



*Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
New York, NY*

January 16, 2019 — 10 Shevat, 5779

Works of Simon Sargon *Celebrating 80 Years*



Shani Cohen & David Fair
3rd Year Cantorial Student Practicum

Works of Simon Sargon

Celebrating 80 Years

Pedro d'Aquino, piano & organ
Joyce Rosenzweig, piano

LITURGY

Rachmana (from *Elul Liturgy: A Cantata of Penitence*) – David
featuring the 2nd and 3rd year students of the DFSSM Choir
Ahavat Olam – David

SECULAR POETRY

Tie the Strings to my Life (from *Letters from Amherst*) – Shani
Crossing the Bar (from *Intimations of Mortality*) – Shani
A Florida Night (from *Jump Back*) – David

HOLOCAUST POETRY

Shifreles Portret (from *Ash und Flamen*) – Shani
Roykhn (from *Ash und Flamen*) – David
Cantare (from *Shema*) – Shani
featuring Sarah Grabiner (flute), Yari Bond (cello), and Ivan Barenboim (clarinet)

MUSIC OF MEMORY

Yakovs-Lied (from *At Grandmother's Knee*) – David
El Punchon y la Rosa (from *At Grandfather's Knee*) – Shani
A La Una (from *At Grandfather's Knee*) – David

POETRY OF DIVINE LOVE

Shachar Avakeshcha – Shani
Set Me as a Seal (from *Flame of the Lord*) – Shani and David
featuring Sarah Grabiner (flute) and Yari Bond (cello)

BIOGRAPHY

Composer, pianist, conductor, and educator, Simon Sargon was born in Mumbai, India in 1938, of Sephardic-Indian and Ashkenazic-Russian descent, and came to the United States as an infant. Sargon obtained degrees from Brandeis University (B. A., Music, *magna cum laude*, *Phi Beta Kappa*, Class Valedictorian) and the Juilliard School (M. S. Composition, 1962). He pursued further studies with major teachers such as Darius Milhaud, Irving Fine, Vincent Persichetti, Mieczyslaw Horszowski and Sergius Kagen.

From 1960-1971, Sargon was a recital partner for famed mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel, and served on the musical staff of the New York City Center Opera, the Lincoln Center State Theatre, Sarah Lawrence College, and the Juilliard School. In 1971, Sargon received a grant to relocate to Jerusalem, Israel where he took a position as Head of the Voice and Opera Department at the Rubin Academy of Music, and served as a Visiting Lecturer at Hebrew University until 1974. Upon returning to the United States, Sargon was appointed Professor of Composition at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas (where he retired in 2013). Also in 1974, Sargon was appointed Director of Music at Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, Texas, one of the largest Reform congregations in America. During his 27-year tenure at Temple Emanu-El, Sargon established himself as a major creative figure in contemporary American Jewish music. His wide range of Jewish liturgical music, includes two complete Friday evening services, a Sabbath morning service and numerous solo and choral works, and is performed regularly in synagogues across America.

Sargon has served as Composer-in-Residence and received commissions from leading temples throughout the country. In 2003, the American Conference of Cantors made him an Honorary Member in recognition of "his outstanding contributions to Jewish Music and Jewish Life." In the fall of 2006, Sargon was one of ten composers selected to be a panelist and presenter at the "Lost Legacy Conference" in New York, an event sponsored by HUC-JIR's School of Sacred Music exploring the music of past Jewish liturgical composers. The Dallas Symphony Orchestra has premiered three of his works to critical acclaim (*Elul Midnight*; *Symphony No. 1: Holocaust*; *Tapestries*). Sargon's special interest in creating works for young people is reflected in his many compositions for youth choir. *Sing God's Praise*, a Friday evening service for youth choir, was commissioned and recorded in its entirety by the Children's Choir of Temple Rodeph Shalom in New York. Two of Sargon's compositions have been selected for inclusion in the Milken Archives Collection of 20th Century American Jewish Music (*Shema* and *At Grandfather's Knee*).

This past summer, "Chezyonei Micha", the Visions of Micah, a choral piece jointly commissioned by the Concert Choir of Leipzig and the Nona Choir of Kibbutz Maagan Michael in northern Israel, was premiered in Leipzig. In October, the work had three

performances in Israel. Along with this new work, the children's choirs presented Simon's setting of six poems by H. N. Bialik "Gad Hagibor".

