (Doležal 2008). The dominant videos in Ivo's channel – centred around Ilja's solos in AUS VN's performances of arranged Slovak and Russian folk songs, Soviet army songs, and Czech Communist songs, with the choir wearing army uniforms – convey the period's authoritarian state discourse, which legitimized political trials, and harsh anti-religious and anti-Semitic state policy (among other things). Nevertheless, other videos also show Ilja's remarkable (for that time and place) interest in the representations of ethnically "other" music, and mainly in the few Jewish cantorial records made by Supraphon.

Apart from Weiss's recordings (n.d. a, b), there are videos with Suprahon records by star cantor Shalom Katz, and by Eugen Katz, as well as two records

with Ladislav Blum (1950, 1954) by Supraphon, though they are not of his cantorial performances – as Supraphon has not published any. Instead, we can hear Blum's solo voice in a secular music context – one Slovak and two Chinese folk songs arranged for the AUS VN. Not being a member of the Communist party, Blum was civic employee of the AUS VN (1950–1957). In 2003, I had the chance to interview Ilja Doležal, as he had been a close friend of Blum since their time together in the AUS VN and the choir's tour of China (in 1952, to perform for Mao Zedong). In 2003, Ilja Doležal, although being very kind and helpful, didn't share with me the information that Blum had gifted him his cantorial records collection – I learned this only from Ivo, whom I contacted instantly, asking him about the photo of the unknown cantor in his video of Josef Weiss's rendition of "Ribon ho-Olamim".

Ivo explained that he was contacted, via his YouTube channel comments in 2017, by a person called Avraham Ben-Tzvi: "Hi! That is my grandfather singing. If you know how I can purchase an original 45-rpm record, please contact me" (Ben-Tzvi, in Doležal 2017a). Avraham and Ivo exchanged emails about the fact that both the records are 78-rpm and that both the cantors, Ladislav Blum and Josef Weiss, must have known each other personally, as they were born in the same small town Veľké Kapušany and were peers by age. Ivo Doležal also was kind enough to sell his original copies of the two Joseph Weiss's 78-rpm records to Avraham (similarly, Gabriel Gössel sold his copies to Avraham too), so that the family of the *hazzan* now has a few copies of their ancestor in its possession.

These two particular 78-rpm discs were originally either bought by cantor Blum or given to him by Weiss, whom he likely knew personally, and were later passed further (likely) as a gift to Ilja Doležal, inherited by his son Ivo, digitized, and uploaded to YouTube, and as a result of this digital diversion sold to Weiss's grandson in Israel. The cultural biography of these discs offers several possible interpretations. This case of two related material objects circulating from a commodity state through a gift, to inheritance, and back to commodity in the span of seven decades points to the network of professional musicians and music collecting aficionados in Communist Czechoslovakia. This network was constructed through personal friendships and gift-giving in an important way, and often *across* political affiliations or other collective identifications of its actors (as we see in the case of Ilja Doležal and Ladislav Blum).

This was also the case of the partially overlapping small network around Jewish minority music, which was not in favour of the political regime and

was therefore pushed out into niches of the state-security monitored activities behind the closed doors of synagogues, community buildings and apartments, and later, personal collections. These exchanges were based on gift-giving rather than on the black market activities (as was the case of music subcultures which were also not in the favour of the regime, such as rock and punk; see Hagen and DeNora 2011). My previous research of Blum's estate (Seidlová and Knapp 2008; Seidlová 2009) revealed that he collected cantorial music recordings (mainly through gifts from behind the Iron Curtain, as these were unavailable for purchase in the Czechoslovakia of the 1970s and 1980s) not only for the purpose of appreciation and musical inspiration, but also as an important source of learning of cantorial practice to which he returned later in his life in Prague at a moment when almost nobody was left to learn from. In this context, Weiss's records in Blum's collection had a considerably different function and value than in the countries where cantorial music and education has been freely available. Finally, the lastly observed commodity phase in the social life of these two copies of the 78-rpm records points to personal memorialization realized through the global technoscape.

