

Olena Dyachkova

MUSIC HERITAGE OF THE KULTUR-LIGE

Owing to the scope and art activity's results, Kultur-Lige (Culture League) can be considered the most important project of Jewish culture in the history of the world on the eve of the Holocaust tragedy.

Kultur-Lige was founded in Kyiv in January 1918 during the short period of the *Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR)*. As a social institution, Kultur-Lige has existed for just a few years. In September 1920, the processes of Kultur-Lige bolshevisation started. On 17th December 1920, the Central Committee of Kultur-Lige was dismissed by a decree of the Kyiv Revolutionary Committee, and an executive committee was appointed, the majority of its members being communist. However, some units of Kultur-Lige survived in a new environment and continued the ideological strategy of the organisation until the 1930s. The longest existing of them was the Kultur-Lige Publishing House that was working till 1931, although under a changed name.

The main feature of Kyiv during the period of 1918–1920 was an extraordinary concentration of creative intelligentsia who tried to escape from the Soviet power. It was during these years that Osip Mandelshtam, Konstantin Paustovsky, Il'ya Erenburg and Benedikt Livshits lived in Kyiv, artistic groups were created and magazines published. At the same time, the infamous call “Beat the Jews, save Russia!” could be heard in Khreshchatyk, the main street of the city (Puchkov, 2015:216).

Kultur-Lige has created a wide network of orphanages, kindergartens and schools, especially for children affected by the pogroms, with training and education in Yiddish. Subsequently, dissemination of cultural knowledge became the main focus of the Kultur-Lige's activities. By autumn 1918, the organisation comprised seven sections: literary, educational, publishing, librarian, musical, theatrical and artistic (fine arts). Later, statistical and archival sections were started (Estraiikh, 2010).

Almost immediately, starting in 1918 (!), Kultur-Lige began organising classical music concerts with music of modern Jewish composers. Prominent musical figures Abram Dzimitrovsky and Moisey Beregovsky became the leaders of the musical section of Kultur-Lige. In Spring 1919, the delegates of the

Kultur-Lige Conference elected Abram Dzimitrovsky as a member of its Central Committee (Rybakov, 2010).

It is known from the newspapers that the music section of Kultur-Lige appeared on the basis of the Kyiv Society of Jewish Folk Music (Rybakov, 2010) and consistently performed the tasks identified back in 1908, for example, in the statute of the *Society of Jewish Folk Music* in St. Petersburg. Among those tasks, the main ones included collecting examples of folk art, supporting Jewish composers, organising musical meetings, concerts, lectures, etc. To fulfil those tasks, the society took up the obligation of having its own choir and orchestra, a library of musical notes and books on musical art as well as of promoting the publishing of musical works (Kopytova, 1997).

The first concert of the Kultur-Lige musical section was held in November 1918 at the Merchants' Assembly hall (now the National Philharmonic of Ukraine). At once, a choir and a vocal quartet guided by Abram Dzimitrovsky were created under the auspices of the society, and a symphony orchestra (directed by David Bertie) gradually emerged. D. Bertie (violin) and M. Levin (cello) were regular participants of the chamber concerts. As part of the trio, they performed with well-known pianists G. Beklemishev and F. Bliumfeld. Famous soloists, such as Heinrich Neuhaus and Matvey Gozenpud, took part in the Kultur-Lige's music programs.

In the morning concerts, which were usually devoted to contemporary Jewish music, works by composers of the Society of Jewish Folk Music of St. Petersburg were performed. In 1918–1919,

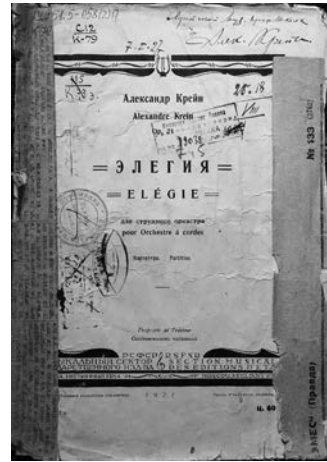
mainly works by A. Krein, A. Zhitomirsky, S. Rozovsky and L. Tseitlin were performed, and in the 1920s, it was the works of M. Milner, A. Krein, M. Gnesin and M. Levin. Thus, thanks to the Kultur-Lige's musical section, a common artistic space between Kyiv and St. Petersburg was formed.