All texts and translations below were provided in Mr. Sargon's publications, unless otherwise noted.

* * * * *

LITURGY

“Rachmana” from *Elul Liturgy: A Cantata of Penitence*: In speaking with Sargon, he said that it was his intention to compose a work that parallels the Catholic midnight mass. He sought to take advantage of the ambience and the mood of the midnight hour of Selichot as well as the impending sense of awe in its building up to the holy days. “I particularly liked the Aramaic because of the number of open broad ‘ah’ vowels in the language. It lends itself to singing,” Sargon said. He also referenced that he researched Jewish musicologist Eric Werner’s writings about the relationship between the Catholic plain song chant, the Gregorian chant, and its roots in Jewish psalm chant. “In the opening statement, I was trying to imagine an ancient, quasi psalm-like chant that is the type of thing that Gregorian chant grew out of,” Sargon said. This is a Jewish approach to chant.

רַחֲמָנָא דְעָנִי לְעָנִי עֲנִינָן.	Merciful One, who answers, the poor, answer us.
רַחֲמָנָא דְעָנִי לְמַכְיָי רִוּחָא עֲנִינָן.	Merciful One, who answers those of crushed spirit, answer us.
רַחֲמָנָא דְעָנִי לְתַבְרִי לְבָא עֲנִינָן.	Merciful One, who answers those of broken hearts, answer us.
רַחֲמָנָא עֲנִינָן.	Merciful One, answer us!
רַחֲמָנָא חוּס.	Merciful One, have pity!
רַחֲמָנָא פְּרוּק.	Merciful One, redeem!
רַחֲמָנָא שְׂזִיב.	Merciful One, save!
רַחֲמָנָא רַחֵם עָלָן.	Merciful One, have mercy on us.

(Translation from <http://kabbalah4all.com/>)

In **“Ahavat Olam,”** Sargon’s opening accompaniment begins in a contemplative, almost meditative fashion. Sargon intended this to be the Cantor’s musing about this almost mysterious thing, “everlasting love” that God has had with His people throughout the centuries, despite the everlasting persecution. It builds into a more passionate statement

of our commitment to God into an eventual reciprocal love we have with God. Notice how Sargon switches from minor into major for the words “Al kein Adonai Eloheinu,” as per the traditional nusach.

אַהֲבַת עוֹלָם
 בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ אֶהְבֶּתָּ,
 תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת,
 חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים, אוֹתָנוּ לְמִדָּתָּ.
 עַל כֵּן, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
 בְּשָׁכְבֵנוּ וּבְקוּמָנוּ
 נִשְׁיַח בְּחֻקֶיךָ,
 וְנִשְׂמַח בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ

כִּי הֵם חַיֵּינוּ וְאָרְךְ יָמֵינוּ
 וּבָהֶם נִהְגֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה.
 וְאַהֲבָתְךָ
 אַל תִּסִּיר מִמֶּנּוּ לְעוֹלָמִים.
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ,
 אֱוֵהֵב עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Eternal love

The people of Israel, you have loved,
 Torah and commandments,
 Laws and precepts, have you taught us.
 Therefore, Adonai our God,
 When we lie down and when we rise up,
 We will reflect on Your laws.
 We will rejoice in the words of Your Torah.

For they are our life and the length of our days.
 And of them, we will ponder, day and night.
 And of your love,
 Never remove it from us, forever and ever.
 Praise to You, Adonai,
 who loves Your people Israel.

(Translation by David Fair)

SECULAR POETRY

“Tie the Strings to my Life” from *Letters from Amherst*: Written in 1862, Emily Dickinson’s poem captures a spirit of adventure in this poem telling of a rapid descent into death. Whether literal or figurative death, the speaker seems excited about the journey, exclaiming that she is “ready to go!”. Sargon reflects Dickinson’s fast-paced text through his energetic, rhythmic 12/8 setting. Written in 2002, Sargon wanted to embody the speaker’s yearning for the end of life through this wild ride “to the judgment.”

Tie the Strings to my Life,
 My Lord,
 Then, I am ready to go!
 Just a look at the Horses —
 Rapid! That will do!

Put me in on the firmest side—
 So I shall never fall—
 For we must ride to the judgement—

And it's partly down Hill—

But never I mind the steepest—
And never I mind the Sea—
Held fast in Everlasting Race—
By my own Choice, and by Thee.

