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Tsen Brider: A Jewish Requiem

Joshua R. Jacobson

In 1939 a Jewish choral conductor imprisoned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp organized a clandestine choir. The choir and its conductor managed to rehearse and perform secretly for three years. Sensing that the end was near, in 1942 the ensemble was rehearsing its own “Jewish Requiem” when the deportation order arrived. Neither the conductor nor any of his singers survived, but the “Jewish Requiem” did survive. This article chronicles the origins and fate of this unique composition.

Martin Rosenberg

figure 1: photograph of Martin Rosenberg

Martin Rosenberg was born on December 24, 1890 in Russian-occupied Poland.¹ He was a child prodigy in both music and political activism, caught up in the revolutionary fervor of the times. At the age of fourteen he was arrested by the Czarist police for distributing revolutionary fliers, and was detained in prison for thirteen weeks.

Soon after that incident he left Poland. He studied conducting and composition in Vienna and later in Italy, eventually earning the title Professor of Music, and taking on the stage name “Rosebery d’Arguto.” In 1912 he arrived in Germany. In 1917 he took over the conductorship of the Schubert-Kinderchor, a ninety-member children’s choir in Berlin. In 1922 he received an appointment as conductor of the a well-established working-class choir in Neuköln, a suburb of Berlin. He modestly renamed the group, “Gesangsgemeinschaft Rosebery d’Arguto” (The Rosebery d’Arguto Singing Society). Under his inspiring leadership the membership of this ensemble quickly grew to 270 singers.

As a composer, Rosenberg strove to combine the socialist and humanistic with the aesthetic functions of music. He experimented with quarter-tones and the instrumental use of voices,

¹ The biographical information on Rosenberg was taken from the Kulisiewicz’s unpublished typescript, *Polskie Piesni Obozowe 1939-1945*, pp. 1830-31. Portions of Kulisiewicz’s memoir are currently being prepared for publication in Germany. I am grateful to Bret Werb, musicologist at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for his assistance in my research. Peter Gorny was most generous in providing me a carefully edited translation of the relevant portions of Kulisiewicz’s manuscript.

often abandoning lyrics in favor of vowel colors only. But he never forsook the concept that music must serve the common welfare of the people.²

After 1933, when Hitler's party gained power, Rosenberg, as a Jew and as a Socialist, was forced to resign his conducting positions. He soon returned to his native Poland. In 1939, a few months before the outbreak of war, when he made a brief business trip to Berlin, he was arrested by the Gestapo. On September 13, 1939 he was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp amidst a transport of approximately nine hundred Jews. All of his effects, documents, scores, and choral pedagogy manuscripts were destroyed. The building in which Rosenberg lived and where he had left his belongings was burned to the ground.

In Sachsenhausen, Rosenberg formed a four-part choir comprised of twenty-five or thirty Jewish male inmates. Of course, the choir's existence had to be kept secret from the camp guards. Rehearsals took place in Block 39 because its overseer was sympathetic enough to look the other way. Over three hundred people attended the first performance in the sleeping quarters of Block 39. According to an eyewitness who survived, the concert was magnificent, deeply moving and very risky.³

In September 1942 Hitler ordered that all Jews in concentration camps in Germany be moved to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. On October 21, 1942, in the evening, an announcement came that the following day Jews would not be sent to work. Block overseers and supervisors from the Jewish Blocks 37, 38 and 39 were thrown into the bunker.⁴

Expecting imminent death, Rosenberg was inspired to compose a choral work which he called, "Jüdischer Todessang", "a Jewish Death-Song."

² "Arbeitshefte: Sektion Music: Forum Musik in der DDR: Arbeiterklasse und Musik: Theoretische Positionen in der deutscher Arbeiterklass zur Musikkulture vor 1945," p. 74. This article from an East German academic series was provided to my by Bret Werb from the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and translated by Prof. Ross Hall of Northeastern University.

³ Kulisiewicz, p. 1833.

⁴ Kulisiewicz, p. 1834.

Tsen Brider

This work was actually based on a ubiquitous Jewish folk song, called “Tsen Brider” (“Ten Brothers”).⁵ A transcription of this song by ethnologists Saul Ginsburg and Pesach Marek was published in Russia in 1901.⁶ This is the earliest version that I have been able to locate.⁷

figure 2: Tsen Brider (text)

Its structure is regressive. Like “Ten Little Indians” or “One Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall,” the constituency of each verse is reduced by a factor of one unit from that of the previous verse. In the first verse the full component of ten brothers is introduced. In each of the succeeding verses one of the brothers dies, until, in the last verse, only one is left. This theme of the vanishing Jew is not uncommon Yiddish folklore.⁸ One hundred years ago Jewish men were being murdered in pogroms, drafted for twenty-five year stints into the Czar’s army, and escaping Russia through emigration.