Scene IV. Jerusalem and New York, 2018. Aunt is Guarding the Suitcase

As Ivo Doležal kindly shared Avraham's contact info with me, I got in an e-mail and managed a phone call conversation with Avraham in 2018. After explaining my aim of collecting data for the upcoming exhibition in the JMP, I checked the biographic details of his grandfather, which confirmed that Salomon and Josef were two different people. After another piece of the puzzle found in Hungary, when I bought a CD compilation *Hungarian Cantors: Archiv Recordings* (2009), which happened to contain digitizations of two of Josef Weiss's prewar sound tracks from Budapest (Weissz n.d.), I met Avraham the same year in Jerusalem for an interview.

Avraham, who saw his grandfather Josef Weiss for the last time at around 15 years old, has already recollected the silence in his family concerning his grandfather's recordings when we met for the first time: "They really didn't know he has ever published anything. But when I started asking more, it turned out that my aunt [Elke] has his reel-to-reel tapes, which he made at home during the years... but she is hesitant about giving them to me. I hope I'll convince her one day" (Ben-Tzvi, interview, 5 June 2018). Thus, the professional,

band-accompanied, studio-made records from postwar Prague were at the core of Avraham's project, which started taking shape in his head due to subsequent events, after I met Avraham for another interview at the Sound archives of the National Library in Israel (NLI). Avraham had mentioned that his aunt – who is in possession of the tapes, but is afraid to give them to anybody for digitization – also insisted that Josef recorded for Voice of Israel broadcasting service (and Avraham had indeed by then found four of Weiss's recordings from 1950s Israeli broadcasting service which had been digitized and placed on the NLI website). So I introduced him to Gila Flam, the director of the Sound Archives and the Music Department of the NLI. Gila Flam offered to digitize the home reel-to-reel tapes, if he would bring them.

This set of events "unleashed a storm" in Avraham's family: only two months afterwards, Avraham brought a heavy suitcase from New York to Jerusalem that was full of reel-to-reel tapes recorded by cantor Weiss in his various homes and had been lying for almost four decades in his aunt's basement at her home in Brooklyn, intact and well guarded, although degraded by time.

Scene V. Prague, 2020. Grandfather's Voice and the Story on the Museum Exhibition

While the NLI was helping with the first round of digitization, Avraham and I were preparing his grandfather's biographical entry for the permanent exhibition of the JMP. This goal has triggered even more intense remembering in Avraham's broader family and finally has brought much more biographical data than we could use at that moment. My role as an ethnomusicologist became entangled with my active role in the field consultant's private remembrance project, as well as in the institutional production of collective memory.

For the new permanent exhibition of the JMP at the Spanish Synagogue in Prague, "Jews in the Bohemian Lands, 19th–20th Centuries", I was given free rein to create biographical entries of local Jewish musicians, supported with photographs and audio recordings (Seidlová 2020b). Therefore, I decided to introduce mainly the so-far underrepresented synagogue soundscapes.[17]

[17] Most of the entries covered the 19th and early 20th century synagogue soundscape from the Czech lands, with a number of local composers (e.g., Moritz Pereles, David Rubin, Max Löwenstamm, Samuel Welsch, etc.), who embraced – at that time – a new modern style of Jewish choral music, which dominated the Jewish religious soundscapes of the Czech lands until World War II (for more on this topic, see Seidlová 2020a). Yet, it was almost impossible to introduce traditional Orthodox soundscape

The soundscape around the postwar cantorial recordings produced in Czechoslovakia, which drew on the production of the Golden Age celebrity cantors, became the most audible one in the exhibition visitors' headphones, while only partially reflecting the actual religious practice of the surviving cantors, who took on the important role of renewing local Jewish communities. What follows is an extended version, commented on and supported by references, of the exhibition's short biographical entry on cantor Josef Weiss, which I constructed together with Avraham and which exhibit contained Josef's photographs and his recordings published by Supraphon.

