

SOLOMON EPSTEIN
(1939-2018)

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES
EDITED BY ALOMA BARDI



ICAMus 2019





At my invitation, Solomon Epstein wrote a concise autobiography in April-May 2014, and completed its compilation on May 3rd, 2014. These Autobiographical Notes were meant as future publication by ICAMus, for archival purposes, and as a meaningful addition to the composer's collection of music manuscripts held by the Center.

In the opening pages of this written account of his life, Dr. Epstein deploys a narrative technique of 'self-interview', telling his own story in the third person, with large portions of direct speech, as if in response to questions. As the narrative progresses, after the story of his childhood years, direct speech (introduced by quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph) becomes predominant and eventually exclusive.

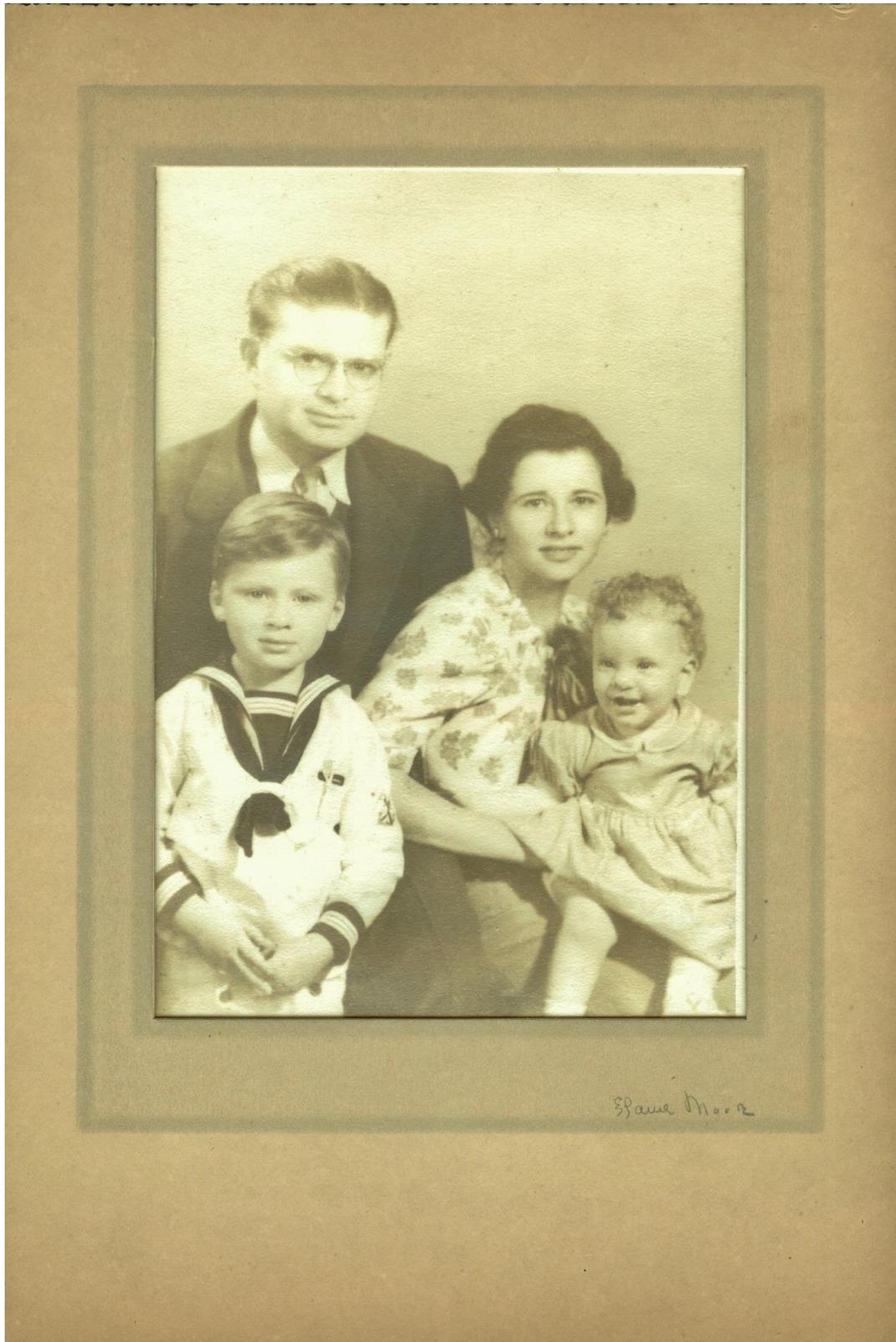
The composer narrates the origin of his family, his childhood and discovery of music (a revelation that would grow into everlasting devotion), his studies, his professional experiences as synagogue cantor and music director, and most importantly his compositional work. Of special interest are the recollections and thoughts on opera and singing, since Dr. Epstein was mainly an opera composer.

Every paragraph of these memories features Solomon Epstein's characteristic insights, generosity, humor. From these Notes, he stands out as a learned composer, whose admiration and love for opera, and for the presence of music in a Jewish congregation and in the wider human community always guided his works and his daily experience.

These pages are the closest Solomon Epstein ever came to writing an autobiography. They significantly complement the Collection of his unpublished music manuscripts that Dr. Epstein donated to the ICAMus Archive in 2014, and illuminate the centrality of music in the story of his life. In remembrance of Sol Epstein, who passed away one month ago, we publish this narrative with thankful heart.

Aloma Bardi, ICAMus Director
Ann Arbor, Michigan, January 19, 2019

* Illustration on Cover Page: Solomon Epstein, San Francisco, California, near the Golden Gate Bridge; late 1960s. Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Composer Solomon Charles Epstein (1939-2018) at age 6, with his family: his father Maurice (Morris; 1906-1952), his mother Florette Jacobs, and his sister Ann Victoria (Vickie); 1945.
The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Composer Solomon Charles Epstein (1939-2018) as a baby; 1940.
Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

Solomon Epstein was born in 1939 in Savannah, Georgia. From age 6 he was put on the pulpit of the Orthodox synagogue to sing solos, chanting a Haftarah (Prophetic Reading) at age 7, and leading the full Sabbath Service at age 9.



Composer Solomon Charles Epstein (1939-2018) as a child (first from left, upper row); 1944.
Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

His father, Maurice Epstein, was born in 1906 in a village near Kiev. In 1913, Solomon's paternal grandfather, Cantor Solomon Epstein, left Russia to join relatives in Canada, one of thousands of Jews leaving behind barbaric Russian antisemitism for more hopeful prospects in North America.

"It is from my grandfather," says Solomon Epstein, "that I inherited my voice and musical ability. It is the only possibility. My mother's extended family are completely unmusical."

His grandfather intended to find employment in Canada, then send money back to his wife and children in Russia so they could join him.

World War One and the Russian revolution made emigration impossible, and mother and children endured the privations and dangers of this period until 1922, when they managed the ocean crossing in steerage from Riga, Latvia to Ellis Island, rejoining the father in Canada.

Shortly thereafter, a younger son, age 12, died from pneumonia contracted during the ocean passage.

“For many people, the brutality of Russian antisemitism has been obscured by the fiendishness of the Nazi Holocaust,” says Epstein. “In Russia, at age 9 my father witnessed a drunken Russian soldier shoot his grandfather on a whim.”

Solomon’s grandfather, plagued by asthma, soon left Canada with his family to become cantor of congregations in warmer climates, first in Nashville, then New Orleans, and finally in Savannah.

The grandfather died in Savannah in 1933, age 53. Maurice, then in his mid-20’s, struggled to make a living while helping his two older sisters to survive.



Solomon Epstein’s paternal grandparents: Cantor Solomon Epstein (1880-1933) and Hannah Victoria Shuer.
The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

Maurice Epstein met his future wife, Florette Jacobs, a fourth-generation native of Charleston, South Carolina, through a Savannah friend, Louis Odrezin, whose family had emigrated from Poland when Louis was 4 years old.

Louis was dating Florette’s sister Sadie Lee, and in 1938 the two couples were married in a double wedding in Charleston, where Epstein’s maternal grandfather Louis Jacobs was president of the Orthodox synagogue and a respected local merchant.



Florette Jacobs, mother of Solomon Epstein, at age 17, high school graduation; Charleston, SC; 1929. Photograph & art deco cover ornament. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

“Most people think of American Jewish immigrants as the ‘huddled masses’ of New York tenements. This notion is irrelevant to the history of Jews in the American South.

“My mother’s great-grandparents landed in South Carolina as one of four Jewish families in the state. Over several generations, that meant a great deal of cousin marriages, until gradually the extended family branched out across the Southeast.”

Fleeing European anti-Semitism themselves, these tiny numbers of Jews could not fail to notice the appalling racism Southern whites directed at blacks. Thus, while Southern Jews kept their religion and soon built synagogues, they lost no time in acculturating to Southern white mores in an effort to blend in as seamlessly as possible.

Thus Solomon was born to a Russian émigré father who, like most American immigrants, sought to be “more American than the Americans.” His mother, though religiously an observant Jew, was an entirely acculturated Charlestonian.

Epstein says, “Of course I can’t be sure, but I think what attracted my mother to my father was that he loved to take her to dances and do the jitterbug and the

Charleston. My future mother, growing up in a suffocatingly decorous middle-class atmosphere which stifled the slightest expression of individuality, was literally swept off her feet by my future father on the dance floor.”



Top to bottom, left to right: Solomon Epstein’s maternal great-grandparents, Louie Charles Pearlstine, Rebecca Miriam Pearlstine; maternal grandmother, Ethel Pearlstine Jacobs (b. 1886) in 1908; paternal great-grandparents, Israel Shuer, Baba Shuer (Winnipeg, Canada). The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

As a boy, Solomon was one of three Jewish children in a Southern grammar school. Surrounded by lower middle-class children who reflexively ingested the dirt-ignorant antisemitism of their parents, Solomon quickly learned to view the general antisemitism as a neutral fact of nature like a hurricane.

Realizing by age 9 that he could not expect a secular education from a Southern grammar school, Solomon formed a lifelong habit of going to the public library and reading voraciously. "I was attracted to Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau and Poe."

Solomon attended the Orthodox Hebrew School five days a week, where he was profoundly influenced by the brilliant Rabbi Abraham Rosenberg, and the operatically trained tenor Cantor Albert Singer. Unusually for the time, both rabbi and cantor were also highly educated secularly.

Rabbi Rosenberg was a graduate of Yeshiva University in New York, where he received rabbinical ordination. Cantor Singer was a graduate of the Toronto Conservatory of Music. Thus throughout his childhood, Solomon received both classroom and private instruction in Jewish studies and Jewish music, singing solos in synagogue frequently, and learning to sight-sing as a member of the synagogue choir.

Seeing Solomon's attraction to cantorial singing, his father began giving him recordings of famous cantors and Yiddish folksongs when the boy was 8.

Also at age 9, the boy attended a touring company's performance of *La Bohème*. For the rest of his life, Epstein remembered that performance as "an epiphany, a religious conversion. I was stunned that anything so beautiful could exist in the world. At Mimi's death, I sat glued to my seat after the final curtain, tears streaming uncontrollably down my face."

At just that time, around 1948, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ RPM LP recordings replaced 78 RPM discs. Suddenly, complete operas were being issued on two and three discs, along with bilingual librettos and historical essays. This technological revolution quickly led to the public library's acquisition of complete opera recordings ranging across the Italian, French and German repertory, as well as *Boris Godunov*.

"No doubt at age 9 I made little distinction at first between great cantorial singing and great operatic singing."

Fortuitously, the Savannah Public Library also had a large collection of operatic piano-vocal scores.

"This included a COMPLETE edition of all the Rossini operas, as well as much Donizetti and Bellini. So I was at least aware of much of the bel canto repertory before the Callas/Sutherland revival."

"Driven by a ruling passion that has never abated, between ages 9 and 12 I simply osmosed the standard operatic repertory, including *Salome* and *Boris Godunov*.

"My father strenuously disapproved, as I had opera recordings blaring in his living room at all hours. My father, seeking to be as 'American' as possible, had expected a football player; he hadn't bargained for the likes of me.

"Besides, I was flooding the house with the soul of Europe, which my father understandably hated and wanted to put behind him forever.

"Still, when asked what I wanted for a Bar-Mitzvah present, I asked for a complete recording of Gounod's *Faust*. I still have those recordings from childhood.

"Literally the day after my 1952 Bar-Mitzvah, my father died of a heart attack at age 46.



Solomon Charles Epstein (1939-2018) at age 13 (third from left) on the day of his Bar-Mitzvah; 1952.
Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“My mother, by temperament a calm, moderate person, simply went back to business school to refresh her secretarial and bookkeeping skills, now having to support my sister, age 9, and my brother, age 5, as well as me. I am certain that my mother’s steadiness cushioned the drastic blow of my father’s death for me.

“My best friend, Jules Rosenberg, the rabbi’s son, also was extremely musical and sang in the synagogue choir. Like me, Jules was also attracted to opera, and we spent our boyhood soaking up opera recordings, comparing singers, and becoming enthralled with Mario Lanza in the movie *The Great Caruso*, which we sat through countless times in awe.

Rabbi Rosenberg wanted Jules to attend Yeshiva University High School in New York, an Orthodox boys’ boarding school where the day was divided into morning religious and Hebrew studies and afternoon high school requirements. Jules refused to leave home without his best friend. Since I was considered potential rabbinic material, Rabbi Rosenberg arranged for a scholarship for me. Thus Jules, 16, and I, 14, found ourselves transported from Savannah to New York. For us, this transplantation was like Dorothy suddenly catapulted from Kansas to Oz.

“And of course at Yeshiva I found like-minded friends: other boys who were New York Jewish intellectuals in embryo, a radical change from Savannah where boys my age were interested only in sports and drinking. After a couple of months living in the Yeshiva High School dormitory, Jules and I were united in despising the school. As children, we had simply accepted the Orthodox observances imposed on us, but then neither of us had orthodoxy harshly thrust on us by our families.

“Rabbi Rosenberg, though the authoritative leader of the Savannah Jewish community, was far too astute to alienate his son by imposing Orthodoxy on him too strictly. And my mother, though observant, was certainly no fanatic, and generally easygoing. My father could be harsh, but this stemmed from his difficulties in becoming the ‘perfect American’, and from financial and family concerns, never because he wanted to strictly impose traditional Orthodoxy on me.

“The atmosphere of Yeshiva High School was another story entirely. They tried at every step to force on the students an impersonal, rigidly behavioristic observance of religious rituals. And we were teenagers now, the age of rebellion. So rebel we did, especially me, though at that age I couldn’t have clearly articulated the reasons behind my rebellion. Of course, my acts of rebellion in the 1950’s would have seemed quaint by the 1980’s. But in those days, setting off cherry bombs in the classes of teachers with pre-existing heart conditions, and other such adolescent pranks, were taken very seriously. I did miserably in my religious studies program, but maintained a better-than-respectable academic record in secular high school.

“Spending my adolescence in a boys’ dormitory meant in practice that we were teenage boys raising each other. Thus by age 18 I would have emerged more civilized had I been raised by wolves. To this day, why they didn’t throw me out of that school remains a mystery to me. Yet in spite of myself, I learned an appreciable amount about Jewish ritual, practice and history.

“But New York! I was totally in love with New York! Quickly my friends and I discovered that if we saved our lunch money for a week, we would have \$2.00 to go standing room on Saturday night to the Metropolitan Opera (still at 39th Street and Broadway). So for years my world centered on hearing every opera I could with the greatest singers in the world: Milanov, Del Monaco, my adored favorite Jussi Björling, Richard Tucker, Eleanor Steber, Dorothy Kirsten, Roberta Peters, Eileen Farrell, Giulietta Simionato, Fedora Barbieri, Leonie Rysanek, Leonard Warren, Robert Merrill, Nicolai Gedda, George London, Cesare Siepi, Jerome Hines, Giorgio Tozzi and many others. In 1956, we even heard Callas as Norma, who was so mesmerizing that I shrugged off her already serious vocal flaws.

“In 1955 I attended Fischer-Dieskau’s American debut with *Winterreise* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I heard a Carnegie Hall recital by the magisterial Marian Anderson, and during a Cold War thaw, the glorious Russian baritone Pavel Lisitsian and the mezzo Irina Arkhipova at Town Hall.

“Due to my extreme youth, I took for granted the première run at new York City opera of Carlisle Floyd’s *Susannah* with Phyllis Curtin, as well as Samuel Barber’s *Vanessa* at the Met in 1958 with Steber, Elias, Resnik, Gedda and Tozzi. I thought these new operas very beautiful, and at that time I assumed that new additions to the repertory were inevitable, a matter of common sense. I would learn otherwise later.

“In 1956, when I was 16, Jules and I decided it was imperative that we go to hear some Wagner, which everybody was making such a fuss about. Randomly—sight unseen and sound unheard—we went to the Met to hear *Götterdämmerung* (with Margaret Harshaw as Brünnhilde). We went standing room. The opera began, and continued. And continued. And continued. And it was still Act One. We got hungry, so we sneaked out, went across the street to the Automat, bought tuna sandwiches, and sneaked back into Met standing room. Act One was still going on, but the tuna sandwiches refreshed our patience. We understood not a word, not an action, not a note. But we were determined not to be defeated, and we stayed to the bitter end. In later years, after doing some homework, we learned which Wagner operas we loved, and which ones we loathed (we still had no idea about Wagner the man). Today I think *Götterdämmerung* is the greatest opera Wagner ever wrote.

“Speaking more generally, to this day, the widespread notion that real operatic creativity ended with Puccini still seems to me one of the most massively stupid stereotypes in existence, a piece of brainwashing utterly divorced from actual thinking.

“The operatic wonderland hardly exhausted New York’s treasures. I loved visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney. And the New York Public Library with its specialized branches held inexhaustible discoveries.