Notice that the choice of profession in each verse is constrained by the rhyme scheme. In the first verse the object of commerce is *layn* (flax), in order to rhyme with *nayn* (nine). In the second verse the item is *frakht* (freight or cargo) to rhyme with *akht* (eight), and so on. There are, of course, other considerations. First, the professions listed are those in which Jews were allowed. There are no policemen or politicians in the list. And secondly, the professions at the very end of the song assume a macabre twist. In the next to the last verse the two brothers

⁵ There is a huge repertoire of music composed as a response to the Holocaust, including many works which were contrafacted from well-known folk- and popular songs. See Flam, Gila. *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-1945*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992; Jacobson, Joshua. “Music in the Holocaust.” *The Choral Journal* 36:5 (December, 1995): 9-21; Kalisch, Shoshana. *Yes, We Sang*. NY: Harper and Row, 1985; Mlotek, Eleanor. *We Are Here: Songs of the Holocaust*. NY: The Workman’s Circle, 1983; Kaczerginsky, Shmerke. *Songs of the Ghettos and Concentration Camps*. New York: CYCO - Bicher Farlag, 1948.

⁶ Saul Ginsburg and Pesach Marek (editors), *Yevreiskaya Narodnyya Pijesni v Rusii (Jewish Folksongs in Russia)* (St. Petersburg: Voskhod, 1901).

⁷ I am grateful to Eleanor Mlotek, music archivist at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, for her assistance in locating the early sources.

⁸ Philip Bohlman, “Musical Life in the Central European Village,” in *Modern Jews and Their Musical Agendas*, edited by Ezra Mendelsohn (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 30.

sell bones. And in the final verse the one remaining brother sells candles, an allusion to the Jewish practice of lighting a candle as a memorial for the dead.

In the refrain the narrator addresses a *klezmer* duo: a small ensemble of itinerant musicians the likes of which could be seen in any small town where Jews were permitted to live in the Western fringe of the Russian empire. When not employed at a wedding, these musicians would play on street corners for whatever coins might be tossed their way. There seems to be no significance to the names *Shmerl* and *Tevye*, other than that they were common among Eastern European Jewry. The violin and bass would be considered the minimum composition for a klezmer ensemble. This request for the musicians to play establishes a tone of irony. The ensemble that normally performs on joyous occasions is called upon to entertain for the funeral of each of the brothers.⁹

I have collected, so far, ten variants of the “Tsen Brider” folksong. Most are remarkably similar to the version we have just examined. The names are sometimes changed. Instead of Shmerl and Tevye I have found Yosl and Tevye, Shmerl and Yekl, Shmerl and Cheikl, and the euphonious Shmerl and Berl. In one version, published in New York in 1924¹⁰, none of the brothers dies; rather, most of them succumb to occupational hazards. For example, the wine merchant gets drunk, the baker gets singed, and the hosiery dealer gets tangled in his thread. In the final verse, the narrator of the song explains his own fate in words which reveal yet another dimension of the disappearing Jew: he leaves the community by marrying out of the faith.

<i>Eyn bruder bin ikh mir,</i>	I am one brother,
<i>Hob ikh mikh ferlibt in a meydel, a sheyner,</i>	I fell in love with a beautiful girl,
<i>Hob ikh mir a shikse genumen,</i>	I married a non-Jew,
<i>Ikh gebliben keyner.</i>	Now I'm no-one.

The earliest transcription of the music seems to have been published in *Ost und West* in 1907, as a variant called, “Oi! Jossel mit dem Fiedel.”

figure 3: “Yosl mit dem fidl” (facsimile of the music page)

⁹ There is a funeral dirge tradition in the klezmer repertoire, but it is marginal.

¹⁰ *Jewish National and Zion Songs (K'vutsat Shirim)* (NY: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1924), pp. 255-257.