Josef Elchanan Weiss was born around 1912.[18] He came from Veľké Kapušany, where the graves of his father Zvi Weiss ben Nathanel (d. 1940) and his grandfather Nathanel ben Zvi Weiss (d. 1904) are located (Ben-Tzvi, e-mail, 3 March 2018). At that time, the town was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was better known by its Hungarian name Nagykapos. In 1918, it became part of the newly established state of Czechoslovakia (and then Slovakia, in 1993). This border-town, multicultural, multilingual transit place seemed to have helped form Josef's restless nature. According to his relatives, he never liked to stay in one place for too long, was cosmopolitan, and although he came from a very observant Orthodox Jewish family, he was very curious and open to the "outside" world. Apart from the music cultures of traditional Eastern-Ashkenazi *hazzanuth* and the "Golden Age" cantors, Josef was also interested in secular and non-Jewish music cultures. He loved to sing arias from Italian opera, and he liked to cross borders – not only of nation-states. He left Veľké Kapušany in late 1920s, when he studied at a *yeshiva* in Bratislava (probably the famous Pressburg Yeshiva). Unfortunately, we don't know any further details about Josef's stay in Bratislava, or with whom and where he studied *hazzanut*. We find him again in early 1930s, farther west in Bohemia, as he joined the compulsory service in the Czechoslovak army (see Figure 3).

from the Czech lands by means of an exhibition. This soundscape, based on orally transmitted, typically heterophonic male vocal practice without any instrumental accompaniment (Frigyesi 2018), usually performed behind the closed doors of small family shuls, scattered in private houses, has generally not been (and resisted to be) fixated in scores (for one partial exception, see Stellmacher 2019) as well as in technology of sound recording (except for Frigyesi 1980).

[18] In the Israeli birth certificate of A. Ben Tzvi's mother, Bruria (orig. Breyndel) Weiss (b. 1950, Jerusalem), the stated age of the father is 38. (Issued on 30 August 1950, copy in the private archive of A. Ben-Tzvi.) Weiss's exact date of birth could not be specified, neither by his family nor by my requests in various Czech and Slovak archives, both local and national.

Figure 3. Josef Weiss as a soldier in the Czechoslovak Army from early 1930s. Stamp of a photo salon in Pardubice. Private archive of A. Ben-Tzvi. Used with permission.

According to Josef's children's memories, he had been cantor in Vienna and Budapest before the war (see Figure 1). His stay in Budapest is evidenced by Josef's photo from 1937, stored in the private archive of Avraham Ben-Tzvi (as all the other photos mentioned below), and by the above-mentioned Darling Super record company's gramophone record of "kantor Jozsef Weissz" from late 1937 or early 1938 (Weissz n.d.). In 1941, along with his brother, Josef was forced to join the Hungarian Army Jewish Work Force. Following their surrender to the Soviet Army, Josef was transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp

in Siberia, and later fought with the Svoboda's Army in Ukraine (Avraham Ben-Tzvi is in possession of Weiss's photo in a Czechoslovak uniform, with the inscription "March 1945").

After the war, we find Josef Weiss in Prague, where he married Zisl Klein. They are captured together on photos from inside and in front of the Old-New Synagogue (the photo, from Ben-Tzvi's private collection, was made by the Prague photo atelier Mráz, with an inscription "3 November 1946"). In Czechoslovakia, their first two children were born. If Josef held an official post as a cantor after the war in the Old-New Synagogue, or in those other Prague synagogues, renewed for religious rituals after the war (High Synagogue, Jeruzalémská synagogue, as well as Meisel's for a very short period), could not yet be verified.[19] He might have been a deputy chief cantor of Eduard Fried (1911 Oradea – 1992 Copenhagen), the first postwar cantor of the Old-New Synagogue. However, in the fall of 1948, Weiss's namesake, Šalamoun/Solomon Weisz, cantor of Bánská Bystrica, was accepted as chief cantor of the Old-New, instead of Fried, who emigrated and accepted the post of cantor in Copenhagen (Mink Rossen and Sharvit 2006).