Good-bye to the Life I used to live—
And the World I used to know—
And kiss the Hills, for me, just once—
Then—I am ready to go!

“Crossing the Bar” from *Intimations of Mortality*: Lord Alfred Tennyson wrote this poem in 1889, three years before his death, and specifically requested that this piece come at the end of his collections. Sargon’s setting brings out the dichotomy between the calm beauty of the sunset on the beach, and the inner turmoil of the speaker, who stands in the liminal space between water and sand, life and death.

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

“A Florida Night” from *Jump Back*: The poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was born in Dayton, Ohio, to parents who had been slaves in Kentucky. As seen here, much of Dunbar's popular work was written in African American English (AAE), specifically, the antebellum South. (Dunbar also wrote in conventional English in many other poetry and novels.) “What appealed to me was his word poetry and the way he adapted the

natural flow of the language in the dialect,” said Sargon. “It just all came out so naturally, and it was so singable. It was like a lyric when I read it.”

Win' a-blowin' gentle so de san' [sand] lay low,
San' [sand] a little heavy f'om de rain,
All de pa'ms a-wavin' an' a-weavin' slow,
Sighin' lak [like] a sinnah soul in pain.
Alligator grinnin' by de ol' lagoon,
Mockin'-bird a-singin' to be big full moon.
'Skeeter [mosquito] go a-skimmin' to his fightin' chune [tune]
(Lizy Ann's a-waitin' in de lane!).

Moccasin a-sleepin' in de cypress swamp;
Needn't wake de gent'man, not fu' [for] me.
Mule, you needn't wake him w'en you switch an' stomp,
Fightin' off a 'skeeter [mosquito] er [or] a flea.
Florida is lovely, she's de fines' [finest] lan' [land]
Evah [ever] seed [seen] de sunlight f'om de Mastah's han',
'Ceptin' fu' de varmints an' huh fleas an' san'
An' de nights w'en Lizy Ann ain' free.

Moon 's a-kinder shaddered [shadowed] on de melon patch;
No one ain't a-watchin' ez I go.
Climbin' of de fence so 's not to click de latch
Makes my gittin' in a little slow.
Watermelon smilin' as it say, “I's free;”
Alligator boomin', but I let him be,
Florida, oh, Florida's de lan' fu' [for] me
(Lizy Ann a-singin' sweet an' low).

HOLOCAUST POETRY

“**Shifreles Portret**” from *Ash un Flamen*: Written by the famous Yiddish folk poet and songwriter Mordechai Gebirtig, “Shifreles Portret” has been set to music by numerous composers over the past century. The poem speaks of Gebirtig’s oldest daughter, Shifre, who was separated from her family during World War Two. In it, the father looks at the portrait of Shifrele hanging on his wall, and imagines his daughter calling out to him, promising that the war will be over soon, and that father and daughter will be reunited. Sargon’s heart-wrenching setting begins with a folk-like, simple melody, then brings out the distant, child-like voice of Shifrele by changing key from G-sharp major to the unrelated E-flat major.

Oyf der vant links fun many bet
Hengt main tokhter Shifreles portret.

On the wall to the left side of my bed
Hangs a portrait of my daughter, Shifrele.

Oft mol in der nakht
Ven ikh benk nokh ir un trakht,
Ze ikh vi zi kukt oyf mir.
Here ikh, vi zi redt...

Ofttimes in the night
When I turn to gaze at it
I see how she looks at me.
I hear what she says...

“Tateshi! Ikh veys, s’iz dir bang,
S’vet der krig shoyt nisht gedoyern lang.
Kumen vel ikh bald tsu dir,
S’klapt der friling schoen in tir.”

“Dear Daddy, I know, you are sad,
But the war won’t last much longer.
Soon I’ll come to you,
Soon spring will come knocking at the
door.”

Shmeykhlt lib tsu mir un redt
Shifreles portret...

With a loving smile,
Shifrele’s portrait speaks to me.

“Roykhn” from *Ash und Flamen*: The poet, Abraham Sutzkever (1913-2010), his mother, his wife, and newborn son were sent to the Vilna Ghetto in 1941, where his mother and son were murdered by the Nazis. After both he and his wife miraculously survived, they immigrated to Palestine in 1947. In 1985 Sutzkever became the first Yiddish writer to win the prestigious Israel Prize for his literature. The New York Times has written that Sutzkever was “the greatest poet of the Holocaust.” Sargon writes, “In the musical setting, I have tried to evoke a vision of swirling wreaths of smoke from which emanate the disembodied voices of the dead children.”