A. Zhitomersky's arrangement, published ten years later, is a more perfect fit for the 1901 lyrics.¹¹

figure 4: "Zehn brider" (transcription of the melody line, only)

Ten Brothers

figure 5: *Ten Brothers* (facsimile of the Coopersmith music page)

An English version of this song, edited for children (!) appears in Harry Coopersmith's (1902-1975) collection, *The New Jewish Song Book*.¹² In a footnote, the editor suggested, "This song lends itself to imaginative dramatization. Have ten children act out the brothers' parts. The contents of each stanza will suggest the intended action."¹³ Coopersmith also offered the following sociological and psychological insights, "The Jews in Europe were denied permission to practice professions, enter into business or cultivate the land, hence they had to earn a living in areas which others disdained. Their burden was lightened by the humor they possessed."¹⁴

figure 6: Ten Brothers (Coopersmith text)

Coopersmith has retained the basic form and rhyme scheme (abcb) of the original, but changed the names and instruments in each refrain, allowing the children greater opportunity for dramatization. The song is shortened by having two brothers die at once between brothers eight and six, and three at once between five and two. Despite his own reference to the "disdained professions" in which the Jews were forced to work, despite the recurrence of death in each refrain, Coopersmith has created a cheerful song. The "oy yoy yoy" chorus has been transformed to "Diddle daddle dee, Fiddle faddle fee," expanding on the *Yidl-Fidl* rhyme of the original. "Play me a little song in the middle of the street" has been altered to the more upbeat, "Let joy abound and song resound;/ Be merry as can be!" Coopersmith even indulges

¹¹ Z. Kisselgof, ed., *Lider-Zamelbuch* (Berlin: Juwal, 1917), pp. 30-31.

¹² Harry Coopersmith, *The New Jewish Song Book* (NY: Behrman House, 1965), pp. 118-119

¹³ Coopersmith, p. 118.

¹⁴ Coopersmith, p. 118.

in some American slang in the fourth refrain: “Oh, play some jolly jive,” and implied profanity in the final refrain: “Now gather all around me;/ And give me your farewell./ For writing such a poem/ I’ll surely go to ...!”.

Yidl Mitn Fidl

In the 1930s the American entrepreneur Joseph Green produced a Yiddish musical comedy film called, *Yidl Mitn Fidl* (*Yidl with His Fiddle*). The movie was shot in Poland in 1936, even as the Nazi menace threatened from the west.

The title of the show is taken from the refrain of our old folksong. In fact, the plot revolves around the adventures of the two itinerant musicians, Aryeh the bass player and his daughter, a violinist, played by the popular actress Molly Picon. The latter has to dress as a young man, since it was too dangerous for an attractive single woman to be on the road.

figure 7: *Yidl Mitn Fidl* (text)

The title song is an astonishingly light-hearted parody of the somber Russian folksong. The verses are completely new. The focus is on the joys of being a carefree traveling musician. There is no reference whatsoever to the dying brothers.¹⁵ The only factor that ties the two songs together is the refrain. The fiddler and bassist are there, but with new names. The name *Yidl* was chosen not only for its ability to rhyme with *fidl*; in Yiddish, *Yidl* means “little Jew,” and, as such, represents an “Everyman” figure. *Shpil zhe mir a lidl* (play me a little song) has been changed to the lighthearted metaphor, *dos lebn iz a lidl* (life is but a little song). To *Yidl* and *fidl* is then added the nonsense word *shmidl*, replacing the somber vocables from the folksong, *oy yoy yoy*, and cementing the frivolous tone. Rhyming with *bas* is now *kas* ([why be] angry) and *shpas* (fun).

figure 8: comparison of the refrains of *Tsen Brider* and *Yidl Mitn Fidl*

The music is by Abe Ellstein (1907-1963), a popular and prolific composer of music for both the Yiddish stage and the synagogue. His setting matches the up-beat sentiment of the lyrics.

¹⁵ By the end of the movie, all the klezmerim have, one by one, abandoned the tradition. The movie might well be construed as a metaphorical ode to the death of klezmer.

The melodic line of the refrain follows the contour of the refrain in the folksong, but travels in lanes that are far richer in both melody and (implied) harmony.

Jüdischer Todessang

Now let us turn our attention back to Rosenberg’s “Jewish Requiem.” Unfortunately, no score has survived. We know about this piece only because of the efforts of Aleksander Kulisiewicz, a non-Jewish political prisoner who witnessed the rehearsals of the prisoners’ choir.

Rosenberg asked Kulisiewicz to promise that, if he survived, he would keep this song alive and tell the world of the crimes of the Nazis.¹⁶

figure 9: photo of Kulisiewicz

Kulisiewicz fulfilled his promise. From a hospital bed after the war, Kulisiewicz dictated 716 pages of poems and songs that he had heard and memorized in Sachsenhausen.¹⁷ Until his death in 1982 he traveled the world performing “Tsen Brider” and other songs that bore witness to the horrors of the Holocaust.¹⁸ He recorded eight albums in Europe and America, including the classic Folkways recording, *Songs from the Depths of Hell* (Folkways 37700, 1979). He also left an unpublished memoir entitled, *Polskie Piesni Obozowe 1939-1945*, a copy of which has been preserved in the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. To my knowledge, this is the first time this work has appeared in English.