At that time, Josef Weiss recorded those four liturgical compositions in Prague on 17 September 1948, accompanied by a record company orchestra under the baton of bandleader Adolf "Dol" Dauber (for more on Dauber, see Seidlová 2020b). Apart from the cantorial repertoire, Weiss, accompanied by the same orchestra, recorded two popular dance music pieces in Hebrew during the same session in Prague's Rokoska studio: a tango, "Artzeinu HaKtantonet" ("Our little country"), composed by Henryk Gold, known as Tzvi Zehavi, in 1943 in Tel Aviv (lyrics by Shmuel Fisher); and "Im Hupalnu Lo Nivhalnu" ("Though defeated, not terrified were we" – composition by Menashe Baharaff, lyrics by Yaakov Orland) – about the wartime disasters of the sinking of two ships, Patria and Struma, set to the *hora* rhythm. However, the record (Weiss n.d. c) remained an unpublished sample record in the archives and was never commercially distributed. On the other hand, the four liturgical pieces were put on two records published in at least four different pressings. All of them were meant for export abroad, as all the vignettes were in English.

In 1949, Josef Weiss immigrated to Israel with his wife and two children.

[19] The work contracts from this period are stored in the Center of Pre-Archive Care of the Jewish Community of Prague, which is not accessible to the public. My research request was treated, but without success, in 2018.

Figure 4. Josef Weiss sings into a microphone during a recording session (?) accompanied by harmonium (c. 1956, in Israel). Behind him is David Koussevitzky. Private archive of A.-Ben-Tzvi. Used with permission.

They lived first in Jerusalem in the German Colony / Baka neighborhood, then in Ramat Gan. Another two children were born. Josef served in the Israeli army reserves (he is seen on a photo from Ben-Tzvi's private collection in the uniform of an Israeli soldier, c. 1957) and also earned his living as a handyman and a plumber, but – as shown on the family photos – he further performed musically. During the Ramat Gan period, as his daughter Elke remembers, Weiss recorded with star cantor David Koussevitsky (1911–1985) from Smorgon in Belarus, since 1948 the cantor of Temple Emanu-El in Boro Park, Brooklyn, one of New York's major Conservative movement synagogues at that time, where he served until his death. The family photos show them together in both professional and informal situations in Israel (see Figure 4). We know for sure that from 1952–1954, Weiss recorded cantorial pieces for Voice of Israel radio (Kol Israel) for its weekly *Kabbalat Shabbat* Friday shows (Weiss 1953a, b; 1954). Avraham Ben-Tzvi enquired about Josef's cantorial activities in Israel from star cantor Moshe Stern (1935–) from Budapest, who immigrated to Israel in 1950. Stern replied to Ben-Tzvi: "I remember well your grandfather [...] I was a young boy at that time. We lived [...] in Jerusalem. I heard him on different

occasions. He had a sensational lyric tenor [...] My father, Chazzan Yisroel Stern [...] spoke always very highly of him" (Stern, text message to Ben-Tzvi, 3 September 2018). In 1957, the Israeli newspaper *HaTzofe* mentions Josef Weiss's name amongst a group of *hazzanim* who left Israel as they were unable to find permanent appointments as *hazzanim* (*HaTzofe* 1957).

In 1958, the Weiss family moved to Manchester, England, where Josef won the post of chief cantor in Prestwich. The *Jewish Chronicle* stated that "The Prestwich Hebrew Congregation, Bury New Road, has appointed the Rev. Yoseph Weiss [...] of Ramat Gan, Israel, as their new First Reader. He [...] has been a chazan in Budapest, Prague, and Vienna *(Jewish Chronicle* 1958; see also *Jewish Chronicle* 1960). During that year, his last child, Nathanel, was born.