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On this picture of a Wagner score the stamp of the Kultur-Lige can be clearly seen. It is published in the magazine Music of the year 1913, no.128. This edition was a part of the books collection of the Music school of the Kultur-Lige

The library of the Kultur- Lige’s musical section contained selected issues of the pre-revolutionary periodical music publications that were associated in some way not only with important pages of music history but also with the works by the St. Petersburg composers’ society. In the library of the Tchaikovsky National Musical Academy of Ukraine (NMAU), there are two issues of the weekly magazine *Music* of 1913 with stamps of the Kultur-Lige Music School. In No. 119, among the articles devoted to the works of M. Metner and R. Strauss, there is an extensive review of the symphonic dithyramb *Vrubel*, op. 8, by M. Gnesin, which was published by P. Jurgenson’s publishing house. In No. 128, which was devoted to Richard Wagner’s centenary, there is a small advertisement of the non-party newspaper *Russian Talk*. In this communication, the members of the Society of Jewish Folk Music in St. Petersburg, L. Saminsky and Y. Weisberg, who were working for the music section of the newspaper, are mentioned.



Autograph of the score *Elegy* by Alexander Krein. Including the stamp “to the Jewish Music School”.

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The cultural space created jointly by the musical section of Kultur-Lige and the *Society of Jewish Folk Music* of St. Petersburg remained and continued to function even after the official dismissal of Kultur-Lige. In February 1925, the Music School of Kultur-Lige was reorganised into a *Jewish Music Professional School* (Rybakov, 2001). The stamps of the school were placed on Drozdov’s book, *Mikhail Fabianovich Gnesin* (Drozdov 1927). In the NMAU library, there is also the 1927 edition of the score *Elegy* by Alexander Krein for a string orchestra with a stamp of the school and the author’s inscription “To the Jewish Music School”.

Nevertheless, close ties between the music section of Kultur-Lige and the composers and figures of the *Jewish Folk Music Society* in St. Petersburg did not mean that the section had the status of the periphery in the area of the Jewish music of Russia. The musical figures of Kultur-Lige were distinguished above all by the integrity of creative beliefs, their creative dialogue with the representatives of other sections of the group – in particular, the literary, theatrical and artistic – and having common strategic symbols of activity: 1) Book, 2) Childhood, and 3) Image of a ‘new person’ that is an active creator of culture.

Kultur-Lige was a historically unique large-scale institution that made every effort to realise the way of the *People of the Book* in Yiddish. The idea of Kultur-Lige itself belonged to the worker at the Wilno (Vilnius) Selenium publishing house, Zelig Melamed. Leader of Kultur-Lige musical section, Abram Dzimetrovsky, was invited to Vienna in 1923 by the Universal Edition publishing house. From 1925 to 1933, he headed the Russian department of this publishing house (Barsova, 2007).

The first bulletin of Kultur-Lige with its manifesto was decorated with a label showing the names of the three classics of the Yiddish literature – Mendele (Moicher-Sforim), (Yitzhak Leibush) Peretz and Sholem Aleichem. Books, libraries, typographies and bookstores became the centrepiece of the efforts of Kultur-Lige artists. The book turned into an artwork. Book covers, illustrations, fonts and ex libris became the field of experiment for the best avant-garde artists. Legendary Kyiv artists have joined the art section of Kultur-Lige, including Mark Epstein, Alexander Tyshler, Isaac-Ber Rybak, Baruch Aronson, Nison Shifrin as well as the artists who arrived in Kyiv at the end of 1918 – Yosef Chaikov, Polina Khentova, Sarah Shor and El Lissitzky (Kazovsky, 2011).

The publications of the Kultur-Lige musical section were not an exception to the unique design. For example, the covers of the series Kultur-Lige: *Music Section. Notes* were designed by Isaac-Ber Rybak, who used the motif of Solomon's Seal on the first page. On the last page of the series, there were texts from poems by Y.L. Peretz and one of the first Kultur-Lige labels.

In Kyiv, Kultur-Lige published the notes of Dzimetrovsky, his student Moshe Milner, who would become an author of the first opera in Yiddish and M. Levin. The most popular at the time was Milner's vocal suite setting ten children's poems by Y.L. Peretz.

In general, the theme of childhood was of great significance for the artists of the Kultur-Lige. The organisation was well-known for publishing children's books and magazines. The children's musical school of



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back cover illustration of Issue 6. Also showing a first label of the Kultur-Lige in 1918 with three classics of the Yiddish literature — Mendele (Moicher-Sforim), (Yitzhak Leibush) Peretz and Sholem Aleichem

Kultur-Lige, headed by Moisey Beregovsky, was an extremely important one (Kaminer, 1924). Over time, it turned out that the young teachers of the school became the elite of the music world.

Music scores published by the Kultur-Lige¹:

Dzimitrovsky, Abram. 1923.

In a small hut. Folk tune for mixed choir with notes. Kyiv: Kultur-Lige.