“At age 18, I had to make a living. Since age 9, I had decided that I wanted to be an opera singer, period. But at age 18 the voice itself didn’t seem that impressive, although I was already totally confident in terms of musicianship, languages and knowledge of repertory. So I auditioned for the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary. I was awed by the panel of judges, who included the composers Hugo Weisgall and Miriam Gideon, and Siegfried Landau, Conductor of the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

“I have a hilarious memory of that audition: After I sang a piece of my own choice, “*Avant de quitter ces lieux*” from *Faust*, the judges asked me to sight-sing something they chose. I remember Weisgall asked, ‘Do you use fixed Do or moveable Do?’ I said, ‘What?’ I had no idea what he meant, and I panicked, sure I wouldn’t be accepted. After Weisgall explained, I answered, ‘No, sir, I don’t know either of those. I can only sight-sing a new piece in Italian, French, German, English, Hebrew or Yiddish.’ There was a strange pause, and then Weisgall said, ‘All right, here is a 17th Century Italian song. Why don’t you sight-read it and Maestro Landau will accompany you?’

“In retrospect, I realize that the fact that the judges didn’t burst out in helpless gales of laughter was nothing short of heroic self-restraint. But anyway, I was accepted and completed the program between ages 18 to 21. I could hardly have gotten a more thorough grounding in music theory and practice. In seminar with Siegfried Landau, I traversed a large swatch of the art song repertory.

“In 1959, Hugo Weisgall took his students with him to hear the première of his opera *Six Characters In Search of an Author* at New York City Opera (the first of several operas by Weisgall which the City Opera would produce until 1993, when it mounted his last opera *Esther*). Mere proximity to such an extraordinary event was bound to make a profound impression on me.

“During my senior year at the Cantors Institute, in response to a fairly routine harmony assignment, something was triggered, and I burst out with a powerful Expressionist song setting of Rilke’s “*Der Panther*” in German.

poem by Rainer Maria Rilke Der Panther music by Solomon Epstein (1962)

Lento

5 *mp* Sein Blick - ist vom Vor-ü-ber-gehn - der Starbe so müd -
legato simile

8 *mp* - ge-word-en dass er Nichts mehr

10

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“To my surprise, the faculty was astonished, and they insisted I perform the song on my senior recital. They also insisted that I must continue to study composition. But at age 21 I was still obsessed with the idea of becoming an opera singer, so I could not really hear these professors at that time.

“In the early 1960’s, the Met made spectacular new acquisitions: Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, and Franco Corelli. Of course in 1966, the new Met opened in Lincoln Center. I went to the second performance of Barber’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. I thought it was a beautiful opera; since I had grown up listening to opera recordings, and since nobody went to the Old Met for spectacular productions (they were mostly make-do or falling apart), I had no habit, much less expectations, of fancy visual productions.

“The last notion that would have occurred to me was that it was the responsibility of opera to compete with the movies. So I barely noticed Zeffirelli’s elephantine sets, and was puzzled at the fuss they stirred up, as if they mattered one whit to the music.

“Though now the disease of Regietheater is a long-established convention, I think it is just as ridiculous and irrelevant as in 1966.”



Solomon Epstein, late 1960s. Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

“In fall 1962 I entered City College of New York, majoring in music. Since Open Admissions were still in the future, City College’s nickname as “the poor man’s Harvard” was still fully justified. I remember a class with the Hungarian professor Otto Deri.

“It was his practice to call on the individual students, most of whom were already accomplished instrumentalists, to perform in class sections of the scores we were then analyzing.

“As the only singer, I remember being asked to read through with a pianist some of Schönberg’s “Das Buch des hängenden Gärten”. At age 21, I really did not understand that many of our dazzlingly brilliant professors were refugees from Hitler. Especially in a field like music, these professors had studied in European conservatories, so they were far more advanced than many American-trained music professors at that time.

“After two months of this Paradise, in November I was summoned to the City College Health Department, which had required a physical exam for all entering students.

“The Health Office attendant showed me my lung X-rays, and pointed to something he called a ‘bleb’. He explained that sometimes a few alveoli break away from the lung lining in infancy, and gradually fill up with air and fluid. He said I would have to have immediate surgery. ‘But’, I protested, ‘This has never bothered me before, and I’m a singer. Can’t this operation wait till the summer when the school year is over?’ ‘Young man,’ said the attendant, ‘You don’t understand. You’ve just been lucky. If this thing pops, you drown.’

“At 21, I had never given a thought to health insurance, so the least expensive way for me to have this surgery was to go to Savannah and stay at my mother’s home. And fortunately, Savannah had only recently been graced with an expert young thoracic surgeon.

“The operation went fine, but the doctor insisted I remain in Savannah for three months, so that he could take follow-up X-rays to determine that I did not develop a post-operative infection. In 1962, this surgical procedure had only recently been developed.

“In New York, I had lived with a roommate my own age. Though I was academically and musically gifted, the Yeshiva experience had left me woefully inept in social relations. My roommate, on the other hand, was street-smart and sophisticated, working for “Time” magazine.

“For various reasons, he had taken on the role of my mentor in the area of what used to be called ‘sentimental education’, taking me to parties and literally teaching me techniques of flirting with young women, as well as the latest dance crazes.

“He was genuinely touched, as well as amused by my social retardation, and showed amazing patience in teaching me life lessons. So needless to say, I hero-worshipped him.

“But now I was helplessly trapped in Savannah for three months—an eternity. I could hardly wait to get back to New York, my idealized roommate, and City College. (I did not yet realize that City College was not on a two-semester schedule, which would have enabled me to enroll in January, but on a yearlong system, which would mean that I could not matriculate again until the following September).

“I guess that during my long absence in Savannah, my New York roommate, also 21, had time to think, and announced that he could no longer afford his half of the rent, and was moving out.

“In later years, common sense told me that he decided to move in with a girl. But whatever the facts, I was devastated, for now I had no one in New York who would be like family, and I could not return to City College for almost a year.

“On the surface I seemed all right, and I returned to New York to the same apartment, now furnished with a new roommate more than twice my age whom I loathed on sight, and finished out my contract as a part-time cantor with a synagogue in New Jersey.

“But this avalanche of meaningless personal catastrophes, blow after blow, was more than I was equipped to handle at that time.

“The result was that I rationalized my decision to leave New York and attend the College of Charleston, SC (my mother’s hometown), supporting myself as the cantor of a local synagogue. There I began staging then avant-garde plays with other college students.

“The students in ultra-conservative Charleston were intrigued by this exotic material which they would have otherwise probably never encountered, such as Ionesco’s *Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson*.

“Local audiences were enthusiastic also. But the ultra-conservative college administration hated this edgy stuff, and I got called on the carpet more than once.

“It took me years to realize that my failure to return to City College of New York, though psychologically understandable, was the most colossal mistake of my life.

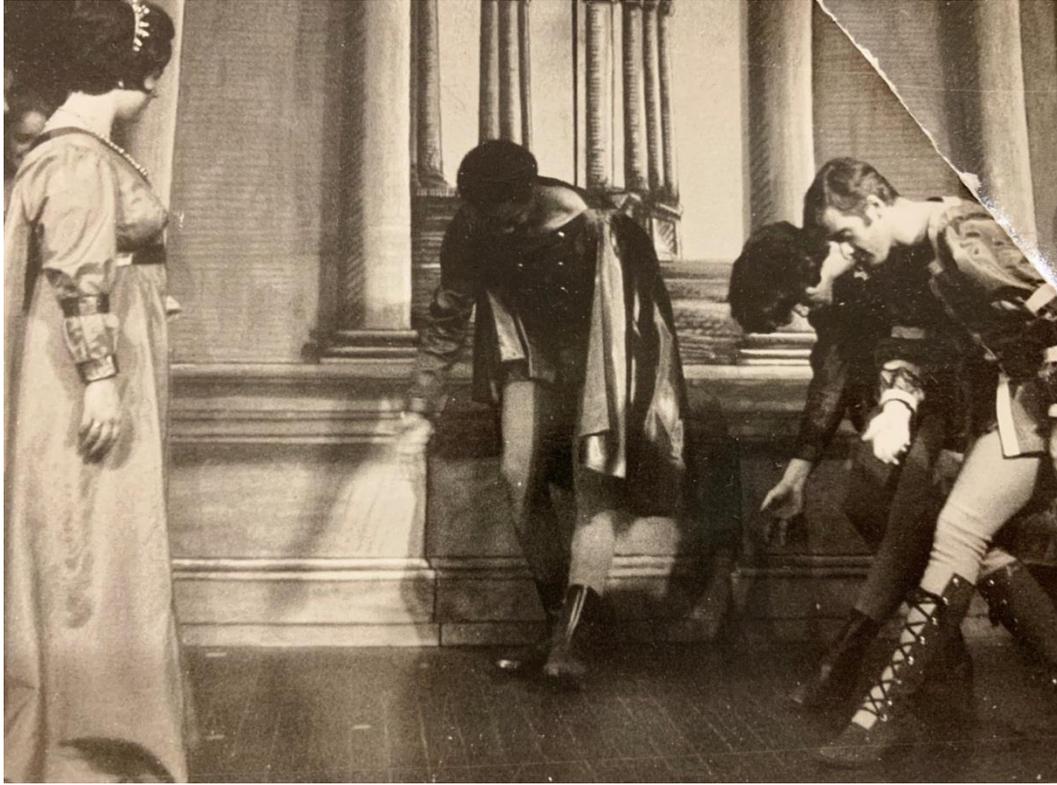
“After graduating in 1966, I suddenly woke up and realized that there was nothing for me in Charleston.

“So I managed to move back to New York, soon landing a position as cantor of a large Conservative synagogue in the New Haven suburb of Woodbridge, Connecticut.

“I was only 26, and later I learned that the synagogue Board of Directors was shocked at the notion of hiring such a young man.

“But they were persuaded by their rabbi, Arthur A. Chiel, who had been one of my favorite professors at the Cantors Institute of the Seminary.

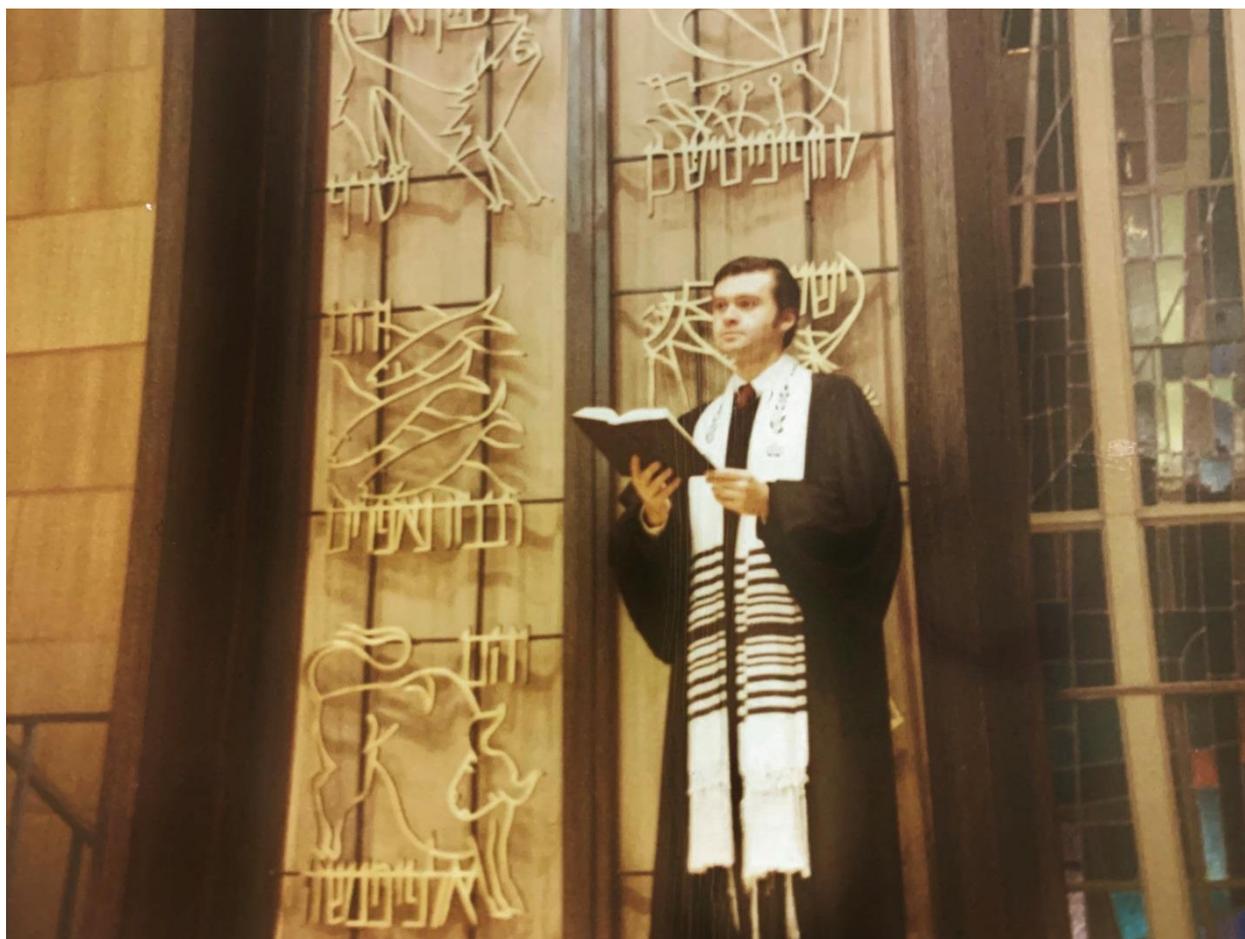
“It took me years to realize that my failure to return to City College of New York, though psychologically understandable, was the most colossal mistake of my life.



Solomon Epstein on stage in his university years, 1960s. Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“After graduating in 1966, I suddenly woke up and realized that there was nothing for me in Charleston. So I managed to move back to New York, soon landing a position as cantor of a large Conservative synagogue in the New Haven suburb of Woodbridge, Connecticut. I was only 26, and later I learned that the synagogue Board of Directors was shocked at the notion of hiring such a young man. But they were persuaded by their rabbi, Arthur A. Chiel, who had been one of my favorite professors at the Cantors Institute of the Seminary.

“At the same time, I was accepted at the Yale School of Music for a Master’s program in voice and opera. I spent summer 1969 at the Yale Summer School of Music in Norfolk, Connecticut on Fellowship as one of six singers, including the mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and the soprano Irene Gubrud, who has remained a lifelong friend. I did a great deal of programming at Congregation B’nai Jacob with children, teens and adults. But after ten years, I fell apart, and I left. Partly because I had no financial alternative, it took me much too long to realize that any synagogue was simply too small an arena to hold my interest for long—especially my musical interest.



Solomon Epstein as synagogue cantor, Congregation B’nai Jacob, Woodbridge, CT; mid 1960s. Dr. Epstein was employed as a Cantor and Music Director in synagogues in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, from 1966 to 2000. Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein as children's programs director and music educator, 1973. Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein as children's programs director and music educator, 1975. Courtesy Epstein Family, Atlanta, Georgia. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“After drifting for a year, in 1978, age 38, I ended up as cantor of a small congregation in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

“This situation worked very well for a while, because I saw the small, close-knit congregation as an extended family.

“And the congregation was thrilled with the theater extravaganzas I staged with children, as well as my bootstrapping of the adult choir up to professional level for religious services and concerts.

“Thus I developed enough clout to have the auditorium stage redesigned, and to insist that the synagogue’s ancient, asthmatic Wurlitzer organ be replaced with a top-of-the-line Allen electronic organ, along with a reconfiguration of the pulpit to make my communication with organist and choir much more efficient.

“There was a branch of the University of Pittsburgh in Johnstown with a growing Department of Theater spearheaded by its Director, Dr. Rodney Eatman.

“During my first year at the Johnstown synagogue, I received a phone call from Rodney. He had heard that I had a Masters of Music from the Yale Music School.

“Due to his efforts, the University was opening a new, well-equipped black-box theater. The inaugural production of fall 1979 was to be Brecht’s *Mother Courage*, a major challenge to the theater students at this still formative stage.

“Rodney asked if I would be able to act as Music Director for the Brecht production. I said yes, and the result was a very successful production of a very difficult play, whose quality surprised both the University and the general community audience. So Rodney and I formed a happy collaboration.

“Our next collaboration was again a Brecht work, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, in 1982.

“Meanwhile, working on the 1979 *Mother Courage* had triggered a long-dormant compositional impulse, leading to an increasing outpouring of compositional activity. By 1982 it dawned on me with a shock that what I was working up to was composing an opera: if I couldn’t sing it, then I would write it.

“Then it dawned on me that while I had solid musical training, I didn’t begin to have the compositional skills necessary to write an opera. And I had never had an orchestration class.

“So I contacted Professor Leonardo Balada, Chair of the Composition Department in the School of Music at Carnegie-Mellon University. Balada looked over my compositions and accepted me as a private student, also advising me to enroll in his orchestration class.

“Balada was a brilliant teacher, treating me with no-nonsense professional demands. Under his tutelage I grew musically by leaps and bounds.

“Yet Johnstown’s comfortable embrace began to seem increasingly suffocating. The pull of New York was magnetic, but by that time New York had become far too expensive, so I moved to Philadelphia, drastically limiting my time in the synagogue by taking part-time cantorial jobs. The impulse to compose opera was now an urgent compulsion, so in effect I traded money in order to free up a great deal of time.

Allegro feroce INTRODUCTION: CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE Solomon Epstein

NOTE TO PIANIST: As convenient, roll fists from left to right.

mf 8va
Pedal 8va
ff 8va
8va Pedal xylophone ff
ff 8va
8va Pedal
8va -- bb -- b -- tranquillo
ff sp
xylophone Pedal
Glockenspiel (let ring to *)
music copyright 1982 by Solomon Epstein

Pascantino
NO. 1 MEDIUM 12 STAVE

Solomon Epstein, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, incidental music and songs for a play by Bertolt Brecht; *Introduction*; composed 1982; unpublished manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

Lyrics: Bertolt Brecht
Allegro ma non troppo; agitato

music: Solomon Epstein

THE SONG OF THE ROTTEN BRIDGE (p.60)

① **baritone:** *f* ② ③ ④

Deep is the abyss - son know
The way that I know

ff *mf* *sfz* *mf*

drum (without snare) *mp* ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

(tympani mallets) *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

bass drum *ff*

I see the weak bridge
is the one I must

ff *mf*

tympani *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

drum (without snare) *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

bass drum *ff*

⑩ ⑪ ⑫ ⑬

sway tread *ff* *sfz* *ff* *mf*

But it's not for that
And all - by

ff *sfz* *ff* *mf*

tympani *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

drum (without snare) *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

bass drum *ff*

music copyright 1982 by Solomon Epstein

Solomon Epstein, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, incidental music and songs for a play by Bertolt Brecht; *The Song of the Rotten Bridge*; comp. 1982; unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.