Here is the story of “Jüdischer Todessang” in Kulisiewicz’s own words:

This is what the first, and as it turned out the last, rehearsal looked like. ... Rosenberg,¹⁹ without further ado, gathered the choir and started a secret rehearsal. On this rainy October evening when heaven seemed to be more gray and merciless than usual — people, shivering from cold, in heavy wooden clogs, looked upon their conductor with limitless trust, like children in a kindergarten visited by a long awaited Santa Claus. Suddenly, the conductor interrupted. Before the eyes of the whole choir he took my hand in his and said: ‘Alex, remember. You are not a Jew, but you must sing my song all over the world until you die — otherwise you won’t die in peace.’ ... Several drunken SS men burst into Block 39, screaming shrilly: ‘Alles raus!!’ (‘everyone out!’). Still

¹⁶ Shoshana Kalisch, *Yes We Sang* (NY: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 50.

¹⁷ Folkways, p. 2

¹⁸ Kalisch, p. 50

¹⁹ Throughout his typescript, Kulisiewicz refers to Rosenberg as Rosebery D’arguto. In this translation I have substituted the conductor’s given name.

singing, Jews were kicked, beaten up. Never again did I see the composer of 'Jüdischer Todessang.' In the last moment I managed to jump out through a window. As I ran away, shouting reached me from the Jewish barrack. I spent that night precisely memorizing every tone and every word of the unfinished song. Several hours later a transport of 454 Jews left for Auschwitz. Among them was Rosenberg. He perished in 1943.²⁰

Kulisiewicz claims that he was a witness to the compositional process from the beginning. Presumably that would be the end of October, 1942.

Rosenberg showed me day by day the consecutive composition phases of 'Jüdischer Todessang.' We were united by a desperate love of music and songs, trust in their immortal power—united by the hatred of fascism which desecrated music for the first time in history. We saw the SS victims murdered to the sound of fox-trots and marches, played *vivace*.²¹

By the time we both realized that within the next few days all Jews would be transported to Birkenau, our friendship was cemented by a strong feeling of commitment. Rosenberg was finishing his 'Jüdischer Todessang' and I was memorizing bar after bar, every ornamentation and every novelty of this difficult interpretation.²²

What was Rosenberg like? Kulisiewicz remembered:

Rosenberg was the first Jewish composer that I met. He impressed me with his musical knowledge and his consequent labor to reach his goal, even in the face of death. He was my senior by twenty-eight years and more experienced, but never did he make me feel it. I remember, in the last days, he spoke a lot about his homeland of Mława.²³

²⁰ Kulisiewicz, p. 1837.

²¹ Kulisiewicz, p. 1834.

²² Kulisiewicz, p. 1837.

²³ Kulisiewicz, p. 1835.

Another inmate at Sachsenhausen, Edward Janiuk, recalled:

I met this composer while carrying bricks. He was slim, with an ascetic and always concentrated face and restless hands. I often imagined they were playing something. His hands were long, so were the fingers. The eyes were expressive, very dark, almost black. He spoke calmly, with a melodic voice.²⁴

figure 10: *Jüdische Todessang*: text

figure 11: *Jüdische Todessang*: melody²⁵

Let us examine “Jüdischer Todessang,” phrase by phrase, and hear, through Kulisiewicz’s testimony, Rosenberg’s description of the music and its choreography: a description that he requested be published someday.

The composer described the introduction sung by the basses as ‘Todeswarnung’— a warning of death. Each phrase with the vocal ending “bom-bom” expressed a different feeling: extreme anger, resignation, will to survive — without the need to use words. Rosenberg wished to demonstrate here the achievements of his pioneering choral method. It aimed in some scores to replace text, the traditional element of a song, with descriptive vocalization.²⁶

Rosenberg advocated the use of vocables, syllables that bear no discursive meaning. He once wrote, “...singing without text brings forward with particular strength the unspoiled, elementary components of feelings.... The strongest of feelings are deprived of words, they find their own

²⁴ Kulisiewicz, p. 1835.