Bloyz roykhn, roykhn, shveybedike
roykhn,
Di toyte kinder-leybedike roykhn.

Only smoke, smoke, hovering smoke,
The dead children-living smoke.

Zey fufn: “Mame, mame!” fun di
roykhn,
Di gantse panorama iz in roykhn.

They cry, “Mama, Mama!” from the smoke.
The entire panorama is in smoke.

Di lyalkes un di beygl zenen roykhn.
Un iber zey di feygl zenen zoykhn.

The dolls and their playthings are in smoke.
And over them, the birds are in smoke.

Di toyte kinder hiln zikh in roykhn.
Di toyte kinder shpilm zikh in roykhn.

The dead children wrap themselves in smoke.
The dead children play in their own smoke.

“Cantare” from *Shema*: The fourth piece in this harrowing song cycle of five Primo Levi poems, Sargon portrays the linguistic beauty by keeping this cycle in the original Italian,

adding another layer of meaning through his masterful musical setting. Written in 1946, “Cantare” longs for child-like innocence when war and violence have taken it all away, recalling a happier time that the speaker can only access through singing his “good, foolish songs.”

...Ma quando poi cominciammo a cantare
Le buone nostre canzoni insensate,
Allora avvenne che tutte le cose
Furono ancora com'erano state.

...But then when we began singing
Our good, foolish songs
It would happen that everything
Was just like it had always been.

Un giorno non fu che un giorno:
Sette fanno una settimana.
Cosa cattiva ci parve uccidere;
Morire, una cosa lontana.

A day was only a day:
Seven days made a week.
To kill someone seemed a terrible thing:
To die—something far off.

E I mesi passano piuttosto rapidi,
Ma davanti ne abbiamo tanti!
Fummo di nuovo soltanto giovani:
Non martiri, non infami, non santi.

And the months passed so very quickly,
But there were still so many ahead of us!
Once again we were only young people:
Not martyrs, not criminals, not saints

Questo ed altro ci veniva in mente
Mentre continuavamo a cantare;
Ma erano cose come le nuvole,
E difficili da spiegare.

This and other things came into our minds
As we continued to sing
But these thoughts were like clouds,
And so difficult to explain.

“Yakovs-Lied” from *At Grandmother’s Knee*: Yakov’s Lied sings more like an aria, than an art song. At first glance, the vocal line does not appear complex. However, the weight of the drama demands a legato and an intention that is challenging to execute. The text “Al tira, avdi Ya'akov” comes from Jeremiah 46:27 and 46:28. In the latter verse, God says to Jacob “Have no fear, My servant Jacob... For I am with you. I will make an end of all the nations among which I have banished you, but I will not make an end of you! I will not leave you unpunished, but I will chastise you in measure” (Jewish Publication Society).

Omar adoishem LeYaakov "Oi, Tatenyu. Host du mir tsugezokt 'Al tira avdi Yakov' oi vey, tatenyu.	God said to Jacob "Oi, Tatenyu. You told me, 'Do not fear, My servant, Jacob' Oi Vey, Tatenyu.
Farvos shlukt men unz, Tatenyu? Farvos plukt men unz, Tatenyu? Ven vet zayn a soif, Oh Ven?"	Why do they smite us, Tatenyu? Why do they attack us, Tatenyu? When will it end? Oh, when?"
Bochar adoishem beYaakov "Oi..."	God chose Jacob "Oi..."

“El Punchon y la Rosa” from *At Grandfather’s Knee*: This a collection of Ladino folk songs was named in honor of Sargon’s Sephardic ancestry on his father’s side, but reflects his passion for sharing this vast repertoire of Ladino music. “Passionate and prayerful, poignant and funny, they present a true mirror of the spirit and soul of the indomitable Sephardim” (Simon Sargon’s Program Notes for this set). 500 years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, these gems of our Sephardic heritage remain, renewed by contemporary settings such as “El Punchon,” a vivid tale of unrequited love.