UPJ THEATRE

presents

Bertolt Brecht's
THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

Directed by
Rodney Eatman

Musical Assistant
Thomas Fleming

Costumes designed by
Margaret E. Gilfillan

Musical Composer
Solomon Epstein

Setting & Lighting Designed by
Andrew B. Gilfillan

(Performances: October 21, 22, 23; 28, 29, 30, 1982)

Solomon Epstein, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*; University of Pittsburgh in Johnstown production program, October 21-30, 1982. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“Arriving in Philadelphia in 1983, I almost immediately fell in love with Tennessee Williams’ *Orpheus Descending*, adapted a libretto, and plunged into composition.

“Still, I knew I needed a teacher, and I was lucky enough to begin seven years of study with Andrew Rudin, Professor of Composition and Orchestration at Philadelphia University of the Arts and a brilliant musical polymath who composed in every genre: orchestral works, dance, electronic music, chamber music and opera.

“Rudin helped me to steer through the struggle of transforming *Orpheus Descending* into an opera.

“But finally after a year I felt there was too much in the play that was not susceptible of operatic transformation. Besides, I could not get the adaptation rights, so I abandoned the work. It was far from a total loss, since I had learned a great deal working with Andrew Rudin.

“I wrote several one-act operas at this point, including *The Wild Boy*, based on the attempt, 1800-1805, by Dr. Jean-Marc Itard of Paris to civilize a feral child found outside the forest of Aveyron, whom Itard named “Victor”.

“The work received a partial reading by the Orchestra of the University of Performing Arts in 1986.

“Musically I judged *The Wild Boy* to be very successful, an opinion confirmed by Andrew Rudin.

“But the subject really needed to be expanded into a full-length opera. Had I happened to run into a really gifted librettist, I would surely have developed this project on a larger scale.

“In 1986, I happened to re-read Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and I fell in and drowned. Melville’s awe-inspiring challenge gripped me completely.

“What I did not know was that this colossal operatic project would occupy me off and on in spurts over the next twenty years before I completed it to my satisfaction.

“What I had to learn about *Moby-Dick* was that, monumental as the musical challenges were, truly understanding how I wanted to compress and focus the vast book as an opera libretto would lead me to years of reading Melville scholarship.

“Beyond the staggering interpretive literature on *Moby-Dick*, I would need to understand both the relation of the great book to Melville’s personal biography, and to the political, economic and religious context of the first half of the 19th Century in America, which was the historical milieu in which Melville swam.

“In 1987, the Haddonfield Plays and Players (New Jersey) celebrated their 75th Anniversary by opening a new theater facility.

“As part of their celebration, they commissioned an original musical, and I was asked to compose the songs.

“The book chronicled the life of the 19th Century New England entrepreneur Lydia Pinkham, and would be called *Lady Lyd*.

For my mother, Florette Jacobs Epstein: steadfast

Piano-Vocal Score

The Wild Boy

Opera in one act

music and libretto by Solomon Epstein

based on the case history of the wild boy of Aveyron,
whose education into civilization was

attempted by Dr. Jean-Marc Itard, Paris, 1800-1805

composed while studying with Professor Andrew Rudin at Philadelphia
University of the Arts. Orchestra reading, with taping, January 1986,
of the Boy's Dance (Pages 25 to 57) by the orchestra of the Philadelphia
University of the Arts, conducted by Joseph Primavera, Chairman of
the Conducting Department.

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CAST LIST:

DR. JEAN-MARC ITARD.... high baritone
VICTOR (designated V1)... actor and mime (about 16)
VICTOR (designated V2)... dancer
TWO STRONG MALE ATTENDANTS... silent
(should appear as identical as possible to V1)

INSTRUMENTATION:

Piccolo
2 Flutes
Oboe
2 Bb Clarinets
Bassoon

2 French Horns
Trumpet in Bb
Trombone
Tuba

Percussion: 3 players

Tympani

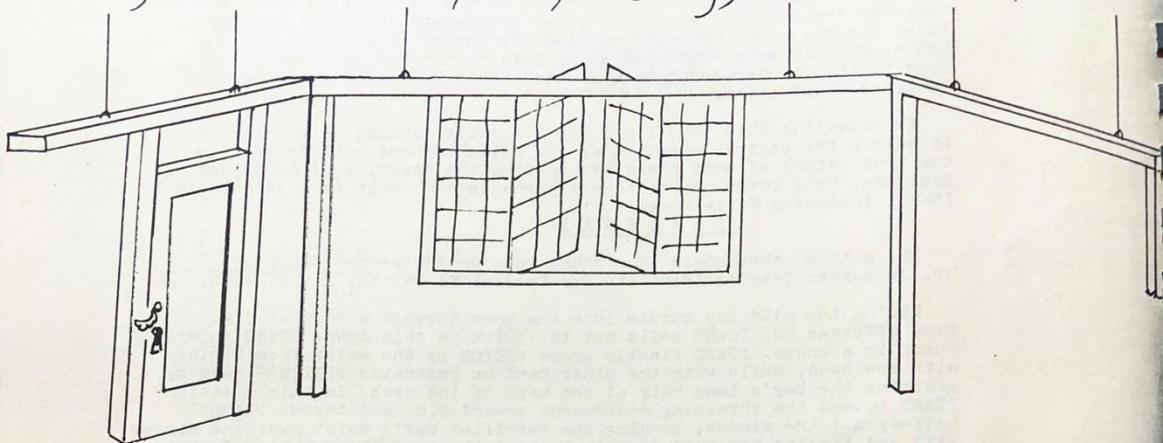
Celesta (or piano); vibraphone; 2 glockenspiels
Wind chimes (glass); sandpaper blocks; triangle;
small wood-block with hard sticks; click-stones;
Chinese cymbal; suspended cymbal; Crotales
(full chromatic octave G-g; tubular chimes
with soft mallets may be substituted for
crotales).

Harp

Strings

Outline of technical requirements for *The Wild Boy*

SET: Outline of a spacious instruction room on the second floor of Dr. Jean-Marc Itard's Institute for Special Education, Paris, 1800. Set may be built thus and suspended from ceiling; the rear window is opened outward.



In addition, at rear are the doctor's writing desk and chair below U.C. window; simple light metal open bookshelf units upstage left and right of window; and a school desk (enlarged in non-realistic style) fitted with restraint straps at left of center.

On the bookshelves are various colorful instructional toys, inventions of Dr. Itard. A projection screen is positioned behind the window so that the top of a leafy spreading chestnut may be rear-projected on it. During VICTOR's dance, semi-abstract projections may be used to suggest VICTOR's memory of life in the forest:



58

V2 appears from behind desk, standing behind V1.

250

ob *p* *f* *mf* *ff*

V1, seated, and V2, standing, in profile behind V1, are both facing right. Their motions, yearning arms outstretching, are identical.

ob *ff* *sp* *ff*

Their motions become more and more urgent. V1 unstraps himself and gets out of desk.

ob *ff* *meno* *mp*

255

ob *sff* *p* *attacca* *f*

wind chimes

257

Allegretto leggiero

sandpaper blocks *f* *8va* *mf*

Piano (or celesta) *f*

The following dance, while not a duet, should still express the yearning relationship of V1 toward V2, since V2 represents V1's memory of his life in the forest. The overall feeling of the dance is hypnotic, languorous. Allegretto leggiero

attacca

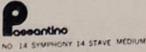
Vn I (tutti) *arco* *pizz.*

Vn II *pizz.* *arco*

Va *pizz.* *arco*

Vc *pizz.* *arco*

EPSTEIN/WILD BOY

 pocoartino
NO. 14 SIMPSON 14 STAVE MEDIUM

Solomon Epstein, *The Wild Boy: Opera in One Act*, comp. 1985; unpubl. ms.; Orchestra Score; Page 58 (Beginning of Dance). The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

Piano-Vocal score **THE WILD BOY** music and libretto by
Solomon Epstein
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Opera in one act
Through the door in the side wall U.R., VICTOR the wild boy explodes into the room

Allegro barbaro DR. ITARD: (offstage R.) *f*

Vic-tor! Vic-tor!

VICTOR runs and crouches above desk which is at center left. DR. ITARD enters through door at U.R.

Stop! Calm down! Calm, boy! - -

poco cresc. non cresc.

VICTOR runs wildly D.L., crouches; ITARD, takes key from pocket, quickly turns and locks door from inside.

sff *mf* *sff*

EPSTEIN/WILD BOY

Poesantino
NO. 14 SYMPHONY 14 STAVE MEDIUM

Solomon Epstein, *The Wild Boy: Opera in One Act*; comp. 1985; unpubl. ms.; Piano-Vocal Score; Page 1. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

PLOT SUMMARY

LADY LYD

Synopsis: The Golden Age of Medical Quackery--circa 19th century--introduced to America, and to the world, a legend--Lydia Estes Pinkham--business tycoon, feminist, sexual advisor. Her Vegetable Compound offered women help with their most "secret" problems.

Her boisterous life and loves with three men, her warming story of success against interminable odds against women is told in "Lady Lyd" as music/theater.

We are made privy to Lydia's birth in **1819** into a family of ten boys and to a father she must prove her worth to.

Lydia grows up "on stage" and we are played out her father love/hate; early childhood romance with T. Elliot Harkum; advances at taking over her father's bottling business after his death; her convenient marriage to Isaac Pinkham while her real love, T. Elliot, goes off to Paris to Medical School.

The play presents us with Lydia's battle against the men of the times, the doctors of the times, the women who find her difficult to follow.

Her first Medicine Show is sabotaged by her jealous husband, Isaac, and she runs off on a mad love affair with a con artist, Alex White.

This affair ends in disaster. She comes home to Lynn, where Isaac has rebuilt her medicine business. She is now torn between Isaac, her old love Dr. Harkum, and Harkum's daughter, Annie, who is mute and needs Lydia's counsel and care.

Consumption destroys her business. Isaac dies; she is hospitalized in Harkum's hospital. Annie comes to her in terrible fear and breaks through her prison of muteness as a sign of confidence in Lydia.

This miracle reconciles Lydia with Harkum, and the play ends on this high note of hope.

words by
WILLIAM BLOCK

ACT I FINALE - Page 2

music by
SOLOMON EPSTEIN

BLUESKY:

Blue-sky, Blue-sky end-less ho-

-ri-zons my hopes are

high and wide as the sky -

I'll

ARCHIVES © Copyright 1987 by William Block and Solomon Epstein
LL125-12 Slave

Solomon Epstein, *Lady Lyd: A Musical in Two Acts*; Book and Lyrics by William Block; Music by Solomon Epstein; comp. and performed 1987; unpubl. ms.; Piano-Vocal Score; Act I Finale; Page 2.
The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“This was an interesting challenge for me, because I had never been interested in the Broadway musical genre. But here was a chance to have a work performed live.

“The music I came up with sounded like a compromise: my efforts at Broadway-style songs came out leaning in the direction of Aaron Copland’s American populist style.

“Anyway, the show turned out to be a well-attended success. I was especially pleased with the talented singer-actors of the Haddonfield Players.

“They had long performed a different Broadway hit each year, but had always learned the songs by ear from the Broadway cast album. Now they rose with great enthusiasm to the professional task of learning the songs from written music in rehearsal with a coach-pianist.

“Meanwhile, I had discovered the Melville Society, a sub-grouping of English professors within the Modern Language Association. I had written to them in 1986, asking if a Melville scholar might be willing to work with me on carving an opera libretto from *Moby-Dick*.

“As passionate I was about the project, I still did not feel that I knew the complexities of the great book well enough to adapt a libretto myself.

“In fall 1987, a year after I had written to the Melville Society, I received a package from Joyce Sparer Adler of Bennington, Vermont.

“It turned out that Joyce Adler, then president of the Melville Society, had written a book, *War In Melville’s Imagination*, published 1983 by New York University’s Gotham Press.

“She had also scripted dramatized and performed versions of Melville’s shorter works, including *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*, and expressed interest in working on a libretto adaptation of *Moby-Dick*.

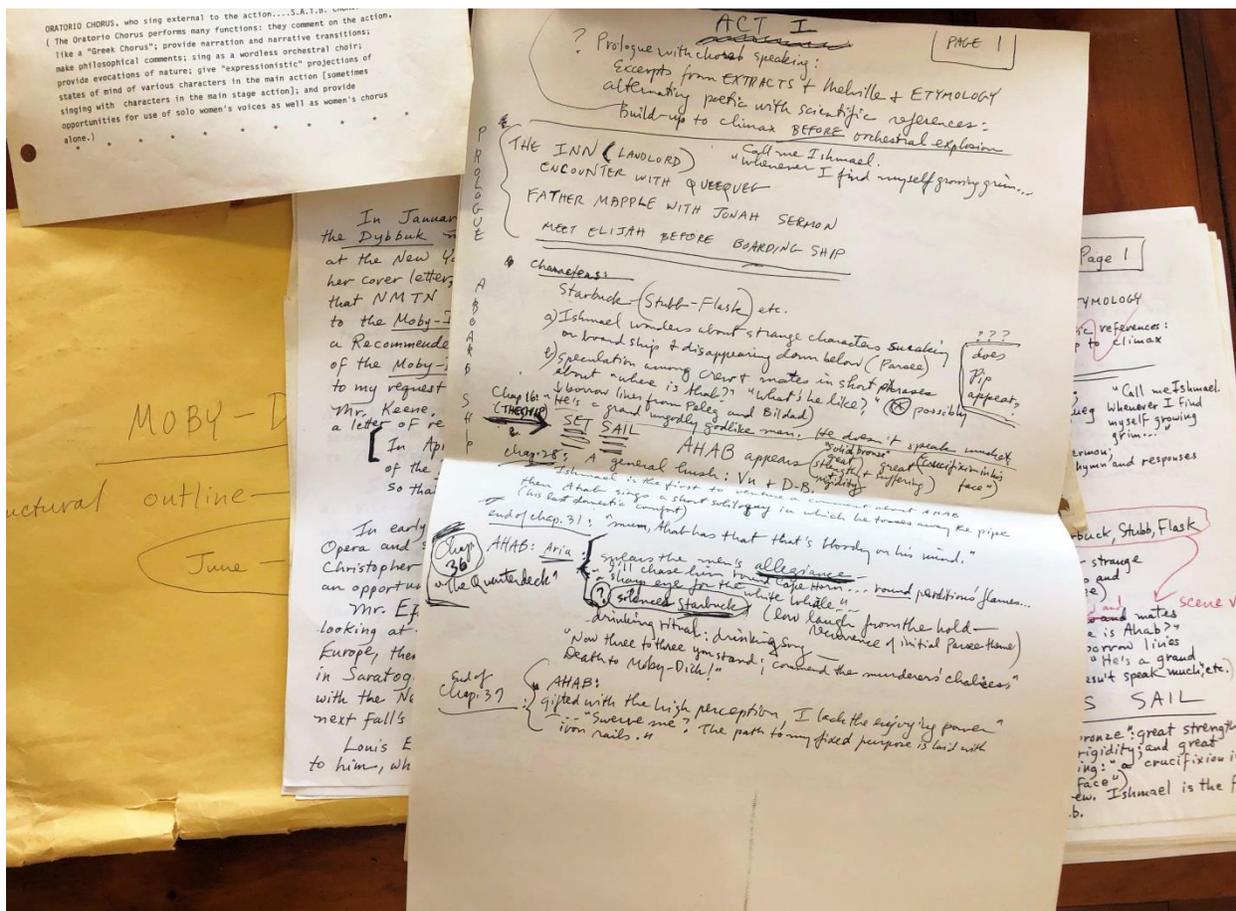
“In her package, Ms. Adler also enclosed a multi-page questionnaire for me about Melville and *Moby-Dick*. It amounted to a Master’s Degree thesis, but I answered it.

“I guess my answers passed muster with Joyce Adler, for she invited me to her home in Vermont during the following spring, where she resided with her husband, a prominent mathematics professor.

“So in spring 1988 I spent an enjoyable week with the Adlers, as Joyce Adler and I surveyed the terrain of *Moby-Dick*.

“On a very big piece of butcher-block paper spread out on her kitchen table, we carved up the White Whale, ending up with a large interweaving diagram of a possible libretto for an opera.

“In this process of boiling down the very complex book into a workably dramatic outline of a libretto, we found it enormously helpful that Melville had formatted the book as a series of short, mostly self-contained chapters.