In 1962, already with five children, Josef Weiss and his wife moved to New York. Until 1964 he worked as a cantor at the Hollis Hills Jewish Center in Queens. In the 1960s and early 1970s, he was also an occasional cantor at the monumental First Romanian-American Synagogue (Roumanishe Shul) on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, later at the Tenth Avenue Synagogue in Brooklyn. An advertisement in *Forverts* (Yiddish newspaper) for high holiday services at the Roumanishe Shul, known as "the Cantor's Carnegie Hall", captures "*hazzan* Josef Weiss" (with photo) as the star of the event (*Forverts* 1972). Later, as Avraham remembers: "My grandparents lived in Boro Park, Brooklyn, on 43rd Street near 9th Avenue, and I occasionally heard my grandfather lead services at the large nearby Tenth Avenue Synagogue" (Ben-Tzvi, e-mail, 3 March 2018). According to Avraham, as heard from his Aunt Elke, Josef left the paid cantorial job in Queens and moved to Brooklyn, because the Hollis Hills community was not as Orthodox as he would have liked, and lacked the Orthodox educational facilities he wished for his five children. While living in Brooklyn, Josef earned his living mainly as a jewelry maker, and worked from home as well as at a booth in Manhattan's Diamond District.

Apart from occasional leading at the mentioned synagogues, he also sang many cantorial pieces at home, recording it on reel-to-reel tapes. Avraham remembers how his grandfather sang in his basement into a microphone connected to his reel-to-reel tape recorder. Indeed, Josef recorded his grandson's very first words. Although the digitization process revealed the bad condition of the tapes, more than 25 liturgical pieces sung by Josef Weiss were rescued. Including two Voice of Israel recordings which to date have not been located in the *Kol Yisrael* archive. Furthermore, the home recordings also contained one Yiddish folk song about a cantorial audition on Shabbat ("A Chazendl Oyf

Shabbes"), a Hebrew folk song about Jerusalem ("Me'Al Pisgat Har HaTzofim"), and three opera arias recorded during an unknown recital performance ("Spirto Gentil" from *La Favorita* by Gaetano Donizetti; "La donna e mobile" from *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi; and "E lucevan le stelle" from *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini). On some of the home recordings, Josef accompanies himself on piano. It is not completely clear which of the sound tracks were recorded before his stay in New York, but it seems most probable that the radio performances, the opera pieces, the Yiddish piece, as well as the Hebrew folk song were recorded in Ramat Gan. Those liturgical pieces with piano were most likely recorded in Manchester, and all the a cappella pieces in New York. Josef's family remembers how he "*shleppt*" ("dragged" in Yiddish) his suitcase with his recordings from Ramat Gan to Manchester and later to Brooklyn, where it stayed in the basement for almost four decades.

At the end of his life, Josef Weiss practiced the Hassidic concept of Judaism.[20] The last photo in the family archive shows Josef, sporting Hassidic clothing with a long white beard, surrounded by his many children, grandsons, and other relatives at the Bar Mitzvah of his grandson Avraham Ben-Tzvi in October 1983 in Brooklyn (Figure 5). In 1984, Weiss returned to Israel and lived in Kiryat Sanz, Netanya, where he passed away on 10 October 1985 (the photo of his tombstone was shared with me by Avraham Ben-Tzvi. The inscription was translated by rabbi Michael Dushinsky).

Josef Weiss's biography sheds light on his music recording practice as situated in the soundscape of the Golden Age cantors. In agreement with Lockwood, I understand this soundscape as a revival of the sounds that were considered to be the roots of sonic Jewishness (Lockwood 2020, 1). The case of the exceptionally vocally gifted and manually skilled Josef Weiss, who embraced the tools of technological innovation – both passively in a recording studio and actively in his own home recording activity – in order to co-create a musical world that would fuse the sounds of the past with period art, fits very well with Lockwood's argument about Golden Age cantors as using technology (seen as threatening the stability of pre-modern cultural continuity) to stage a musical uprising that would paradoxically preserve the sounds of the imagined past.

Unfortunately, I couldn't work with any ego-documents, which would throw light on the meanings Josef Weiss gave to his music activity. From today's perspective, it is possible to say that concerning the recording process, Josef Weiss

20 For an ethnomusicological account on Hassidic music in the US, see Summit 2000.

Figure 5. Josef Weiss, his children, grandsons, and other relatives at the Bar Mitzvah of his grandson Avraham Ben-Tzvi (1983, in Brooklyn). Private archive of A.-Ben-Tzvi. Used with permission.