²⁵ This transcription is based on the three recordings made by Kulisiewicz: *Songs from the Depths of Hell* (New York: Folkways 37700, 1979), *Chants de la Deportation* (Paris: Le Chant du Monde LDZ74552, 1975), and *Lieder aus der Hölle* (Heidelberg: Da Camera SM95011, 1968). There are some differences in the three interpretations. My spelling of the vocables is slightly different from that of Kulisiewicz.

²⁶ Kulisiewicz, p. 1839.

way through shouting, for example, and from their very genesis rest at the root of the human soul."²⁷ Rosenberg's composition *Absolute symphonische Gesänge [Abstract Symphonic Songs]* is an example of his most subjective use of vocalization in singing. It was first performed during a concert in the Berlin Philharmonic on May 21, 1924.²⁸

We continue with Kulisiewicz's transmission of Rosenberg's program notes.

The initial vocables of falsettos (li-lai) is like a lullaby for the hundreds of thousands of murdered Jewish children. Rosenberg never spoke about his family or relatives. The only person he recalled with tears was a little girl called Reginka. This two-year-old child was stampeded to death in mud by the Germans during the annihilation of a Jewish township in the Bialystok area. Rosenberg met and liked Reginka during a visit to his homeland in 1939. In Sachsenhausen, he was told that in the last moment the girl ran up to her father, hugged his knees desperately crying and begging him not to leave. She was killed at this point. So, the concept of '*voci degli bambini*' (the voices of children) in '*Jüdischer Todessang*' was born out of bitterness and desperation.

The baritone soloist was a young, tall, perhaps twenty-year-old Jew. He must have been in the camp not longer than several weeks. With a muscular chest and a handsome manly neck, the man's lust for life was clear. He did not want to die.

The soloist's first words suddenly stop, signifying a broken thread of life. The choir commences after a short break, 'oy oy oy, yoy!...' in a long held-back diminuendo. The soloist's face, up to now expressing the enormity of pain, suddenly changes. The vision of the Jewish yard orchestras²⁹ appears, interrupted by a kind of dissonance '*müssen wir ins Gas*' ('we are being taken to the gas chambers').

²⁷ Kulisiewicz, p. 1839.

²⁸ Kulisiewicz, p. 1839.

²⁹ The reference is to the orchestras of inmates who were forced to play at the entrance of the concentration camps. Their music might be soothing, to allay the fears of the new arrivals, or rousing, to inspire the slave laborers as they went off to work each morning. See Szyman Laks, *Music of Another World*, translated by Chester Kisiel (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 1989 (Originally published as *Musiques d'un autre monde*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1948), and Fania Fenelon, *The Musicians of Auschwitz*, translated by Judith Landry (London: Michael Joseph), 1977.

The soloist seems to have recovered from the macabre surrounding. He attempts to dance, but a glance behind [to the choir] shows the striped camp uniforms.

His exhaustion gives way to tragic resignation and ends with paroxysms of pain and desperation. The singer's eyes are wide open with horror; his stiff fingers push away the vision of gas chambers. The last syllable 'gas!!...' lasts awkwardly long. Sorrow, sobbing delicately vanishing into pianissimo. A longer pause.

During the basses' vocables [bom bom], the soloist makes a few, heavy, slow paces, as if following his own funeral. The choir turns silently [away from the soloist] to face the wall. According to the composer's explanation it symbolizes Jerusalem's Wailing Wall, [as well as] insignificance and death. The soloist is on his own. His hands hang down beside his body.

[The next lines are sung] *quasi recitativo*, with meticulous German articulation. While singing 'Denkt ihr an alle neun?' the soloist points his stretched finger at the prisoners gathered in the sleeping quarter. It is not aimed at the Jewish 'audience' from Block 39 — it's only a rehearsal — but at the comrades from other nationalities, for whose ears 'Jüdischer Todessang' was mainly destined.

The next part (from 'Jidl mit...'), as opposed to the first verse, is sung with a growing emotion. The soloist improvises a crazy dance, mimicking playing some string instrument. Repeating 'Jidl mit...' the singer claps his hands, attempting to draw into the dance the choir members, who are [still] standing with their backs towards him. The choir remains motionless. The young Jew stoops forward, his hands hanging down. The palms dangle lifelessly, as if they belonged to a body carried on someone's back. Then, like an echo, the first motif returns: 'Zehn Brüder waren wir gewesen...'. Facing the wall all this time, the choir does not respond anymore 'haben wir gehandelt mit Wein' ('we traded with wine'), but accuses: 'wir haben keinem weh getan' ('we haven't harmed anybody').