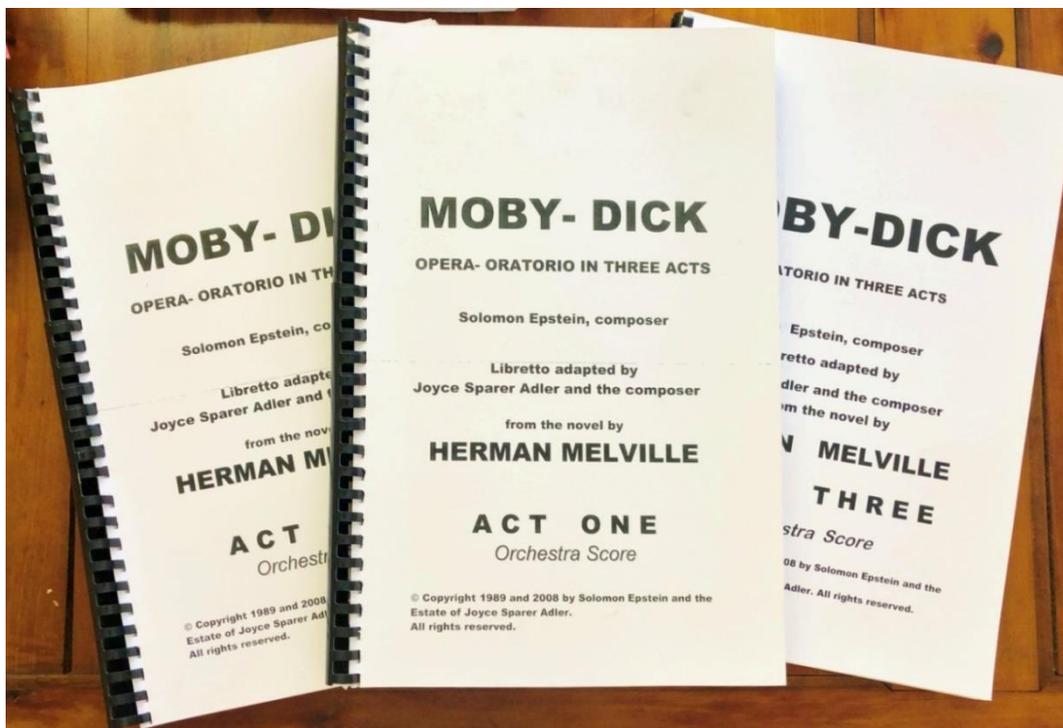
Solomon Epstein, *Moby-Dick: Opera-Oratorio in Three Acts*; Structural outline-Scenario («before libretto»); June-August 1988; unpubl. mss. & typescripts. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“So for example we saw immediately that Ishmael’s pseudo-scientific, self-parodying Cetology chapters could have no place in an operatic rendering.

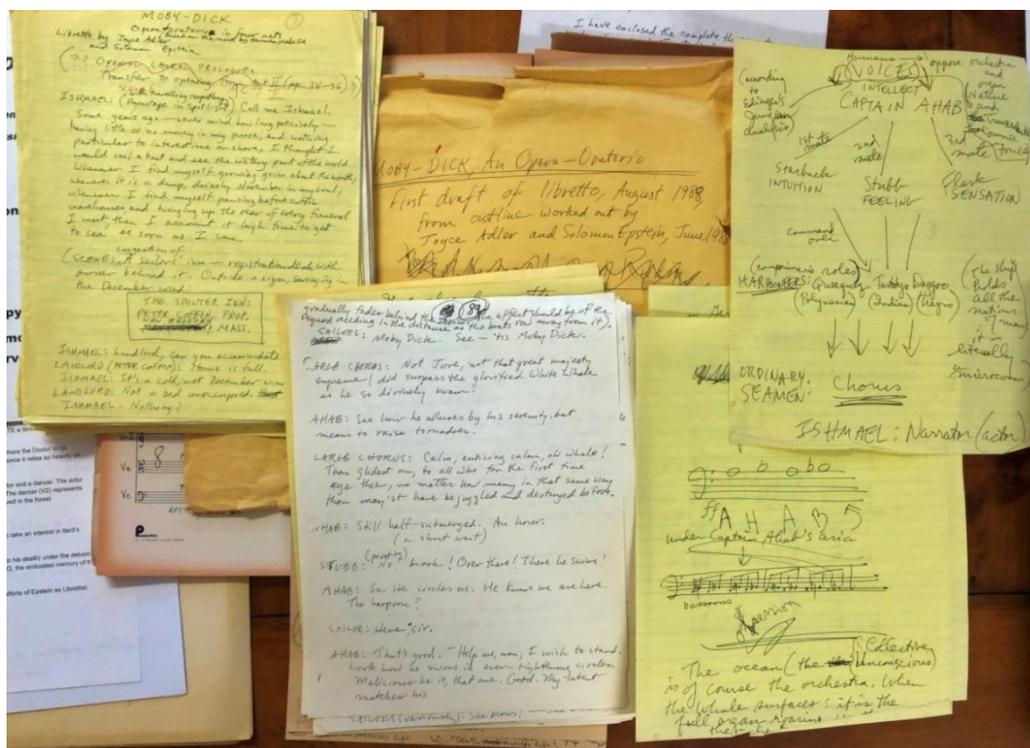
“In fall 1988, armed with Joyce Adler’s crucial outline, which I would flesh out with Melville’s words, I plunged into the musical setting of a *Moby-Dick* opera.

“Andrew Rudin was an indispensable guide as I fought my way over the next year to arrive at a first three-act draft of an opera on *Moby-Dick*.

“With some scenes I felt I had hit the mark, but I knew that much of this first rough draft would demand a great deal of hard thought and hard work.



Solomon Epstein, *Moby-Dick: Opera-Oratorio in Three Acts*; Libretto adapted by the composer and Joyce Sparer Adler from the novel by Herman Melville; Orchestra Score, 3 Vols.; 1989, 2008; unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *Moby-Dick: Opera-Oratorio in Three Acts*; First Draft of Libretto; August 1988; unpubl. mss. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

MOBY-DICK

OPERA-ORATORIO

IN THREE ACTS

music by
Solomon Epstein

libretto adapted by
Joyce Sparer Adler and Solomon Epstein

from the novel by

HERMAN MELVILLE

Copyright 1989 and 2008 by

Solomon Epstein and
the Estate of Joyce Sparer Adler

LIBRETTO

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MOBY-DICK: AN OPERA-ORATORIO IN THREE ACTS

adapted from the novel by

HERMAN MELVILLE

Co-Librettists:

JOYCE SPARER ADLER

and

SOLOMON EPSTEIN

Composer:

SOLOMON EPSTEIN

(NOTE: Bracketed lines are sung either overlapping or simultaneously)

A C T O N E

PROLOGUE

ISHMAEL: (downstage in spotlight) Call me Ishmael. Some years ago --- never mind how long precisely --- having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about and see the watery part of the world. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; when ever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet, then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. (ISHMAEL turns upstage and steps into the scene: a suggestion of a sailors' inn --- outside a sign swinging in the December wind:

THE SPOUTER INN: PETER COFFIN, PROPRIETOR, NEW BEDFORD, MASS.

There is a quick exchange in pantomime of conversation, as ISHMAEL requests a room, the PROPRIETOR holds out his hand, and ISHMAEL gives him coins. Then the PROPRIETOR takes up his lantern and leads ISHMAEL into the "bedroom area", where there is a very large bed and behind it a "wall"

[a scrim]).

PRELUDE WITH PANTOMIME

(PROPRIETOR EXIT with lantern. Moonlight only. On the "wall" [scrim] there appears a projection: a painting, turbulent but unclear at first, which gradually clarifies to reveal itself as a painting of a whale in the gigantic act of leaping over a three-masted schooner and impaling itself on the masts. ISHMAEL stares transfixed at the painting. After a few moments he turns away; the painting fades.

ISHMAEL drops his traveller's bag. He looks uncertainly round the room, peers apprehensively at the door, sits on bed, pulls off his boots, takes off his heavy outer coat, begins to unbutton his shirt, then suddenly without undressing further jumps into the far side of the bed and pulls the covers up to his chin.

The Polynesian harpooneer QUEEQUEG ENTERS, nearly seven feet tall, and carrying a shrunken head. He turns his back to ISHMAEL, appearing not to notice him. ISHMAEL turns quickly but silently in the bed, covered up, observing the stranger with

-3-

SCENE ONE :THE WHALEMAN'S CHAPEL

(On the large rear scrim there appear large projections of marble memorial tablets on either side of the pulpit at upstage center. These black-bordered tablets have inscriptions:

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN TALBOT.
Who, at the age of eighteen,
was lost over board,Near
the Isle of Desolation, off
Patagonia,
November 1st, 1836.
THIS TABLET
is erected to his memory
BY HIS SISTER

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY
OF
ROBERT LONG, WILLIS ELLERY,
NATHAN COLEMAN, WALTER CANNY,SETH MARY,
AND SAMUEL GLEIG,
forming one of the boats' crews
of
THE SHIP ELIZA,
who were towed out of sight by a Whale,
on the Off-shore Ground in the
PACIFIC,
December 31st, 1839.
THIS MARBLE
Is here placed by their surviving
SHIPMATES

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY
OF
The late
CAPTAIN EZEKIEL HARDY
who in the bows of his boat was killed by a
Sperm Whale on the coast of Japan,
August 3rd, 1833.
THIS TABLET
Is erected to his Memory
BY
HIS WIDOW

The CONGREGATION gradually files in. They are dressed in Sunday clothes, properly but unostentatiously. Several, particularly among the women, are dressed in mourning black.

Instrumentation

Piccolo

Flute I and II

Oboe (doubling Cor anglais)

B-b Clarinet I and II

Bass Clarinet

Bassoon

Contra-Bassoon

French horns I, II, III, IV

B-b Trumpet I and II

Tenor Trombone I and II

Bass Trombone

Tuba

4 Tympani: 32", 29", 26", 23"

Percussion: xylophone, vibraphone, glockenspiel, celesta, 2 tubular chimes (snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbals (small, medium, large), sizzle cymbal, finger cymbals, crash cymbals, triangle, tambourine, tam-tams (small, medium, large) claves, woodblocks (small, medium, large), castanets, anvil whip, ratchet, wind chimes (metal), Mark Tree

Piano

Organ

Strings

MOBY-DICK: Opera-Oratorio in Three Acts
Adapted from the novel by Herman Melville
 Joyce Sparer Adler and Solomon Epstein, Co-Librettists
 Solomon Epstein, Composer

PROLOGUE

Echoing footsteps are heard approaching from OFFSTAGE before the closed curtain. ISHMAEL ENTERS DOWNSTAGE, in spotlight.

ISHMAEL (to audience): Call me Ishmael. Some years ago — never mind how long precisely — having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about and see the watery part of the world.

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from stepping into the street and knocking people's hats off — then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball.

There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men, sometime or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings toward the ocean with me.

(Curtain up. Ishmael turns UPSTAGE and steps into SCENE.)

A suggestion of a sailors' inn. Outside, a sign swinging in the December wind:
The Spouter Inn: Peter Coffin, Proprietor, New Bedford, Mass.

Ishmael and Peter Coffin pantomime a quick exchange of conversation:
As Ishmael requests a room, there are gestures of disagreement back and forth; finally the Proprietor holds out his hand and Ishmael gives him coins. The Proprietor takes up his lantern and leads Ishmael into the "bedroom area", where there is a very large down-quilted bed, and UPSTAGE of it, a "wall" (a scrim). Proprietor lights oil lamp on bedside table, then EXITS with his lantern. Moonlight. On the scrim there appears a huge projection painting, ornately framed, of a sperm whale in the gigantic act of leaping over a three-masted schooner and impaling itself on the masts.

Ishmael, his back to the audience, stares mesmerized in wonder at the painting for some moments: PRELUDE

** It is imperative that the set designer consult the monumental study by Robert K. Wallace, Melville and J.M.W. Turner: Spheres of Love and Flight: Side Projections of Turner's seascapes may very well serve as backdrops at various points in the opera. The opening scene in the bedroom of the Spouter-Inn should show the painting Ishmael describes (see final paragraph above), painted in the dynamic "proto-Expressionist" style of Turner.*

music by Solomon Epstein

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Solomon Epstein, *Moby-Dick: Opera-Oratorio in Three Acts*; 1989, 2008; Orchestra Score; Act I, Pages 1, 190-191. unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

Solomon Epstein, *Moby-Dick*; Orchestra Score; Act III, Pages 779-780 (End of Opera); unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

Solomon Epstein, *Moby-Dick*; Piano-Vocal Score; Act II, Scene 2: *Dance of Sailors*, Pages 170-171; unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

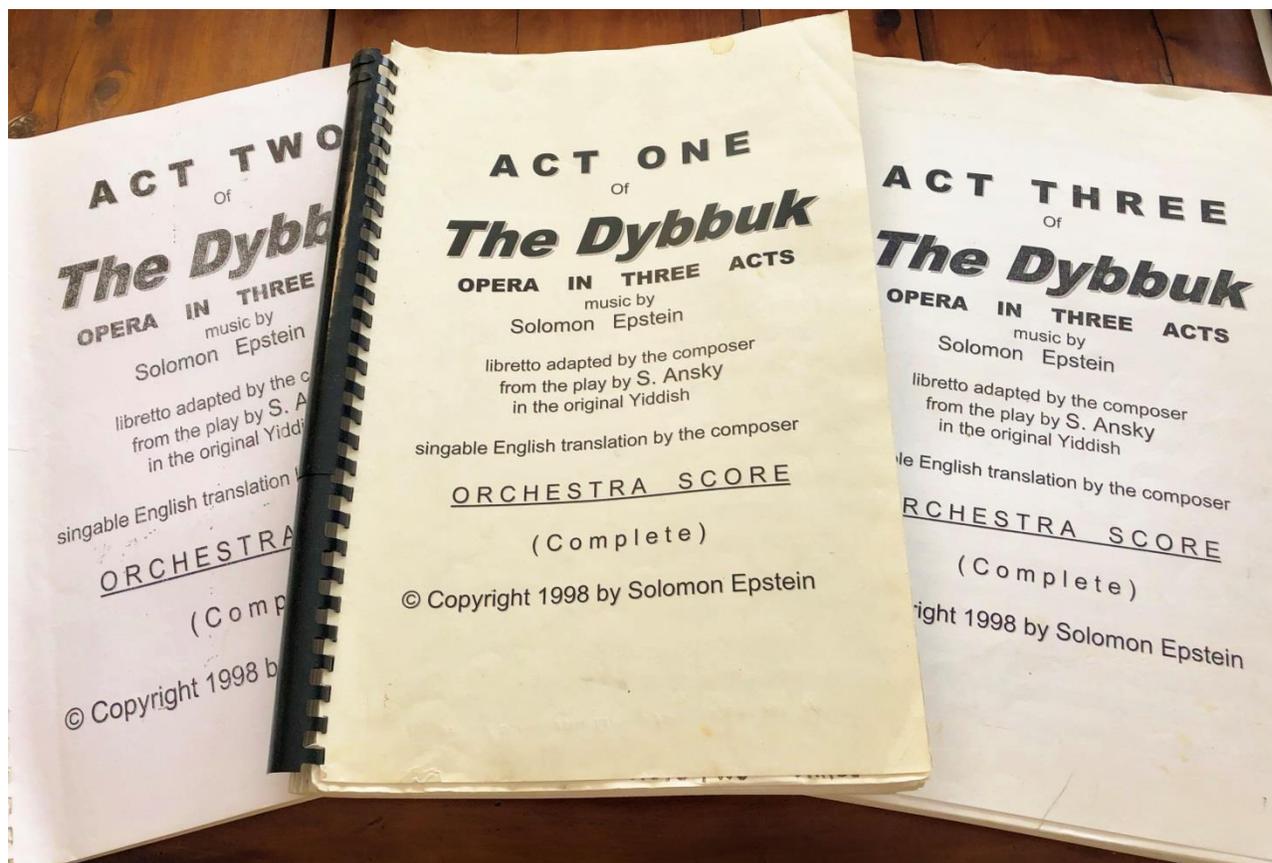
“By spring 1989, the congregation where I earned a living as a part-time cantor decided to close its doors and merge with another congregation. Unable to locate a similar position in the Philadelphia area, I was forced to move.

“In my last lesson with Andrew Rudin, he said to me, ‘Well, you’ve done a lot of study now in composition and orchestration. With your extensive background in Jewish music, I think you might just be the man to adapt S. Ansky’s drama *The Dybbuk* as an opera. It’s been tried before, but so far not very successfully.’

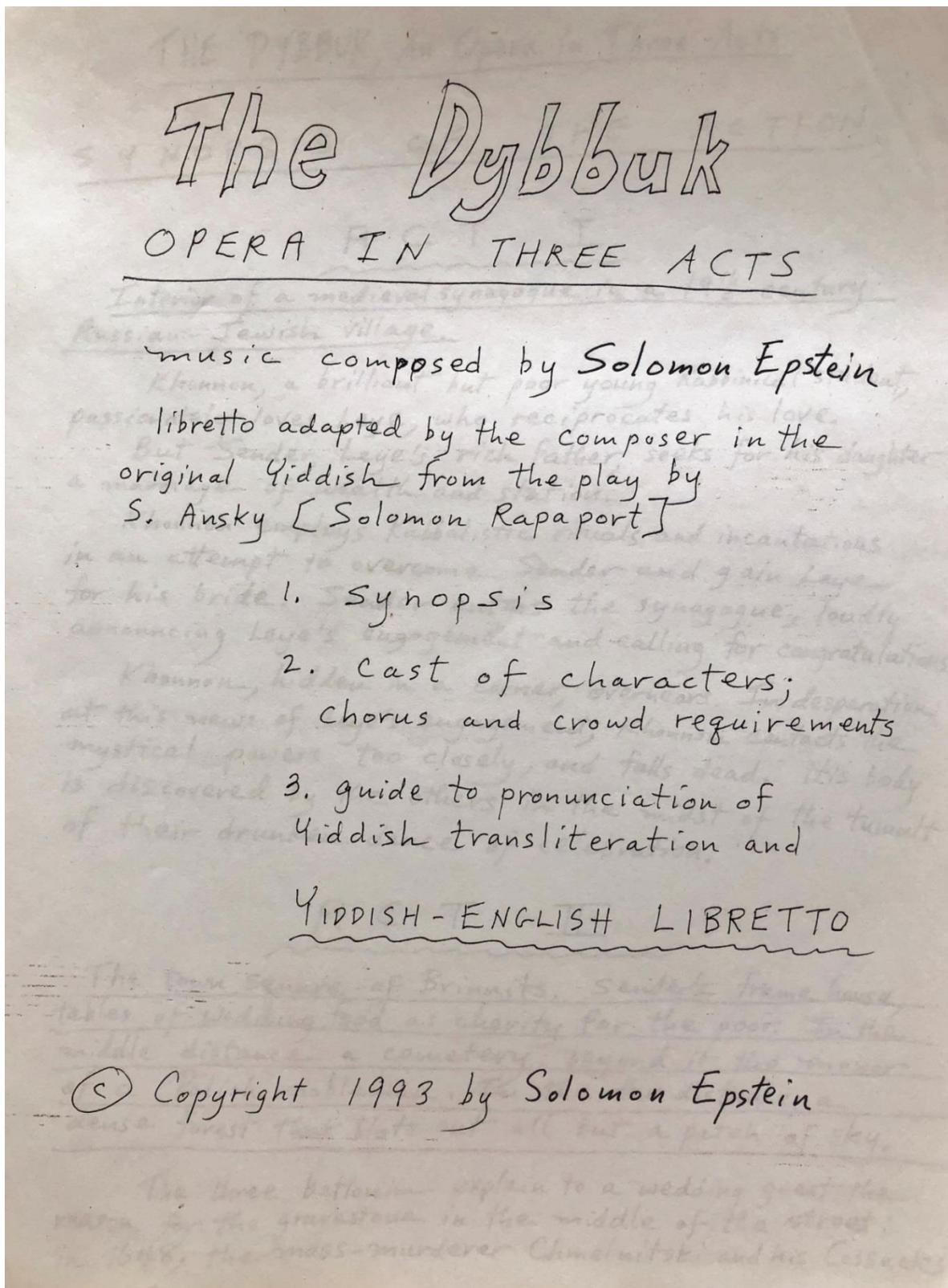
“Coming from a composer as gifted and experienced as Andrew Rudin, his observation was all it took to galvanize me into composing and orchestrating an opera on *The Dybbuk* over the next five years.