had been lucky to record before WWII as a very young cantor in Budapest, which was full of talented *hazzanim* from all corners of Hungary. Later, as a *shoah* survivor, he paradoxically happened to be at the right moment in Czechoslovakia in 1948: firstly, he met Dol Dauber, who nostalgically longed for the old Jewish world (and therefore turned to recording cantorial music two years before his death), as well as supported new life in Israel (as heard in the two popular pieces). Secondly, a short "window of opportunity" was opened: the recovering and newly "nationalized" music recording industry of the Czechoslovak state (still partially built on prewar ties such as in the proven case of Dauber and his orchestra) sought commodities for export, while the ideological barriers set by the Communist policy have not yet been established. However, in this part of Europe, severely decimated by the *shoah*, the prospect of a paid stable cantorial job, needed in order to provide for his growing family, was scarce, as well as being "too early" for the same in the newly established state of Israel. Indeed, Israeli newspaper archives indicate that 1958, the year Weiss left Israel

for Manchester, also saw an "exodus" from Israel of several other highly trained cantors who found paid positions abroad (*HaTzofe* 1957). And paradoxically again, as much as the Voice of Israel recordings could have meant a new start, they are his last-known, studio, sound-recorded performances for the public.

The following four years of cantorial service in Prestwich Hebrew Congregation provided much-needed stability for a family with four little children and one new-born, but it didn't bring enough professional satisfaction. As Avraham told me, "He probably didn't have much patience with the bar mitzvah boys", whom he had to teach as part of his job, and he also likely felt limited by the United Synagogue mandated repertoire and limits on recording and concert performing, similar to his friend, David Koussevitsky (who for these same reasons left his position in the Hendon Synagogue, London, after WWII; cf. Slobin 2002, 85–86).

On the other hand, in New York in the 1960s, Josef came rather "late": not necessarily because of his age (as tenor vocalist) but rather in the sense that the New York's cantorial Golden Age had already been far behind its zenith. There were far fewer opportunities for public performances and paid cantorial jobs then for Orthodox cantors than in the 1930s through the early 1950s. As Avraham commented: "When he came to the US, the best times for *hazzanim* were probably already over. The sixties up to the eighties were kind of 'dry' times for them, mainly the Orthodox ones, such as him" (Ben-Tzvi, phone call, 14 April 2022). Moreover, according to his family, Josef didn't want to compromise on those religious values, which he understood as important to pass onto his children, so he left his paid job in a modern synagogue in Queens in order to move to Brooklyn, and his lifestyle shifted increasingly towards Hassidism. It is my understanding that this move perhaps secluded him from the period cantorial mainstream in the US. At the same time, his Golden Age cantorial performing art did not fit into the Hassidic normative music practice either, and was pushed back to the niches of occasional service leading in Orthodox synagogues and home recordings. We don't know what he aimed to do with those tapes, but deducing from their amount and contents – a result of long-term activity – it is possible to imagine how these private moments of singing his favourite cantorial pieces induced a sense of his "old" self. The "new" self as a Hassidic patriarch of a large family is captured on the last family photos. In this sense, Josef's large family – seen by them as Josef's ultimate triumph of survival – was also on Avraham's mind when he started thinking about the CD music album as a project which would tie these two strings together.

Scene VI. Jerusalem and New York, 2019–2022. Blessing from the Past and the Post-Mortal Gift

In May 2019, after the NLI helped with the first round of digitizing the New York tapes, Avraham texted me: "I do want to put together a collection for my family – maybe a small print CD set [...] I am speaking to a professional sound engineer to see if we can work on the sound of some of the songs" (Ben-Tzvi, text message, 28 May 2019). He explained:

> I played one of the Supraphon recordings at my youngest cousin's wedding two months ago (I'm the oldest grandchild and he's the youngest – 30 years apart). Everyone was very moved by this. [...] I spoke about how not only was my uncle "closing" his house by marrying his youngest, but we were closing a generation and after what my grandparents went through and now have almost 40 grandchildren married with children of their own, it's very special [...] I played [his] Birchos kohanim. It's the priestly blessing but also a blessing that parents say to children. [...] I did say it was recorded in Prague. They were very intrigued by this – especially the younger cousins, who had never heard him sing (ibid.).

