

Appreciation for Music

Sporadic signs of a modern Jewish music movement that would include organized choral groups and musical compositions for piano, violin, and orchestra began in the nineteenth century, but it did not attract large numbers of followers until the early part of the twentieth century.¹⁴ That is about the time synagogues and temples in Washington began hiring trained cantors and musical directors, including Solomon Tovbin at Bikur Cholim, David Behar at Ezra Bessaroth, and musical director Samuel E. Goldfarb at Temple De Hirsch. In the 1940s and 1950s, they would be joined by Cantor Frederick S. Gartner from Bellingham, and Nathan Grossman, choir director of Congregation Keneseth Israel in Spokane. In addition to singing traditional melodies, these men also participated in community concerts, trained young people, and stimulated an interest in Jewish liturgical music.

They were fortunate in being in an area where music, particularly Jewish music, flourished. Seattle, which had the state's largest concentration of Jews, temples, and synagogues as well as community organizations such as the Young Men's Hebrew Association, provided a stage for talented violinists, pianists, and vocalists. Jewish people could join a choral group singing Yiddish songs, sing in a choir, or perform with an orchestra. Additionally, they engaged in secular musical activities. Not long after Washington became a state, Jewish names appeared in discussions of Seattle's musical community.

Aubrey Levy and Rose Morganstern Gottstein were the first known Jews to enter the mainstream music scene in Seattle in the late nineteenth century. In addition to pursuing their professional careers, both Gottstein and Levy sang with Temple De Hirsch's choir, which in the beginning tried to function with Jewish volunteer members only.¹⁵

Levy, son of Esther and Aaron Levy, was an accomplished violinist. He formed the first orchestra at the University of Washington in 1898. Two years later, the *Tyee Yearbook* reported: "This year the orchestra has been an indispensable part of assembly exercises, and their willingness to play when called upon has been very much appreciated by the students."¹⁶

Levy's musical career received notice with the publication of his composition "Princess Angeline Two-Step," a march dedicated to the Seattle Athletic Club and named in honor of the daughter of Chief Seattle. First played at the opening of the Seattle Food Show in 1897, the song became an instant hit.¹⁷ Although in later years Levy occasionally appeared with amateur musical groups, he abandoned a career in music for law.

Trained in San Francisco as an opera singer, Rose Morganstern Gottstein gave up a singing career when she married. In 1900, she became the unpaid executive secretary of Seattle's Ladies Musical Club, a position she held for over forty years. Started in 1891, the club supported the professional aspirations of its members and brought concerts and guest artists to Seattle. During her tenure, Gottstein, called the "silver-tongued financier," managed the "expenditure of \$1,000,000 . . . and aided in putting aside a trust fund for the club."¹⁸ Concert violinist Julius Friedman, who attended West Seattle High School before pursuing his career in New York and Europe, stands out as one of the promising Jewish musicians supported by the club.¹⁹

Other young Seattle Jews went beyond the obligatory piano and violin lessons to pursue musical careers. Among those receiving special mention in *The Jewish Transcript* were Coraine Frada Goldstein, who in 1913 gave her first piano recital at the age of seven; Minnie Hurwitz Bergman, who frequently played at special Jewish community events and became a popular violin instructor; Helen Schuman, winner of the Young Artists Contest held under the auspices of the National Federation of Music Clubs; Anita Lipp, who at eighteen received enthusiastic reviews following her violin concert in New York; and Judith Poska, who was invited to play her violin before Calvin Coolidge at the White House.²⁰

Needless to say, not every Seattle Jewish musician was an accomplished classical soloist. Jean Singer Savan, who had an unusual, deep baritone voice, made a name for herself singing popular ballads in cabarets and music halls during the 1920s and 1930s. Recalling that time, Savan said her mother would say in Yiddish, "I never knew my daughter had such a sweet voice . . . and she gets paid?"²¹ Like so many women of that era, Savan retired from the stage after she married.

Music thrived at the Educational Center of the National Council of Jewish Women, Seattle Section. Seattle NCJW members, like their counterparts around the country, saw the arts as a way to Americanize newly arriving Jewish immigrants. Attendees learned to play the piano or violin, act in a play or operetta, sing in one of three glee clubs, or perform in the Center orchestra under the baton of Leo Wiseman. They could also take advantage of music and dance classes offered by teachers from the Cornish School, or, between 1922 and 1924, attend a branch of the Cornish School at the center.²²

A review of *The Jewish Transcript* indicates that local organizations regularly ended their meetings with a piano or violin solo, and sometimes even with a musical or theatrical performance. Presenting a program of song and dance not only provided entertainment, it also added funds to the club's treasury. Occasionally several organizations would join forces for one extravagant show. Hine Brown,

Louis Sherman, Minnie Hurwitz Bergman, Helen Schuman, Kathy Barokas, Leon Israel, Sophie Coyne, and Isaac Levy are just a few who entertained for Jewish organizations.²³ In Seattle, so many Jewish residents professed an interest in music that in 1928 a number of them, led by Edward Handlin, formed a Jewish Music-Art Society.²⁴

“They’ve Brought Jewish Music to Seattle—Here’s All About Them,” announced *The Jewish Transcript* on May 4, 1928, in a story about Solomon Tovbin, cantor of Bikur Cholim; Eric Friedland, conductor of the B’nai B’rith Lodge No. 503 Glee Club; and Boris Dolgoff, leader of the Hazomir Choral Society. European trained, the men introduced Washington Jews to the modern Jewish music movement, which produced many piano, violin, vocal, and chamber music works and developed an appreciation for Jewish folk music.



Cantor Solomon Tovbin (top row, center) and Boris Dolgoff (bottom row, center), with an all-male choir enriched the services at Bikur Cholim; ca. 1917. Among the singers: first row, second from left, Meyer Aronin; fourth from left, Dave Hoffman; third from right, Dick Sadick; and far right, Adolph Warshall. Second row, far right, Billy Warshall; and second from right, Ben Flaks. *WSJHS*, 102.