“My first decision was to adapt my libretto from S. Ansky’s Yiddish version of his play. I obtained the Yiddish playscript from YIVO in New York.

“*Moby-Dick* now existed as a complete, though rough, three-act first draft, but further work on it would have to wait.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*; Libretto adapted by the composer from the play by S. Ansky in the original Yiddish. Performed: 1999, Beersheba, Israel, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; Tel Aviv, Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre. Orchestra Score, 3 Vols.; 1994, 1998; unpublished manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*; Libretto adapted by the composer from the play by S. Ansky in the original Yiddish. First draft of Libretto: Cover Page; 1993; unpublished manuscript. The ICAMus Archive.
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(45)

(LAYEH falls. People run over to her to pick her up, but it is impossible to move her, as if she were an iron weight.)

VOICE OF KHAWNAWN (OFFSTAGE over microphone, recognizable, but electronically altered with echo and reverb):

Ah! Ah!

(LAYEH, prostrate, slowly raises herself to her hands and knees like an animal on all fours, head lowered. Then, as she very slowly raises her head, full face toward audience, she is seen to be lip-synching KHAWNAWN'S OFFSTAGE VOICE, with fierce intensity but with no sound.)

LAYEH: (lip-synching):

[Ah! Ir hant mir m'kaver zyne, oon ikh hant zikh um-gekert tzoo myne beshertter!]	[Ah! You buried me, And I have returned to my destined bride!]
---	--

VOICE OF KHAWNAWN:

Ah! Ir hant mir m'kaver zyne, oon ikh hant zikh um-gekert tzoo myne beshertter!	Ah! You buried me, And I have returned to my destined bride!
---	--

CROWD:

Ah! Ah!

[LAYEH (lip-synching):
[Un vel nit arek-gayn fun ir!]] [And I will not go out from her!]

VOICE OF KHAWNAWN:

Un vel nit arek-gayn fun ir! And I will not go out from her!

CROWD: Ah! CROWD: Ah!

(NAKHMAN approaches LAYEH; she shrieks into his face:)

The Dybbuk:

An Opera In Yiddish

music by Solomon Epstein

**libretto adapted by the composer
from the play by S. Anski
(Solomon Rapaport)**

CHART OF TRADITIONAL
RUSSIAN-JEWISH SOURCE
MUSIC USED IN THE OPERA
MELODICALLY AND MOTIVICALLY

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= page 1 =

Traditional Russian-Jewish musical sources used in THE DYBBUK: AN OPERA IN YIDDISH by SOLOMON EPSTEIN, with libretto adapted by the composer from the Yiddish playscript by S. ANSKI.

These traditional sources are adapted both melodically and motivically, and were chosen as appropriate to dramatic situations in the opera. The references below are keyed to their appearance in the opera's piano-vocal score by measure numbers.

Many of the opera's melodies and motives are not shown here because they are freely composed in response to dramatic situations, but all are shaped by characteristic Jewish scale patterns. ACT ONE, Prelude.

Nusakh [Signature Melody] for the Final Service [Ne-illah] of Yom Kippur with words from the High Holiday Prayer Book.

Often rhythms are approximate.

measures 144-187 freely chanted: (appears both melodically and as a recurring motive)

1. *Andante*

Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash sh'mei ra-ba, A-mer, bi-ol-mo div-ro Khir-u-telei V-yam-likh mal-khu-tei.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

mm. 189 Chant associated with the study of the Talmud 191

2. *Andante sognando*

190 191 etc.

mm. 228-231; Lubavitcher Hassidic melody for "Tzomoh l'khe naf shi" (My soul thirsts for Thee) [from Psalm 63]

3. *Andante*

Tzomoh l'khe naf shi'

m. 265 ACT ONE, scene two [Also ACT ONE, scene six, mm. 973-1002]

4. *Allegro* Lubavitcher Hassidic Circle Dance

poco allargando accelerando, con giubilo

ARCHIVES

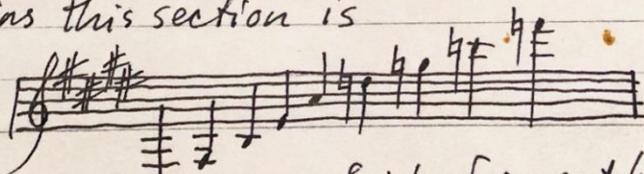
Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*; Libretto adapted by the composer from the play by S. Ansky in the original Yiddish. Chart of Traditional Russian-Jewish Source Music Used in the Opera Melodically and Motivically; 11 Pages; Page 1; 2012; unpublished ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

Some Comments:

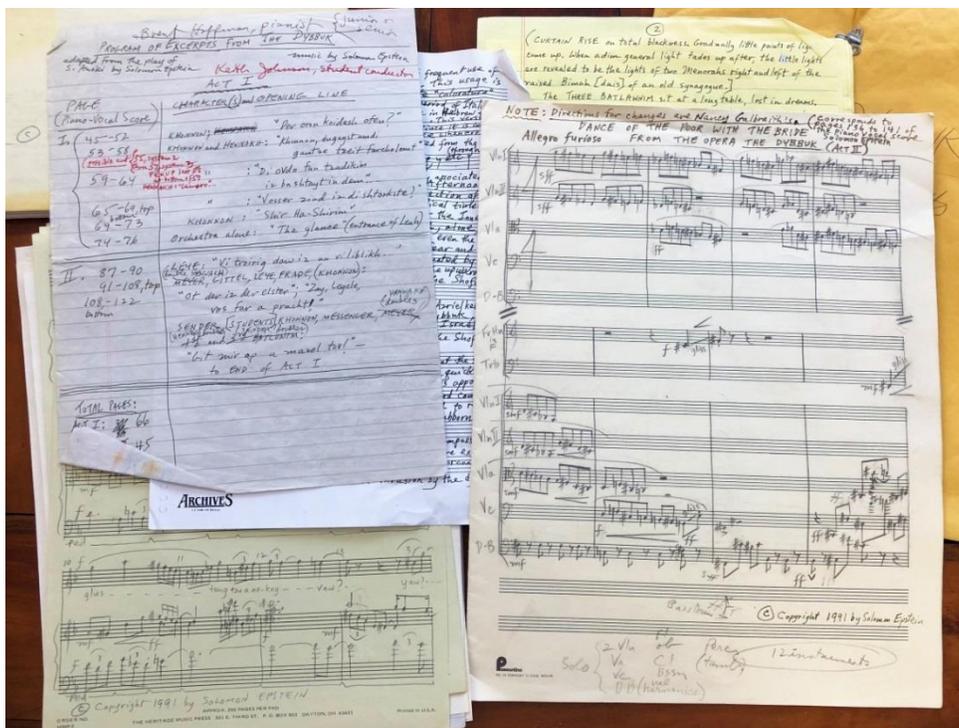
I have saturated The Dybbuk opera both melodically and motivically with traditional Russian-Jewish folk music: synagogue chant, Yiddish folk song, klezmer band tunes, Chassidic melodies. Some of this is direct quotation from the tradition; some of it is composed "in the style of" the tradition.

Using the melodies of a folk tradition has meant trying to find suitable harmonic language. In the context of an opera, all musical elements must also be responsive to dramatic considerations of characterization, psychology, atmosphere.

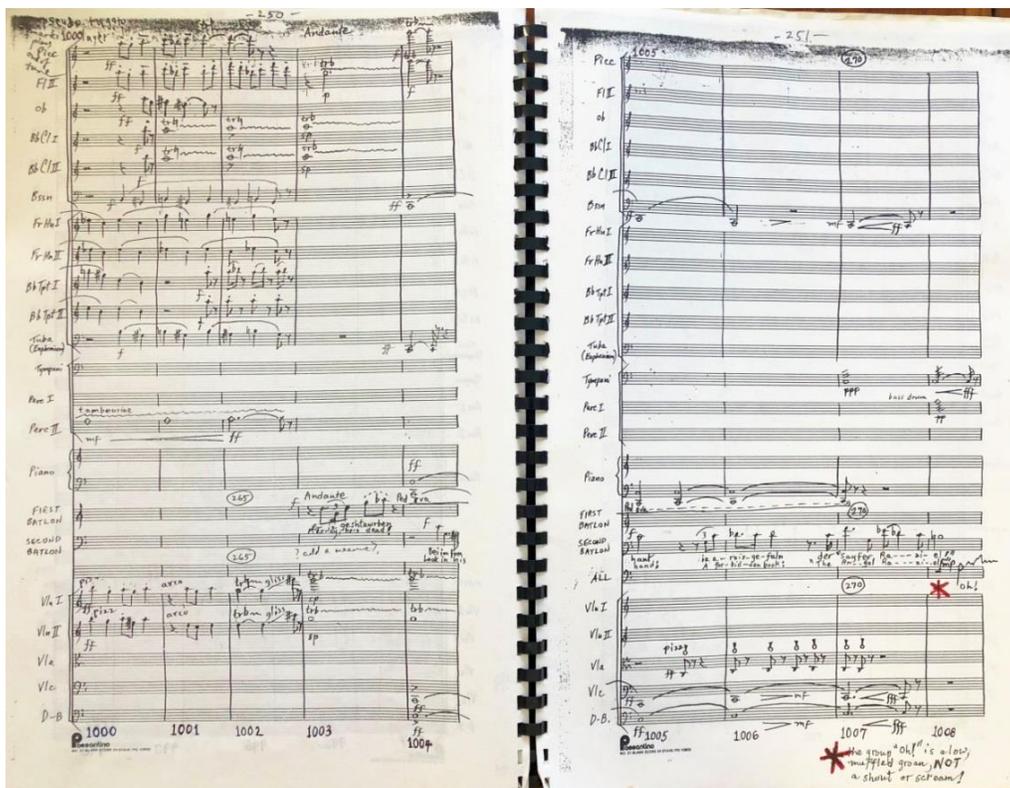
Occasionally, I have used pictorialism. For example, in Act I, beginning page 46, Khounon resorts to a kind of mystical number manipulation known in Jewish tradition as "gematria." In this system, number values are assigned to each Hebrew letter. Then, by a process similar to free association, the seeker finds meanings when he discovers that the numerical values (or multiples thereof) of different words are equivalent. So here, since Khounon is obsessed with his passion for Leye, he notices that the numerical value of the Hebrew letters that spell the name "Leye" equals 36, which is "9x4". So it is obvious that the musical figure that underpins this section is



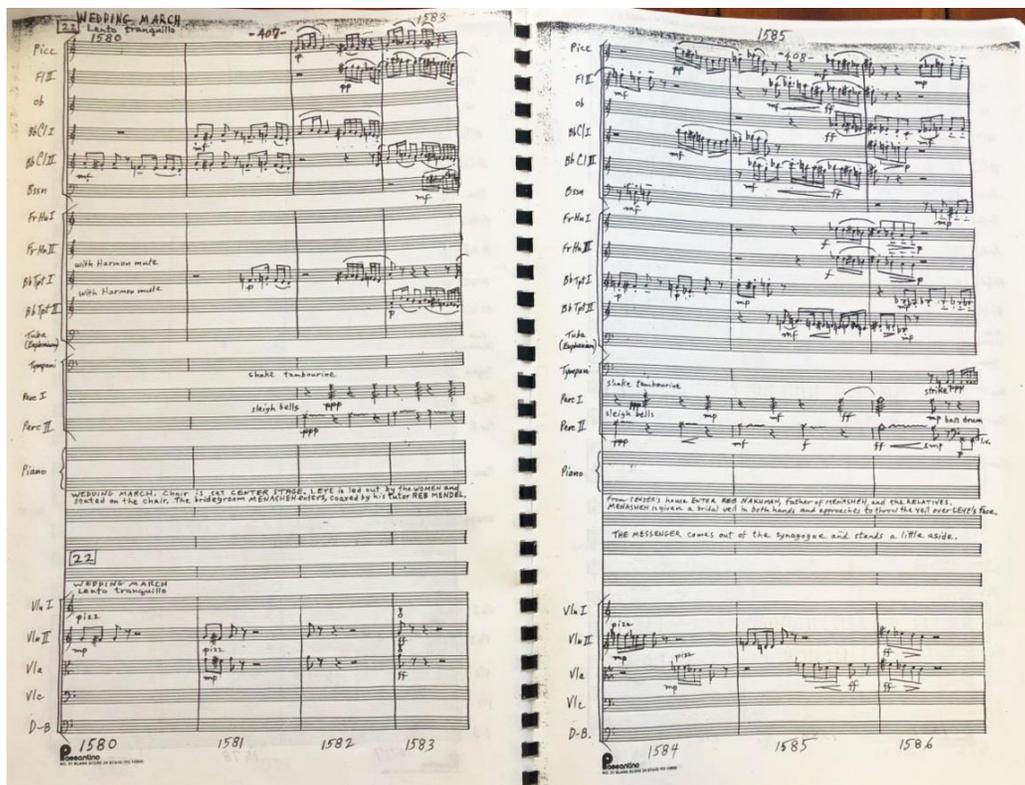
This sort of thing happens fairly frequently in the opera.



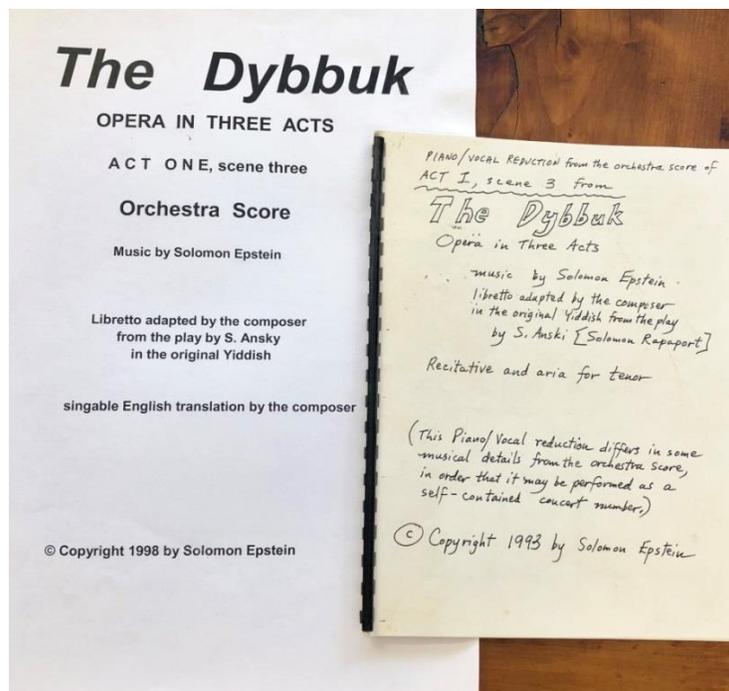
Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*. First draft of Score; Sketches of Libretto and music; early 1990s; unpublished manuscripts. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*. Orchestra Score: Act I, Pages 250-251 (Act I Finale); 1994, 1998; unpubl. manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*. Orchestra Score: Act II, Pages 407-408 (*Wedding March*, close to the end of the act); 1994, 1998; unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*. Orchestra Score: Act I, Scene 3; Recitative & Aria for Tenor (*Shir Hashirim*); 1998; Cover Page. Piano-Vocal Score; 1993; Cover Page: «This Piano/Vocal reduction differs in some musical details from the orchestra score, in order that it may be performed as a self-contained concert number». Unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: Opera in Three Acts*. Orchestra Score; Act I, Scene 3; Recitative & Aria for Tenor (Shir Hashirim); Orchestra Score; 1998; Pages 109-110 of complete score. Unpublished manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“Having found a new synagogue position with a small congregation near Pittsburgh, I immediately met with Professor Balada at Carnegie-Mellon again and asked if he would work with me on *The Dybbuk*. He could not, but introduced me to another composition professor at Carnegie-Mellon, Nancy Galbraith, who had already had several of her orchestral scores performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony.

“Working with Nancy Galbraith on *The Dybbuk* opera turned out to be a wonderful experience, as she proved to be a brilliantly insightful musician, a master craftsman, and the very soul of kindness and encouragement.

“Now living once again near Johnstown, in 1991 I received a commission from Rodney Eatman at the University of Pittsburgh/Johnstown. The University was about to open the new multi-purpose Joseph Pasquerilla Center for the Performing Arts, which could accommodate orchestra concerts, dance performances, and a new theater. There was to be a Gala Week featuring performances in all these disciplines.

“The Theater Department would produce Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and I was commissioned to write incidental music. We did a studio recording of my score, which was used during the performance run as a ‘sound track’.

Thunder and lightning, THE TEMPEST I.i.