It was a Hassidic wedding in Israel. The groom studied in the yeshiva of Modzitzer Rebbe, who personally participated in the event. In a "very ultra-Orthodox" environment, as Avraham pointed out, it was surprising for him, how much the Prague recording was appreciated. In October 2019, Avraham set up his "Cantor Joseph Weiss" YouTube channel, where he uploaded some of the newly digitized recordings. In 2020, he also hired the Danish-Israeli cantor Ralph Levitan, who is a sound producer in Ra'anana, in order to:

> just clean [up] the sound. But it turned out, he salvaged some of the beautiful pieces, which were almost damaged. And then, he orchestrated the first one, "Shir Hamaalos", which doesn't appear anywhere in the synagogue liturgy and is a known "concert piece". He then orchestrated a horribly damaged (cantorial) piece with a piano: "Hashem Malach", to save it. I loved these and was really excited about it. So, we got inspired by the sound of the orchestra in the Prague records, and we made a few more, ultimately orchestrating ten pieces... (Ben-Tzvi, phone call, 4 April 2022).

After commenting on the sound restoration process as a compromise between eliminating unwanted sounds and maintaining the original qualities of performance, while respecting the value of historic documentation, cantor Levitan explained his own technical perspective on how he created synthesized musical arrangements to a capella recordings of Josef Weiss, using the sampled sounds of genuine musical instruments, played within the computer from a MIDI musical keyboard:

> Having uploaded the vocal recording, a piano track is created, representing the musical arrangement. Firstly, a musical intro is created. Then, [the] start of [the] vocal is placed – easily done thanks to full track visibility on [the] monitor screen. Piano accompaniment is created, [filling] empty spaces within vocal track, whenever musical interludes are appropriate. Upon completion of [the] piano track, the various orchestral sections are added, typically strings, brass, woodwinds, percussion, organ. Finally, the mixdown balance of all tracks is crucial [...] for creating the proper and most natural acoustic balance between the old vocal track and the added orchestration (Levitan, text message, 16 October 2021).

Thus, using the latest technological innovations, those ten tracks of cantorial pieces with added synthesized orchestration show how the actors of this commemorative family project partially "invent" the sonic past in order to save it. A sonic past, which was already partially invented by the Golden Age recording cantors themselves in order to save their ancestors' sonic past. If the digitized and cleaned recording of "Birchos kohanim" is played and reinterpreted as a blessing from the late ancestor, then the upcoming music album is understood as a post-mortal gift to him from his grandson:

> So, you asked why I did it... You know, to preserve, and even to some extent to make, a legacy of an excellent hazzan, who was also regarded as such by his famous [hazzanim] peers [...] I know from [cantor] Moshe Stern, who knew him, and [cantor] Naftali Hershtik, they both said how their fathers knew him and regarded him highly [...] I wanted to make something for him, what he could have done himself, had he had that chance in his life, the opportunity, the money [...] Yes, mainly the funding to record an album. Today, it is much easier, but in his time in the US, to record an album, to book a studio, to hire an orchestra and everything, you needed a producer and funding (Ben-Tzvi, phone call, 14 April 2022).

During the production process, Avraham's "labour of love" (Ben-Tzvi, voice message, 18 June 2020) was put to use in another exceptionally important family event. In May 2021, cantor Weiss's eldest daughter Elke, who was born in Czechoslovakia and was in possession of his home-recorded tapes in New York, passed away. Her body was brought to be buried in Israel. Avraham describes:

> Yesterday, we had a funeral service in Israel [...] All of my cousins, all of her five children, flew in [from New York...], through Covid and the (Hamas) rockets, the whole situation was just [...] surreal, but at the gravesite, I actually played one or two songs of my grandfather, and they were very grateful [...] It turns out that during the last few days when she had been in hospital, my cousins played a few of the songs from the files I sent them, [and also] from the YouTube channel, where I posted some of the songs, and one of her youngest daughters asked her if she wanted some more of [her father's] singing, and she said yes, and then she basically slipped into unconsciousness. And [...] probably the last thing she took with her from the world were the sounds of these recordings [...] (Ben-Tzvi, voice message, 12 May 2021).