<u>El Punchon y la Rosa</u> Puncha, puncha, la rose huele y el amor muncho duele. Tu no dacites para mi presto, alexate de aqui.	<u>The Thorn and the Rose</u> Pierce, pierce, the rose is fragrant. And love hurts greatly. You were not born for me Quickly, go far from here.
Si me quieres ver otra vez, sale a la puerta, te hablare. Echa los ojos a la mar, Alli mos vamos a encontrar.	If you wish to see me once again, Go to the door, I will speak with you. Lift your eyes to the sea There is where we’ll meet.
Abaxando la escalera vide una sangre muy correra; es la sangre de las morenas que es mas dulce que la miel.	When you descend the stairs Look at the blood running; It’s the blood of the dark-haired girls. Which is sweeter than honey.

“A La Una” from *At Grandfather’s Knee*: This well-known song in Ladino and Sephardic circles has been arranged and performed by countless musicians. What makes Sargon’s arrangement particularly unique is the playful, upbeat, passionate, and sultry tone he cultivates throughout the entire piece. Sargon constantly alternates between the 7/8, 6/8, 3/8, and 3/4 time signatures, making the song very challenging to master. Sargon has shortened the traditional lyrics, giving us just a taste of this Ladino gem.

A la una yo nací.	At one, I was born.
A las dos m'engrandecí.	At two, I grew up.
A las tres tomí amante.	At three, I took a lover.
A las cuatro me cazí.	At four, I married.
Alma, vida y corason.	Soul, life, and heart.

Yendome para la guerra,	Going off to war,
dos bezos al aire di.	I threw two kisses in the air.
El uno es para mi madre,	One is for my mother;
Y el otro para ti.	The other if for you.

POETRY OF DIVINE LOVE

“**Shachar Avakeshcha**”: Written by the 11th century poet Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, this well-known piyyut tells of one who “is searching for the light that will clarify, explain, and differentiate the things as God did during the creation of the world” (Piyut North America). Sargon set this beautiful piyut in a pseudo-Gregorian chant style, with simple piano accompaniment and a repeated, lyric melody.

שחר אֶבְקֶשְׁךָ צוֹרִי וּמִשְׁגָּבִי	I will seek Thee at dawn, my rock and my fortress
אֶעֱרֹךְ לְפָנֶיךָ שְׁחָרִי וְגַם עֶרְבִי	I stand trembling before you, my morning and my evening
לְפָנַי גְּדֹלְתְּךָ אֶעֱמַד וְאֶבְהֵל	I stand trembling before Your greatness
כִּי עֵינֶיךָ תִּרְאֶה כָּל מַחְשְׁבוֹת לְבִי	For your eyes see all my innermost thoughts.
מָה זֶה אֲשֶׁר יוּכַל הַלֵּב וְהַלְשׁוֹן	What can this heart or tongue do
לַעֲשׂוֹת וּמָה כֹּחַ רוּחִי בְּתוֹךְ קִרְבִּי	And what is the strength of the heart in my breast?
הֲגַה לְךָ תִּיטֵב זְמֵרַת אָנוּשׁ עַל כֹּן	But the songs of men are sweet to You,
אוֹדֶךָ בְּעוֹד תְּהִיָּה נִשְׁמַת אֵלַי בִּי	And therefore, I will thank You as long as I have breath.

(Translation from Piyut North America:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/513b9fc4e4b0b5df0ebd941d/t/56ab8747be7b9686b0172693/1454081863473/S_hachar+Avakeshcah.pdf)

“Set Me as a Seal” from *Flame of the Lord*: Based on Song of Songs 8:6, this beautiful duet (originally composed for baritone and soprano, but slightly altered today for tenor and mezzo-soprano) is the finale of Sargon’s cycle, *Flame of the Lord*. Written in 1978, this cycle represents the ecstasy of both physical and divine love based on the traditional text of *Shir Hashirim*, Song of Songs.

Set me as a seal, as a seal on your heart.
Set me as a seal, as a seal on your arm.
For love is strong, as strong as death.
Its passions are strong, as strong as the grave.
The flames of love are as a flash, a flash of fire, a flame of the Lord.
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.

With our heartfelt gratitude to:

Simon Sargon

Cantor Joséé Wolff, our coach for Fall 2018

Joyce Rosenzweig

Pedro D'Aquino

Yari Bond

Sarah Grabiner

Ivan Barenboim

The DFSSM Choir

Candace Goetz

Jeremy Aye

Simona Frenkel, our pianist during coachings

The DFSSM Faculty

Rabbi Neil Hirsch, Rabbi Jodie Gordon, and the Hevreh

Community

HUC-JIR Facilities, Harriet Lewis, Andy Estevez