Percussion: **Allegro** **Piano:** **TAPE CUE #1**
Shipmaster, Boatswain, Mariners, Alonso, 3 Sebastian, Gonzalo, Ferdinand, & others

drop medium-weight chain on bass strings inside piano, continue to rattle thru

Ped synthesizer **Allegro** unpitched xylophone

clarinet

Vln I **Allegro** **ff**

Vln II **ff**

Vla **ff**

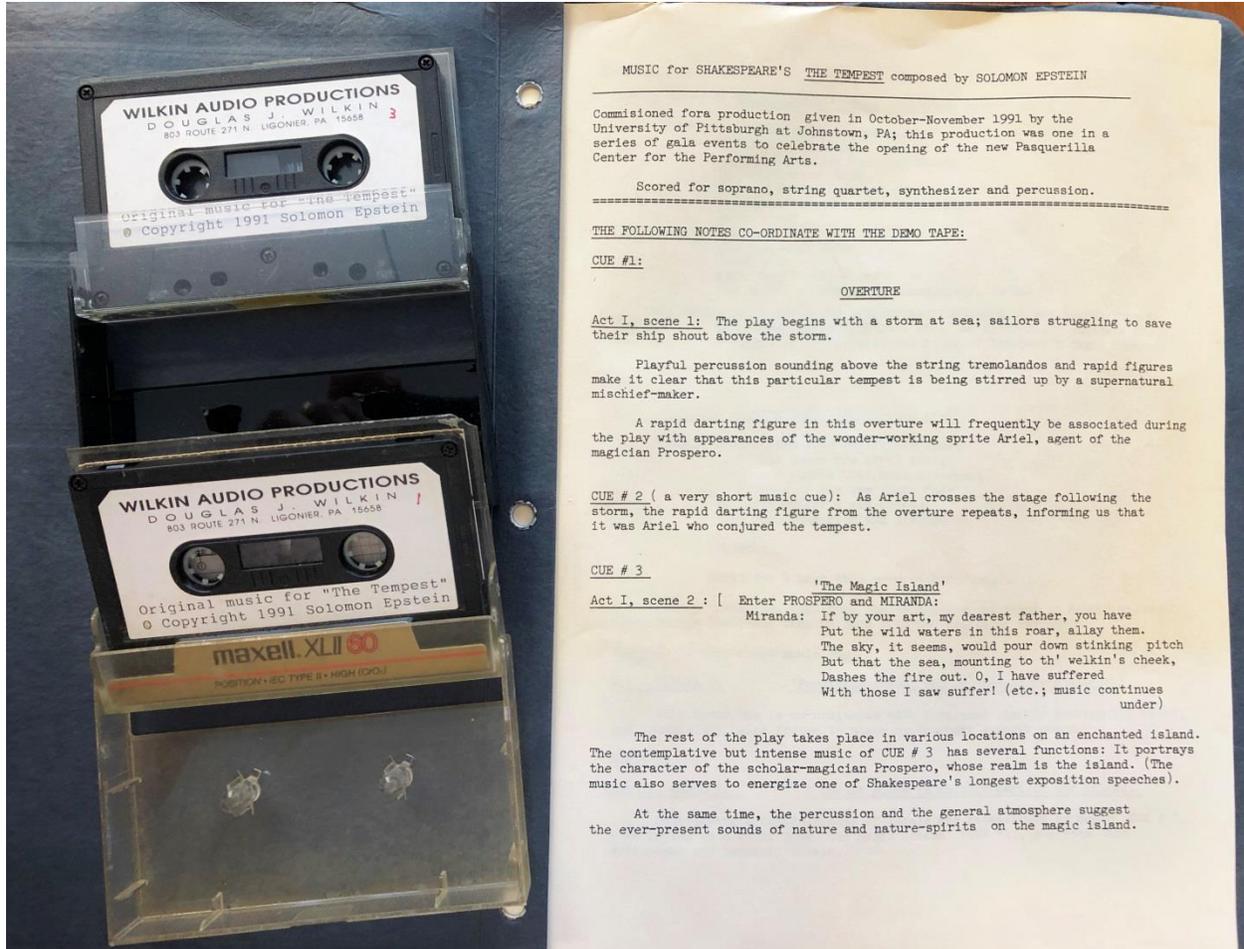
Vcl **ff**

g: **ff**

6:06:15 - 6:08:10

© Copyright 1991 by Solomon Epstein

Solomon Epstein, *The Tempest*. Incidental Music and Songs for William Shakespeare's Play; for soprano and chamber ensemble with piano; comp. and performed 1991; unpublished manuscript; Score, Page 1. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



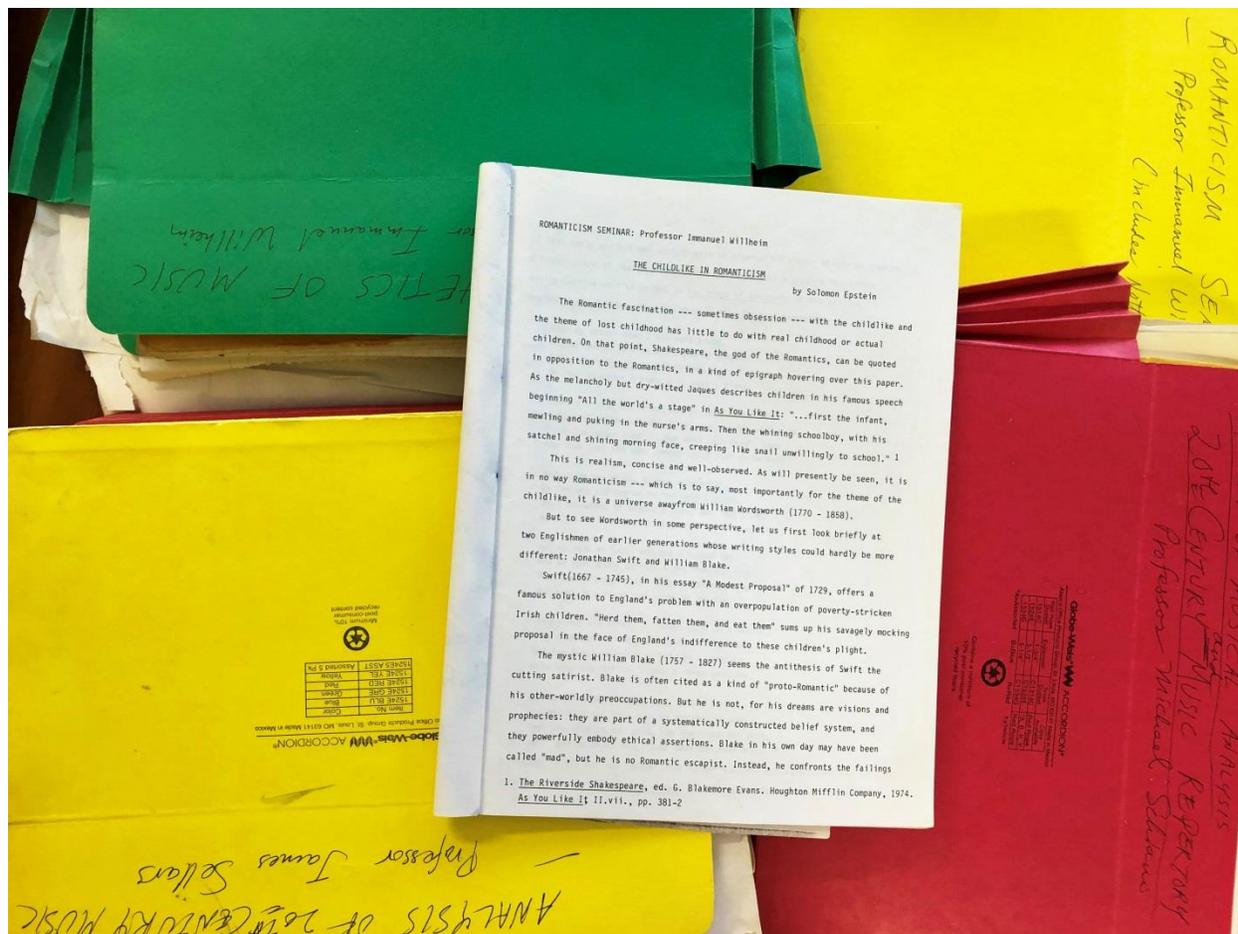
Solomon Epstein, *The Tempest*. Incidental Music and Songs for William Shakespeare's Play; for soprano and chamber ensemble with piano; composed and performed 1991; typescript draft of program and audiocassette recording, Wilkin Audio Productions, 1991. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

"In 1992 I had to make another move, finding employment with a Massachusetts congregation just above the Connecticut State Line. And again I was fortunate to find an exceptional teacher in Professor Robert Stern, Chair of Composition in the Department of Music of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst.

"Robert Stern, also a fine pianist, had long been occupied with writing music commemorating the Holocaust. With Paulina Stark, soprano and Chair of the U-Mass. Voice Department, Stern had performed several of his song cycles setting Holocaust-era poetry at the United States Holocaust Museum of Washington, DC.

"Thus he was especially attuned to the musical challenges of *The Dybbuk* which I still needed to work out.

"In early 1995 I took the all-day entrance exam for the D.M.A. (Doctoral) program in composition at the Hartt School of Music, University of Hartford. This doctorate was geared toward creation and performance. There was also an enjoyable helping of academics. It was fulfilling for me to spend the next six years among serious musicians.



Solomon Epstein, Doctoral School Notebooks, D.M.A. Program in composition, Hartt School of Music, University of Hartford, 1995-2001. In the foreground in the center of the photo, a typed paper, *The Childlike in Romanticism*, an insightful essay on a subject matter particularly dear to the composer. Unpublished manuscripts and typescripts. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.

“Out of the blue, in summer 1995 I received a phone call from Rachel Michaeli in Tel Aviv. She explained that she had been talking to a mutual friend, Cantor Rafi Frieder of Long Island, who was in Israel visiting family.

“Rachel explained that she was a graduate of the Film and Television Department of Tel Aviv University, but had also been studying opera direction at Tel Aviv’s IVAI [International Vocal Arts Institute], founded and directed each summer by Joan Dornemann, Chief Coach of the Metropolitan Opera.

“Rachel planned to start an alternative opera company in Tel Aviv, but knew she could not do so with *La Bohème* or *La Traviata*. She asked Rafi Frieder if he knew of any new operas that might be appropriate.

“As it happened, I had played through parts of *The Dybbuk* for Rafi only two months before. I wanted Rafi’s reactions as he was a graduate of London’s Royal Conservatory of Music.

“So Rachel was calling me at Rafi’s suggestion. I told her I’d be glad to send her the piano-vocal score and the Yiddish-English libretto. Rachel was collaborating with a

young conductor, Ronen Borshevsky, who would evaluate *The Dybbuk* to judge its suitability for production.

“Ronen, then 25, had already won awards in three international conducting competitions, those of the Israel Philharmonic, the Royal Danish Competition, and the Tokyo Philharmonic.

“For summer 1996, Ronen was studying in the Tanglewood Conducting Institute. Tanglewood is an hour’s drive from my home, so Ronen and I were able to sit down at the piano several times that summer to go over my score.

“I observed an assigned conducting session with Ronen and ten or fifteen others studying under Maestro Bernard Haitink. It was immediately obvious that Ronen was already a cool-headed professional conductor; the others were all nervous, uncertain students.

“Ronen returned to Israel and gave his approval of *The Dybbuk* to Rachel Michaeli, who began a search for production backers.

“Eventually, Rachel secured production support from the Avraham Yitschak Lerner Foundation for Yiddish, whose Executive Director was Ofra Alyagon. At that time, the Lerner Foundation supported the Yiddish curricula of the four leading Israeli universities. Thus Ms. Alyagon secured the Auditorium of Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba for the opera’s première.

“Meanwhile, I was able to get a recording of an excerpt from *The Dybbuk* with the Hartt Orchestra and Jerold Siena, experienced tenor of the New York City Opera and the Met, then teaching voice at nearby Yale Music School.

“Rachel, working on a tight budget for an opera production, designed a modest but atmospheric stage setting, and directed the singers in their staging with great sensitivity.

“The budget would not permit an orchestra, but Ronen found a virtuoso pianist, Irit Rub-Levi, in Tel Aviv, who would play my piano-vocal reduction for the opera production.

“Irit had soloed in the cycle of the five Beethoven Piano Concertos with the Israel Philharmonic under Maestro Zubin Mehta.

“It would indeed require a pianist of Irit’s superior mastery to play my piano-vocal score, which, as a reduction of the orchestra score intended to let the singers hear their musical cues in rehearsal, did not exactly fall idiomatically under the pianist’s hands.

“Also, budget limits dictated an abridged version of the opera, featuring scenes of the major characters, largely eliminating the supporting roles. Intelligent cuts mostly preserved plot continuity.

“At the invitation of the Chancellor of Ben-Gurion University, Professor Avishai Braverman, native Yiddish speakers from all over Israel jammed the University’s Sonnenfeld Auditorium for the April 28, 1999 première, while students crowded the aisles.

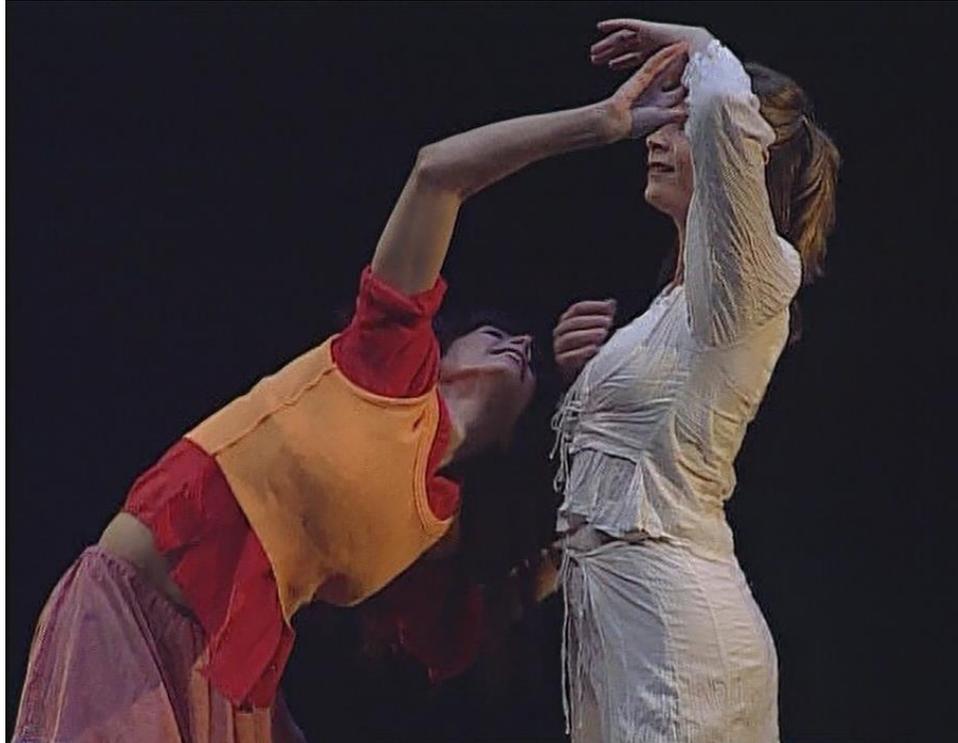
“I was delighted that the audience gave the performance a prolonged standing ovation.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*, Act I: The Synagogue. Tenors Joseph Almog “Yossi” Aridan (Khonnnon) and Avi Yasinovski (Hennokh); Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*, Act I, Scene 3: *Shir Hashirim*. Tenor Joseph Almog “Yossi” Aridan (Khonnnon); Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*, Act II, Scene 3: *Danse Macabre*. Soprano Camilla Griehsel (Leah) & actress-dancer Dorit Talmi (The Old Beggar); Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance & Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*, Act III. Soprano Camilla Griehsel and tenor Joseph Almog “Yossi” Aridan (Khonnon); Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*, Act III: *Exorcism*. Camilla Griehsel; Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*. Conductor Ronen Borshevsky and tenor Joseph Almog "Yossi" Aridan (Khonnon) rehearsing the opera; Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, April 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*. Pianist Irit Rub-Levi and co-répétiteur Ethan Schmeisser rehearsing the opera; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, April 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*. Director Rachel Michaeli & baritone David Sebba (Reb Azriel) rehearsing the opera; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, April 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*. Director Rachel Michaeli & co-répétiteur Ethan Schmeisser rehearsing the opera; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance & Theatre, Tel Aviv, April 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.

“A second performance was given May 2, 1999 in Tel Aviv at the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, once again to a full house. This audience too responded to the opera with an extended standing ovation, and the Tel Aviv press was unanimous in its praise.

“Of course I was thrilled. In addition, the performances gave me the opportunity to assess audience response, and to hear if I now wanted to make any revisions.

“The young professional singers did outstanding work, with the prodigally gifted Swedish soprano Camilla Griehsel giving a portrayal of Leah by turns heartbreakingly tender and mesmerizingly ferocious.

“The mezzo Brakha Kol brought a voice of silvery perfection to the role of Fradeh, Leah’s old nanny.

“The performers, coached in the Yiddish libretto by the expert Hadassah Ben-Haim, brought complete confidence to the stage under the sure guidance of conductor Ronen Borshevsky, and the rock-solid support of Irit Rub-Levi.