Thus, we can see how Avraham's listening experience of his grandfather's sound records from 1948 Czechoslovakia was at the core of a memory production process which brought deeply meaningful listening experiences also to his broader family, when the discovered and technologically treated recordings were put to use even during the life-cycle rituals (e.g., wedding and funeral) of the family members. This case reveals not only how the sound tracks became a functional tool of trans-generational memorialization, but also how music pieces which originated in ritual practice but were extracted from it for the sake of recording and commoditization have been reapplied back to family ritual events in the form of collective listening to recordings.

Returning to the beginning of our story, Avraham's initial listening experience also resembles a "revelatory event" which brought a lawyer "who was never too much into cantorial music" into the middle of a cantorial music album production. This is a term used by Lockwood, quoting a scholar of music revival Peter Narvaez: "an initiatory moment when one ecstatically experiences a cultural alternative" (Narvaez 1993, 245, in Lockwood 2021, 2). Recorded cantorial music differs from the cantorial practice in the synagogues, which as such is largely no longer normative practice in modern Orthodox worship (Schleifer 1995, 66; Lockwood 2021, 3). On the other hand, since the turn of the 21st century, we can speak of a soundscape of "cantorial revivalists": historical cantorial records

aficionados sharing and discussing digital files across continents, uploading them to YouTube, and reissuing them on compilation sets (such as Avraham, his colleague Daniel B. Schwartz, and Ralph Levitan, or the above-mentioned members of the ECA), and these groups are overlapping with a cohort of performers, animating those archival records in mainly secular performance contexts. Lockwood focuses on the young performers from the Hassidic communities in the US. The revelatory listening event seems to be a typical entrance into this scene, which is by its insiders perceived as somewhat countercultural (Lockwood 2021, 2), especially due to the non-conformity of the young Hassidic performers stepping out of their ultra-orthodox communities. And precisely they are on Avraham's mind when thinking about the target group of his project: "These young Hassidim from Brooklyn, what they are doing now, even singing 'secular' popular tunes, their communities would have 'stoned' them for it some 40 years ago [...] and so, yes, I do think that they will be some of the main aficionados, who would purchase and listen to my grandfather's collection, and maybe even learn and perform some of his compositions" (Ben-Tzvi, phone call, 14 April 2022).

In conclusion, the described family / music / memory project, produced, negotiated, and put to use across continents, fits in the broader frame of musical remembrance: Avraham's and other related Jewish actors' memory production is shaped by their present needs ("to make his legacy", to preserve a Jewish sonic past) and is entangled with the current practice of Jewish memory institutions (NLI, JMP), as well as with the practice of non-Jewish collectors and of an ethnomusicologist, with Avraham also hoping for the music anthology album to be purchased by actors who would not only appreciate but actually animate those recorded sounds in their music practice – the cantorial revival performers. The cultural biography of Josef Weiss's Prague recordings suggests how these material objects have moved through different contexts and regimes of value: the initial commoditization of recordings of postwar Jewish minority's ritual music as a remembering of a particular sonic past; the making of private recordings and private collecting of a minority's music not in favour of the dominant political regime in the Communist Czechoslovakia; and finally as tools of minority's institutional memorialization in the post-Communist setting, as well as individual and family trans-generational memorialization (and even "ritualization") in transnational settings. The lastly mentioned regimes of value have been intertwined with the recurring commoditization, although not with the primary goal of economic gain but rather with the purpose of enabling a new social life of the music captured on them.

Acknowledgements: Many thanks to all my field consultants, especially to Avraham Ben-Tzvi and Ivo Doležal, to Yehuda Marx, David Prager and Alex Klein (European Cantors Association), to ethnomusicologists Zuzana Jurková, Gila Flam, Edwin Seroussi, Judit Frigyesi, and cantor Marlena Fuerstman for their help during my stays in Jerusalem, as well as to ethnomusicologist and *Urban People* editor David Verbuč and two anonymous reviewers for their precious advice on this paper.

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