The final vocables of the falsettos [li-lai] are the carefree voices of children playing, perhaps skipping rope. The choir, hitherto still, begins increasingly lively dance movements.³⁰

Rosenberg's lyrics are very similar to those of the folksong, but the differences are telling and, in some cases, chilling. In the refrain, the names are now Yidl and Moyshe. The word that rhymes with *bas* is again *gas*, but this time not *gas*, a street, but *gas*, the gas chamber. While the effect of the word is startling to anyone who hears it, how much more meaningful must it have been for those who knew the original folksong and understood the transformation from *gas*, a street, to *gas*, the gas chamber. In the concluding refrain, the phrases "last little song" and "they're taking me, too, to the gas" are Rosenberg's personalization of the text to his own situation.

Rosenberg shortened the song from ten to two verses. Perhaps the prisoners knew that their time was limited. The most striking change in the verses can be seen at the end of the second (and final) verse. The brothers have not simply "died," as they did in the folksong, they have been deliberately "murdered!" And we are enjoined to remember them. Could Rosenberg have been either consciously or unconsciously recalling the words of the Biblical injunction to remember the evil deeds of the Amalekites? Was this socialist composer aware that historically the Jewish people have identified their worst enemies, from Haman to Hitler, with Amalek?

Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, when you were leaving Egypt; how, undeterred by fear of God, they surprised you on your march, when you were famished and weary, and they cut down all the stragglers at your rear. Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies that surround you, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the very memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

Rosenberg has also added several new elements that are not to be found in any previous versions of the folksong. At the end there is a brief coda: a tearful couplet that serves as a final appeal on the basis of their obvious innocence, "We were ten brothers./We never hurt anyone!" Also evident in this song is Rosenberg's modernist penchant for the use of non-

³⁰ Kulisiewicz, pp. 1840-1842.

discursive phonemes, onomatopoeic words created by the composer. Thus the vocables: *bom-bom* and *li-lai* which we have analyzed in detail above.

figure 12: musical comparison of Tsen Brider and Jüdische Todessang

In his musical setting of the text, Rosenberg made extensive use of the melody of the folksong. We can find the closest correspondence between these two pieces in their refrains. The first four bars are identical. Measures 5-8 are not an exact match, but quite similar. Then, at m. 9, where the folksong moves into the “oy-yoy-yoy” section, Rosenberg instead repeats the first four measures, sequenced up a third. At the end, instead of cadencing back on the tonic, he avoids resolution by rising again to the dominant. The last word, *gas* (gas), is eerily elongated, eventually rising and falling a tritone (a-e^b-a), an interval associated for centuries in the minds of Europeans with death and hell.

Kulisiewicz’s recordings of “Jüdische Todessang” are quite striking. Kulisiewicz accompanies himself on the guitar. His rendition is personal and emotional to the extreme. At the end of the song, to evoke the horrible scene of the S.S. guards breaking up Rosenberg’s rehearsal and beating the prisoners, Kulisiewicz shouts “alles raus!”³¹

In 1994 I wrote an arrangement of “Jüdische Todessang” for chorus.³² At that time I had not heard Kulisiewicz’s recording, nor had I seen his annotations on the original performance. I based my version on a transcription that appeared in Shoshana Kalisch’s collection of Holocaust songs, entitled, *Yes We Sang*.³³ Her version of the text is in Yiddish, like the folksong, rather than Kulisiewicz’s German. In some areas my reconstruction turns out to be quite different from Rosenberg’s choral version. Most obviously, Rosenberg’s chorus was an all-male ensemble, while my arrangement, for practical rather than historical reasons, is scored for mixed voices. Yet, Rosenberg did have the men sing falsetto in the “li-lai-li-lai” refrain, a section that I had assigned to the women’s’ voices.

³¹ On the Folkways recording, Kulisiewicz sings without accompaniment and omits the final shout.

³² The sheet music is published under the title, “Tsen Brider” by Transcontinental Music Publications (NY). A compact disc recording is available under the HaZamir label (www.zamir.org).

³³ Shoshana Kalisch, *Yes We Sang* (NY: Harper and Row, 1985).

conclusion

It is a privilege for me to have had a part in the reconstruction of “Jüdischer Todessang.” By doing so, I have felt myself to be an emissary of Rosenberg and Kulisiewicz, helping to ensure that the “Sachsenhausen Requiem” continues to be heard into the twenty-first century, helping to carry on its message, its *“Todeswarnung,”* the warning that bigotry, cruelty, greed and xenophobia can cause humans to forget their humanity.