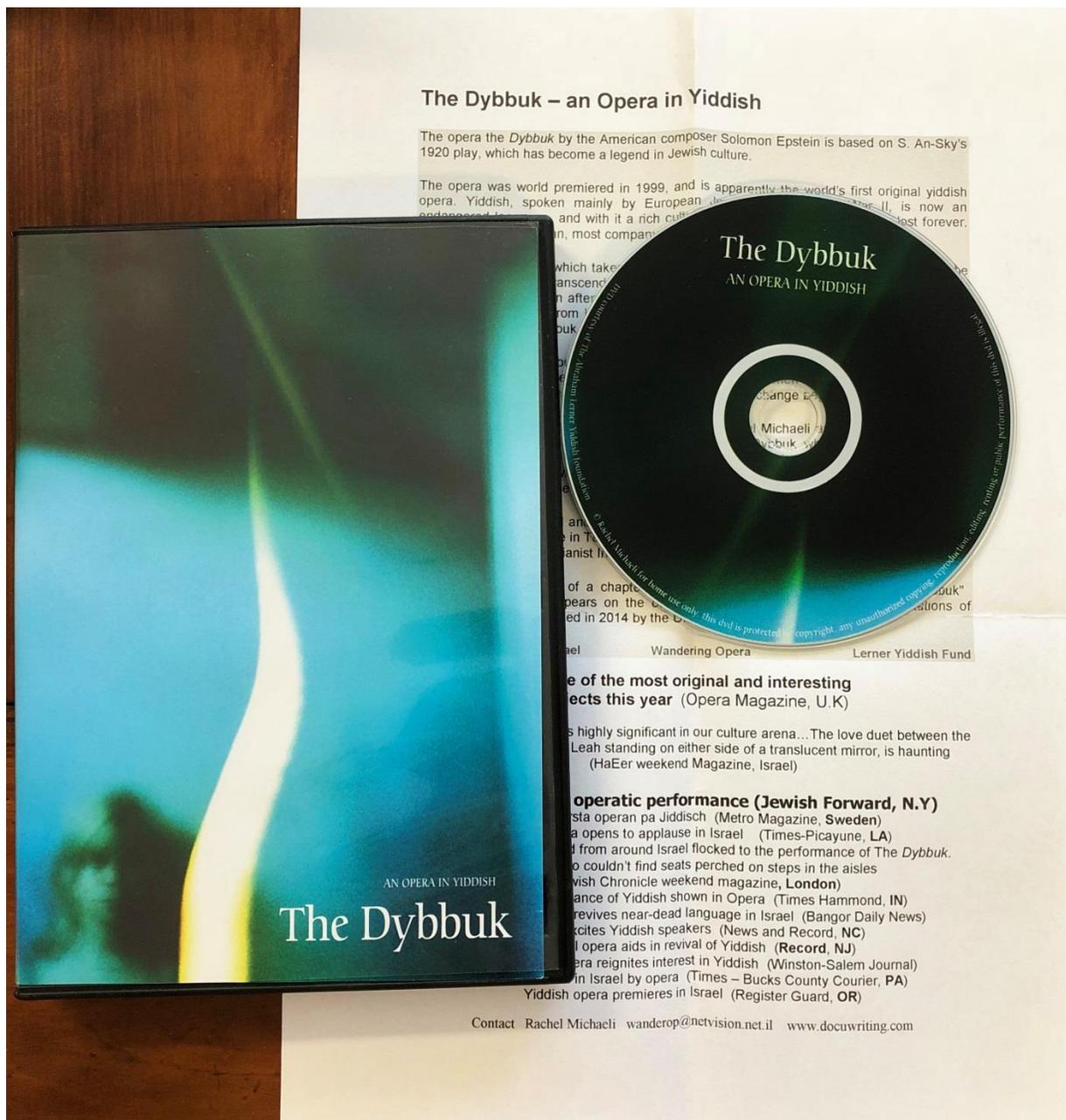
“The 23-year-old tenor Joseph Almog “Yossi” Aridan sang an amazingly mature Khonnon, bringing Italianate passion to the demanding lirico spinto role.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk*, Act III, Scene 7 (Finale of Opera): *The Veiled Bride; Transfiguration and Death of Leah*. Soprano Camilla Griehsel as Leah; Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. © Rachel Michaeli.

“During the performance, Rachel Michaeli directed a videorecording from the television truck outside the theatre, an effort reflecting not only her technical expertise, but also nerves of steel.

“The video was first placed as a VHS with online merchants, and in 2005 was issued as a DVD with English and Hebrew subtitles.



Solomon Epstein, *The Dybbuk: An Opera in Yiddish*. DVD of abridged version (70 min.); 2005. Live recording of the world première. Rachel Michaeli, director; Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1999. Ben-Gurion University, Israel - Wandering Opera - Lerner Yiddish Fund. © Rachel Michaeli.

“Over the next 12 years, I sent the Video and the CD excerpt with orchestra, along with the Tel Aviv press reviews, to almost every large and mid-size opera company in the U.S., as well as to the Royal Opera House Covent Garden and the English National Opera.

“From every one of these companies I received substantially the same response: ‘We think it is a beautiful opera, but we do not have the budget to produce it.’

“I had intentionally planned *The Dybbuk* WITHOUT chorus in order to pre-empt this budget complaint.

“I had instead substituted secondary solo roles in order to represent the society against which Leah and Khonnon were rebelling.

“So I knew this budget issue was just a dodge. It reflected the timidity of opera managements and the indifference of conductors.

“Since opera managements could still depend for audiences on the canonized ‘standard repertory’, they had little motivation to take a chance even on a new opera which had already proven itself with both audiences and the press in a sophisticated cultural center like Tel Aviv.

“In 1995, I happened to see the film *Murder In The First*, with Kevin Bacon and Christian Slater.

”Based on actual events, its story of injustice within the American justice system, taking place ironically at a time when the United States was battling the Nazi monstrosity, struck a deep chord with me.

“I was also moved by the genuine friendship that developed between the lawyer and the accused murderer, which led to a courageous moral redemption for each of them.

“By then I had learned that my passionate reaction to a dramatic subject was the indispensable precondition for me to see possibilities for a subject’s operatic translation.

“Thus I persuaded Dr. Robert Carl, Chair of the Hartt Composition Department, to permit me to compose an operatic treatment of *Murder In The First* which would also serve as my doctoral dissertation.

“In this case, I had to obtain the adaptation rights. So I contacted the Los Angeles agent of Dan Gordon, the movie’s screenwriter.

“After I submitted an operatic treatment of a sample scene, Dan Gordon gave me permission to adapt my libretto from his novel and stage play treatments of *Murder In the First*.

MURDER IN THE FIRST
Opera in Two Acts
by
SOLOMON EPSTEIN

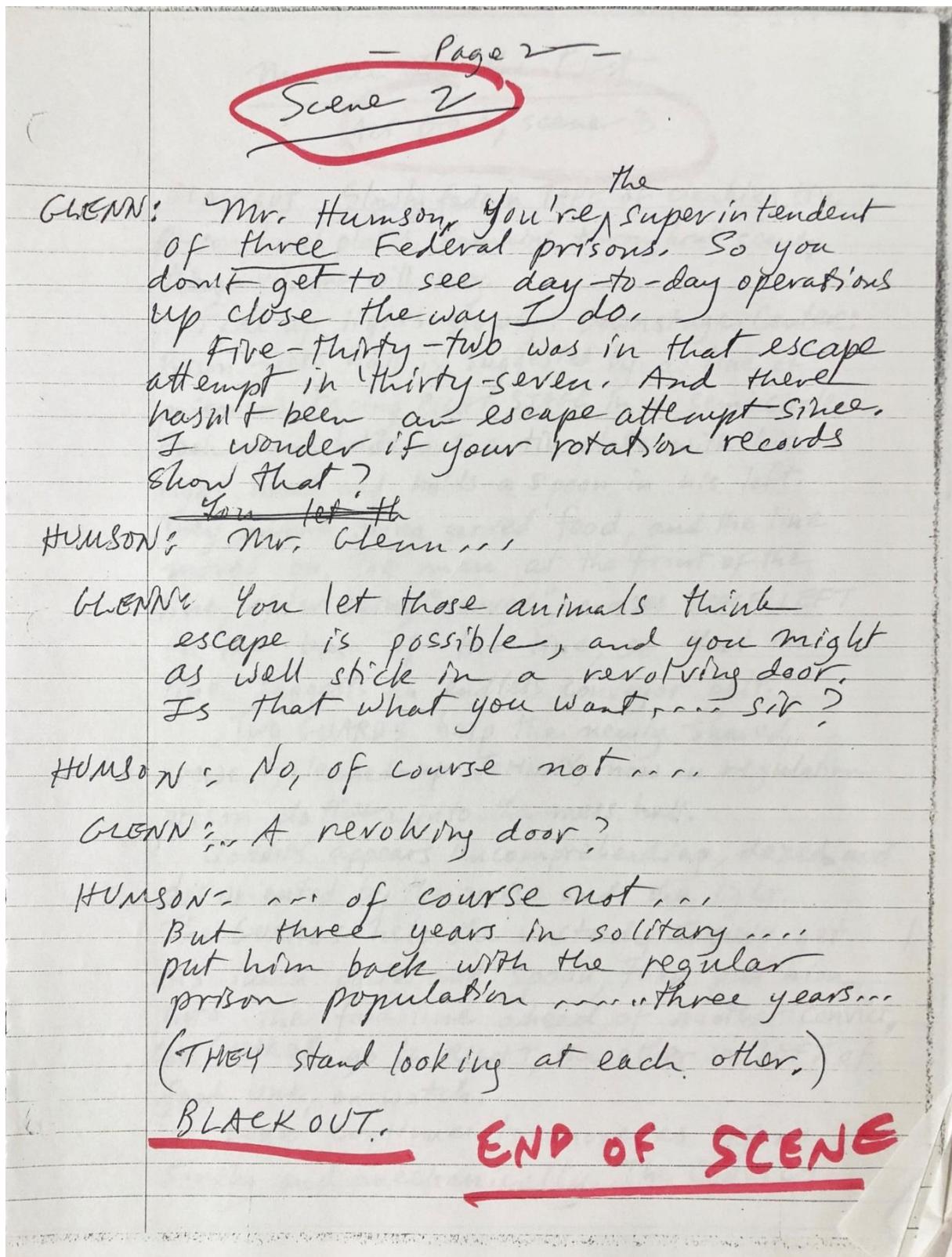
LIBRETTO

by the composer, based on
the novel and stage play by
DAN GORDON, screenwriter for
the movie MURDER IN THE FIRST,
a 1995 Warner Bros./Wolper Productions
film release featuring Kevin Bacon,
Christian Slater, and Gary Oldman

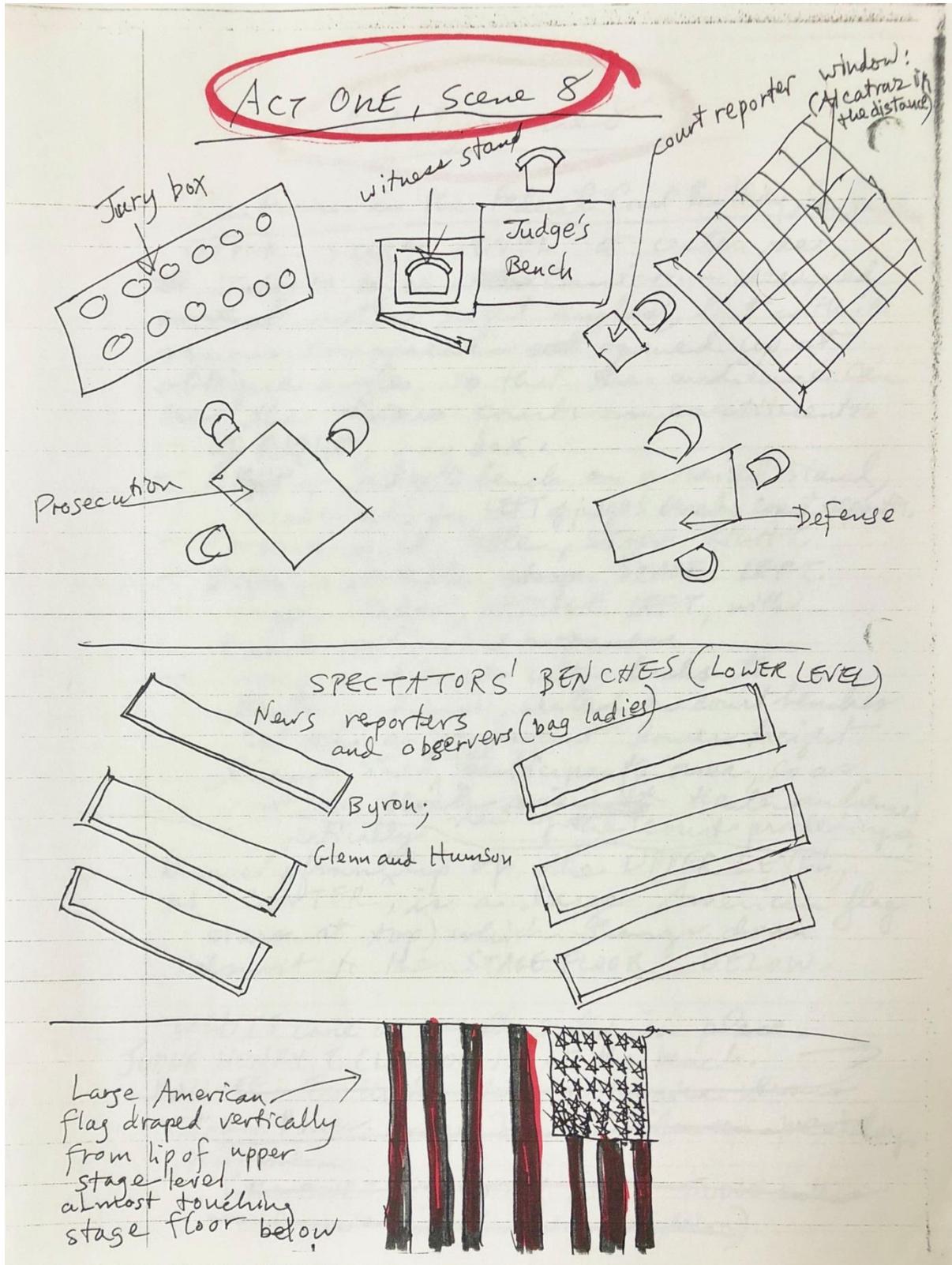
Libretto adapted by the composer
BY PERMISSION of Dan Gordon

© Copyright 1997 by SOLOMON EPSTEIN

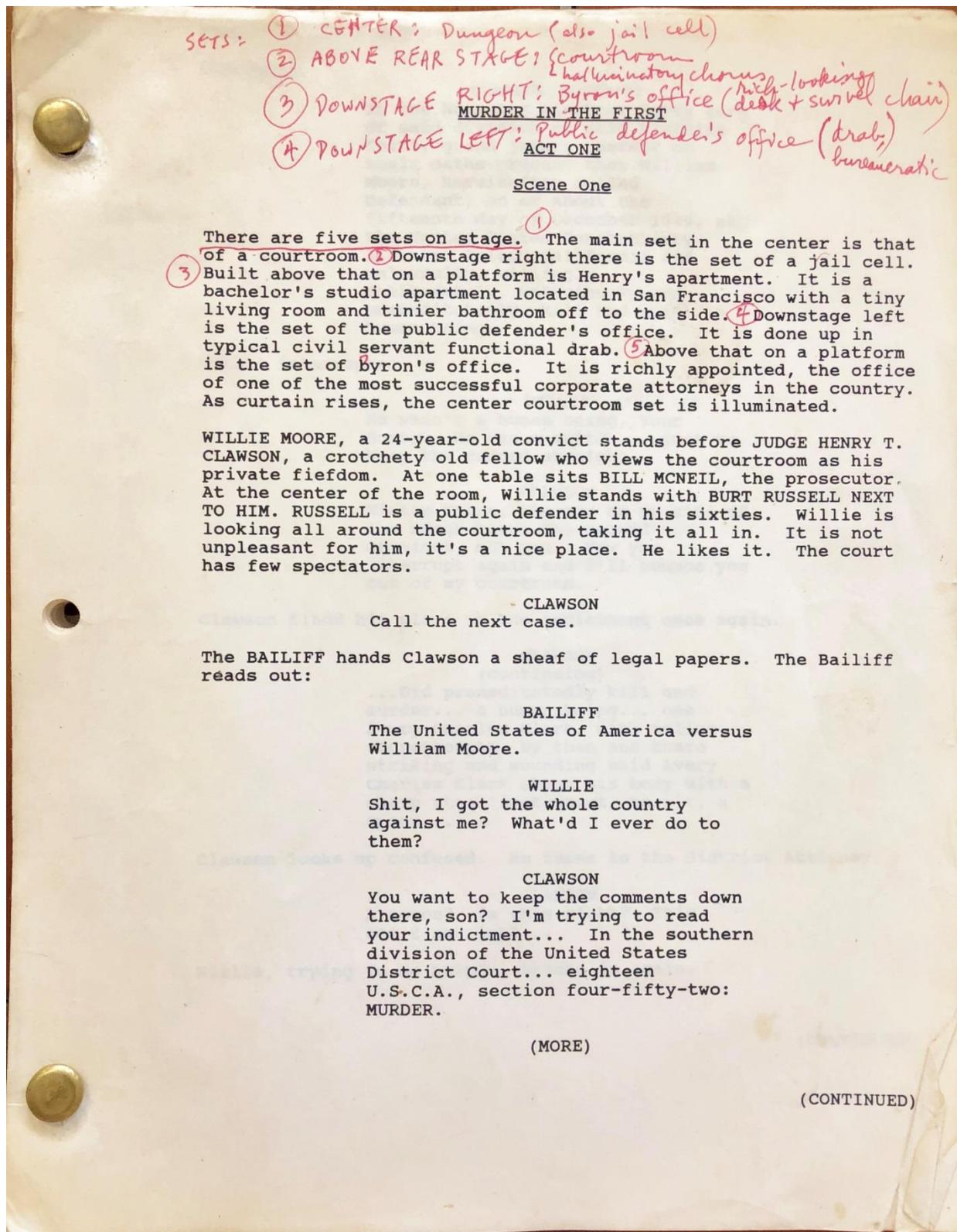
Solomon Epstein, *Murder in the first*. An Opera in Two Acts. 1999, 2010. Libretto adapted by the composer from the novel and stage play by permission of their author, Dan Gordon. First draft of Libretto; Cover Page; unpublished manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *Murder in the first*. An Opera in Two Acts. 1999, 2010. Libretto adapted by the composer from the novel and stage play by permission of their author, Dan Gordon. First draft of Libretto; Act I, Scene 2; Page 2; unpublished manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *Murder in the first*. An Opera in Two Acts. 1999, 2010. Libretto adapted by the composer from the novel and stage play by permission of their author, Dan Gordon. First draft of Libretto; Act I, Scene 8; Outline of scene & technical requirements; unpubl. ms. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.



Solomon Epstein, *Murder in the first*. An Opera in Two Acts. 1999, 2010. Libretto adapted by the composer from the novel and stage play by permission of their author, Dan Gordon. Libretto; Act I, Scene 1; Page 1; unpublished typescript with handwritten stage set description. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

“I began work on the opera with Robert Carl, but frustratingly, we agreed that something was not right with my musical conception. Robert Carl then suggested that, since the story took place in San Francisco and Alcatraz from 1937 to 1942, I ground this very American subject in a jazz idiom.

“I protested that I did not know jazz, but Robert Carl insisted that every American has osmosed some idea of jazz, and that I should strive to find a jazz idiom which would unify the opera.

“He said that in this situation, an expert grasp of particular jazz styles was irrelevant. Rather, I should explore my own instincts in order to develop a jazz-like idiom that would suffuse and unify the opera’s musical language.

“Since I was powerfully attracted to the story and the characters in terms of their operatic possibilities, I struggled for two years to find a convincing musical setting. I was baffled because the musical realization seemed to fight me at every turn.

“Compared with this dilemma, *The Dybbuk* had seemed to almost write itself.

“The three professors at my dissertation defense all felt that the opera was an ambitious failure, and I had to concede my agreement with this view.

“But no one seemed able to pinpoint why the music seemed to be such a botch. Still, they felt I should be awarded the doctorate based on my efforts and my overall record, and I graduated in May 2001.

“It took me two years of hard thought about revision to identify the opera’s root problem, which had all along been right under my nose. It finally dawned on me that the built-in obstacle that had been fighting me all along lay in the very language of my libretto.

“Despite the inherent power of the drama and the characters, the fact that the story took place in mid-twentieth century San Francisco, mostly in Alcatraz and the courtroom, mandated the clipped, staccato idiom of American slang and street language.

“All my previous operas had been based on literary subjects and events of the past, where the language of the librettos had been highly elevated.

“Such a poetic level of diction freed the music to soar melodically and harmonically.

“The down-and-dirty linguistic idiom of American street language, however, refused at every turn to soar. Instead, the language insisted on music dominated by a hard, driven rhythmic tattoo.

“And the text seldom permitted vocal lyricism, instead insisting on a predominantly speech-like vocal line.

“So for two more years, I worked at an extensive revision of *Murder In The First*, drastically stripping down the orchestral texture to expose a lean, mean musical through-line.

“This revision was certainly an improvement. But whether this opera would ultimately succeed in performance I still do not know.

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MURDER IN THE FIRST music by SOLOMON EPSTEIN

Opera In Two Acts
ACT ONE, PROLOGUE: Prison mess hall at Alcatraz

libretto adapted by the composer from the novel and stage play by DAN GORDON

measure 1

[INSTRUMENTS TRANSPOSED]

Flute I (doubling piccolo)

Flute II

Oboe (doubling English horn)

B♭ soprano and Eb alto saxophones

B♭ Clarinet I (C) II doubling Bass Clarinet

Bassoon

French horn I

French horn II

B♭ Trumpet

Bass Trombone

tuba

Tympani

Percussion I

Percussion II

Drum set

Jazz set

snare drum

combo, i.e. amplified string bass

pre-recorded tapes

Piano

Solo Voices

SATB Chorus

hihat, ride cymbal

Tap: slowly fade in sound of clanking tin prison lunch plates

Backout: fade up lights slowly. DOWNSTAGE: Prison mess hall is suggested by a line of convicts eating at tables. They sit in a semi-circle. Each man holds out a tin plate with his right hand, holds a spoon in his left. They strike the plate served food, and the line moves on.

divisi: adagio sul ponticello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla

Vlc

D-B

ppp (non crescendo, non diminuendo) divisi: sul ponticello

ppp (non crescendo, non diminuendo) divisi: sul ponticello

ppp (non crescendo, non diminuendo) sul ponticello

ppp (non crescendo, non diminuendo) sul ponticello

ppp (non crescendo, non diminuendo) sul ponticello

ppp (non crescendo, non diminuendo)

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Solomon Epstein, *Murder in the first*. An Opera in Two Acts. 1999, 2010. Libretto adapted by the composer from the novel and stage play by permission of their author, Dan Gordon. Orchestra Score; Act I, Scene 1; Prologue; Page 1; unpubl. manuscript. The ICAMus Archive. © ICAMus - The S. Epstein Collection 2019.

“Parenthetically, I had experienced a truly amazing transformation back in 1996. During my long career as a cantor, I had earned a steady living with a pleasant but limited baritone, compensating with my broad range of musical abilities: directing and composing for adult professional choirs, volunteer congregational choirs, and children’s choruses, usually including organ or piano, and occasionally writing professional instrumentalists into religious services.

“In 1996, I happened to read a newspaper interview with Joan Sutherland and Marilyn Horne. Since they were celebrated not only for their glorious voices, but also for their supreme technical skills, interviewers would always ask them to explain their singing methods.

“As I read their explanations, they struck me as lucid, straightforward, and anchored in common sense. Suddenly, I said to myself, ‘Well, if THEY do so, it MUST be right, so let me try it.

“I applied their advice, and to my utter astonishment, instantly an effortlessly powerful dramatic tenor popped out, all the way to high B-flat! I was so shocked it’s a wonder I didn’t faint on the spot!

“To oversimplify only slightly, I realized that Sutherland and Horne had taught me the proper way to BREATHE for singing: a deep, calm lower abdominal breath which supported all the vocal functions taking place above it.

“In the same instant, I realized that, although between ages 16 and 30 I had had a parade of voice teachers in New York and at Yale, NOT ONE of them had ever shown me the technique of this utterly calm, profound breath, which I understood in this flash of revelation was UTTERLY BASIC to proper singing! I realized that NOT ONE of my earlier teachers had mastered the art and skills of teaching singing! At least I had never been stupid enough to force.

“In 1996 I was 56 years old, so of course it was much too late for a career singing opera. But now that I was preoccupied with work on the Hartt doctorate, a crucial part of my yearly income came from acting as cantor for synagogues on the High Holy Days, which paid a substantial lump sum.

“And with this fairy-tale discovery of my true vocal potential, my cantorial fee for the High Holydays instantly tripled!

“Over the next ten years, by patient and objective self-scrutiny of mind and body, I found a host of ways to polish and consolidate the previously unimaginable freedom which the great Sutherland and Horne had unlocked for me in a miraculous, once-in-a-lifetime five-minute revelation.

“In fall 2011, I discovered on the Internet that professor Giancarlo Lacerenza of Centro di Studi Ebraici dell’Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale” was teaching a yearlong graduate seminar on the life and works of S. An-ski, prominently featuring *The Dybbuk*.

“To my surprise, I found a page of multimedia assignments required for this course. The students were expected to familiarize themselves with adaptations of S. An-ski’s play through the 20th century, including stage productions and adaptations, film and television presentations and musical adaptations.

“Under the latter category, I found listed *Dybbuk*, a 1976 ballet by Leonard Bernstein choreographed by Jerome Robbins; and *The Dybbuk: An Opera In Yiddish*, a 1994 opera by Solomon Epstein.

“I sent an E-mail to Professor Lacerenza, and he answered very graciously, saying that he thought the opera should be performed widely.

“It was then that I learned that he and his colleagues were preparing the publication of the first scholarly editions, with new translations and historical essays, of S. An-ski’s *The Dybbuk* in each of the three languages in which the play had originally been published: Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish.

“Professor Lacerenza was a friend of Aloma Bardi, Founder and President of ICAMus. He referred my opera to her, and that led to an ongoing correspondence between Aloma Bardi and me.

“Giancarlo Lacerenza had commissioned Aloma Bardi to write a scholarly work examining a number of musical works based on *The Dybbuk* since the play’s première in 1921.

“Aloma Bardi’s book was published in March 2014, and featured analyses of musical works derived from *The Dybbuk*, which included a number of American works by Aaron Copland, David Tamkin, Leonard Bernstein and my 1994 opera.

“In spring 2014, Aloma Bardi plans an in-depth posting on the ICAMus Website on my opera and her recent book. I am very happy to say that her preview postings so far have been getting a considerable response.”

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI "L'ORIENTALE"
CENTRO DI STUDI EBRAICI

ARCHIVIO DI STUDI EBRAICI

III\5

ALOMA BARDI

ESOTISMI MUSICALI DEL DIBBUK

ISPIRAZIONI DA UN SOGGETTO DEL FOLCLORE EBRAICO



Napoli 2014

Aloma Bardi, *Esotismi musicali del Dibbuk. Ispirazioni da un soggetto del folclore ebraico* [*Musical exoticisms of the Dybbuk: Inspirations from a theme of Jewish folklore*], Centro di Studi Ebraici, Archivio di Studi Ebraici, directed by Prof. Giancarlo Lacerenza, Università degli Studi di Napoli, "L'Orientale", 2014; Cover Page. The last chapter of the book, *Un Dybbuk statunitense contemporaneo: l'opera in yiddish di Solomon Epstein (An American Dybbuk of our time: The opera in Yiddish by S.E.)*, pp. 162-183, is an analysis of Dr. Epstein's adaptation of An-Ski's play.

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In questo volume sono analizzate le realizzazioni musicali del *Dybuk* (1914), dramma yiddish dello scrittore e folclorista ebreo russo S. An-Ski (1863-1920), incentrato su una tragica vicenda di amore, possessione e morte. Di ambientazione esotica, *Der Dybuk* raccoglieva e preservava un patrimonio di leggende chassidiche e melodie tradizionali che già all'epoca stava scomparendo, ed ha esercitato sin dal debutto un inesauribile fascino sui compositori. A cominciare dalle musiche di scena di Yoel Engel, vengono qui studiati gli adattamenti degli anni Venti e Trenta in Europa e negli Stati Uniti: il Trio *Vitebsk* di Aaron Copland, l'opera non realizzata di George Gershwin e versioni operistiche come *Il Dibuk* di Lodovico Rocca e Renato Simoni – concepito durante il fascismo – sino al film musicale in yiddish prodotto in Polonia alla vigilia dell'invasione nazista. Si indaga quindi la ripresa di interesse nel dopoguerra, nel clima di ricostruzione successivo alla Shoah, con particolare riguardo al balletto *Dybbuk* (1974) di Leonard Bernstein e all'opera statunitense in yiddish (1997) di Solomon Epstein. Il volume si sofferma su lavori rari, dimenticati, inediti, su manoscritti musicali e documentazione d'archivio, ed offre in chiusura un repertorio degli adattamenti musicali di questo soggetto.

Aloma Bardi, esperta di musica americana e di teatro musicale, risiede da molti anni negli USA. Ha fondato nel 2002 e dirige ICAMus, The International Center for American Music (www.icamus.org). Tra le sue pubblicazioni: l'edizione italiana degli scritti di Charles E. Ives (*Prima della sonata*, Marsilio 1997), saggi compresi nel volume *Gershwin*, a cura di Gianfranco Vinay (EdT 1992) e il *Catalogo delle manifestazioni 1928-2007* del Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, curato insieme a M. Conti e L. Berni (Le Lettere 1998, 2008). Negli anni 2006-2011 ha insegnato "Storia della musica negli Stati Uniti" all'Università di Firenze. È attiva come traduttrice in campo musicologico e letterario, e nella titolazione teatrale applicata alle nuove tecnologie.

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EDITOR'S NOTE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Solomon Epstein's narrative stops at spring 2014, when my book *Esotismi musicali del Dibbuk. Ispirazioni da un soggetto del folclore ebraico* [Musical exoticisms of the Dybbuk: Inspirations from a theme of Jewish folklore] had just been published (March 2014) by the Centro di Studi Ebraici, Università degli Studi di Napoli, "L'Orientale".*

*Following our contacts during the writing of my book, in 2014 Dr. Epstein decided to donate the large collection of his unpublished music manuscripts to the ICAMus Archive. That year he spent a considerable amount of time and energy revising his scores, marking composer cuts, copying the manuscripts, and preparing the definitive version for some scores (in particular his opera in Yiddish, *The Dybbuk*). He also wrote detailed explanatory notes introducing his works. With four separate shipments, the donation was initiated in February 2014 and was completed by February 2015. The Solomon Epstein Collection includes all of Dr. Epstein's works, both publicly performed and unperformed: operas, choral music, incidental music, instrumental works, music for synagogue sacred services, vocal chamber pieces, art songs for voice and piano, and arrangements of Yiddish ghetto songs.*

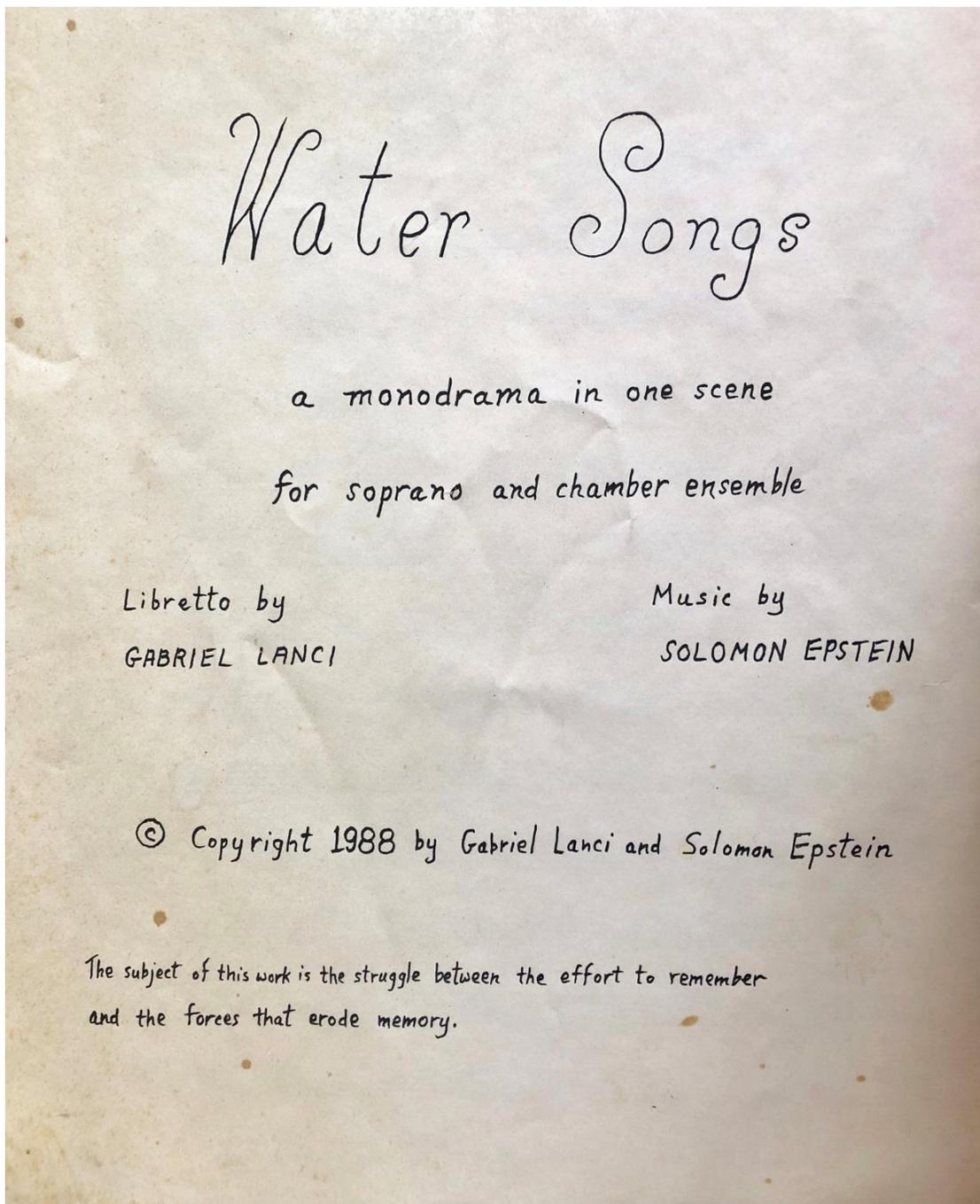
Over the last five years of his life, Solomon Epstein became one of the most engaged advisers and supporters of ICAMus. A man of vast culture, despite ill health he participated in all the Center's projects and provided valuable comments. He remained constantly active on social media and blogs until the last weeks of his life, and passionately pursued his reflections on the subject of opera and the relationship between words and music. He was always very generous with his knowledge and creative suggestions, until late September 2018, when the final crisis came, which led to his death on December 21.

A week after his passing, on December 30, 2018, the Epstein Family (Atlanta, Georgia) donated the Solomon Epstein Papers to the ICAMus Archive, according to the intention expressed by the composer in his last days. The Papers include materials from Solomon Epstein's study at his home in Agawam, Massachusetts: additional music manuscripts; sketches and drafts of compositions; correspondence; programs and documentation on productions of his works; his doctoral school notebooks, classwork and assignments; director's books for performances and shows he arranged as synagogue cantor and music director; photographs; his personal library of Jewish liturgical music; and a selection from his library of music scores by other composers.

I wish to express special thanks to the Epstein Family for donating the important Solomon Epstein Papers to The ICAMus Archive, and for sharing more photographs of the composer, that have been included in this publication; to Rachel Michaeli for sharing photos of the 1999 Dybbuk production in Israel, and for her imaginative staging of an abridged version of the opera; to Sol Epstein for years of irreplaceable guidance and friendship, and for the important legacy of his music.

Aloma Bardi

NOTE ON ILLUSTRATIONS: *Solomon Epstein's Autobiographical notes are illustrated with archival images from the music manuscripts housed in The ICAMus Archive and from the Epstein Papers donated by the Epstein Family in December 2018, following the composer's death on December 21st. The visual element woven into this narrative is meant as a further step towards the preservation of the memory of Solomon Epstein.*



Solomon Epstein (1939-2018). *Water Songs*. Monodrama in one act for dramatic soprano and chamber ensemble with piano. Text by Gabriel Lanci. Unpublished manuscript, 42 pages. ©1988 by Solomon Epstein and Gabriel Lanci. The ICAMus Archive © ICAMus & The Solomon Epstein Collection 2019. Composer's note on cover page: «The subject of this work is the struggle between the effort to remember and the forces that erode memory.»



American composer Solomon Charles Epstein; Agawam, Massachusetts, February 21, 2016.
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