Dzimitrovsky, Abram. 1927.

In a small hut. Folk tune for mixed choir with notes. Kyiv: Kultur-Lige.

Dzmitrovsky, Abram. 1927.

Twitter, Twitter: A song on verses by L. Kvitko for the female choir, solo soprano or violin. Kyiv: Kultur-Lige.

Levin, M. 1921.

Small Suite on Children's Songs, for piano. Kyiv: State Publishing House, Kultur-Lige. Illustrated by Nisson Shyfrin.

Milner, M. 1921.

Vocal Suite: Ten children's songs by Y.L. Peretz, for voice and piano. Kyiv: 'Kultur-Lige'. Illustrated by Joseph Chaikov.

Fayntukh, S. C.

'Shtiler, chaweirim' for bass voice accompanied by piano.

Society for the promotion of Jewish culture, 1929. Gescult. Kyiv: 'Kultur-Lige'

1 For further information please have a look at the Department of Music Foundation of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine and the Department of Jewish Studies Foundation of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine.

Musicians and teachers of the Kultur-Lige Music School:

Beregovsky Moisey Yakovlevich (1892, village Thermakhivka, Kyiv region–1961, Kyiv) – musicologist, folklorist, graduated from Kyiv Conservatory (1920, class of composition with B. Yavorsky, cello with F. von Mulert), studied at Petrograd Conservatory (1922–24; class of composition with M. Steinberg). Head of the music section of the Kultur-Lige and head of the Kultur-Lige school (Beregovskaya, 2001).

Bertie David Solomonovich (real name, Livshits) (1882, Litin, now Vinnytska–1950, Kyiv) – violinist (class of L. Auer), conductor and teacher.

Dzimitrovsky Abram Isakovich (ca. 1875, Lithuania – afca 1940, USA) – leader of the music section of the Kultur-Lige, member of the Kultur-Lige Central Committee. He served as a cantor at the Brodsky choral synagogue and studied at Vienna Conservatory. Among his pupils were the cantors Nicholas [Nissim] Saslavsky, Lazar Weiner and composer Moisey Milner.

Gozenpud Matvey Yakimovich (1903, Kyiv–1961, Novosibirsk, Russia) – pianist (classes with G. Beklemishev, F. Blumfeld) and composer (class with R. Glière).

Grinberg (Sokolsky) Matias Markovich (1896, Uman', Ukraine–1977, Moscow, Russia) – musicologist, pupil of M.P. Dombrovsky, H. Neuhaus (piano) and R. Glière (composition).

Gutman Theodore Davidovich (1905, Kyiv–about 1990, Russia) – pianist (classes with H. Neuhaus).

Pekelis Mikhail Samoilovich (1899, Kyiv–1979, Moscow, Russia) – musicologist, composer, classes with G.M. Beklemishev (piano) and B.L. Yavorsky (theory and history of music).

Perelman Natan Yefimovich (1906, Zhytomyr, Ukraine–2002, St. Petersburg, Russia) – pianist (classes with кааас F.M. Blumenfeld and H. Neuhaus).

Rabinovich Isaak Solomonovich (1900, St. Petersburg, Russia–1943, Novosibirsk, Russia) – musicologist, composer and pupil of F.M. Blumenfeld (piano), B.L. Yavorsky (composition), B.V. Asafiev (musicology).

Razumovskaya Vera Kharitonovna (1904, Kyiv–1967, Leningrad, Russia) – pianist (classes with H. Neuhaus).

Sheinin Yeshua Pavlovich (1890, Kremenchuk, Ukraine–1948, Potsdam, Germany) – choirmaster and pedagogue. From 1921 to 1929 he was the

director of the Kultur-Lige school. From 1929 on, he was the organiser of the well-known choral chapel Yevokans (abbreviation of Jewish Vocal Ensemble), also known as Yidvocans (יִדְוּוֹקָנְס). In 1939 he was dismissed because of “formalism in selecting repertoire” (Evocans, 1930).

Ulitskaya Maria Petrovna – teacher of a dance class at the music school of Kultur-Lige.

Zaritskaya Rozalia Isaakovna (1892, Kyiv) – pianist (classes with V.V. Pukhalsky).

Book Series of the Kultur-Lige, Music Scores, illustrated by Isaac-Ber Rybak

Issue 1: Milner, M.

Lullaby. Vocal suite on ten children's verses by Y.L. Peretz. For voice and piano. Warsaw: Kultur-Lige.

Issue 2: Milner, M.

Boatling, Vocal suite on ten children's verses by Y.L. Peretz. For voice and piano. Warsaw: Kultur-Lige.

Issue 3: Milner, M.

Dance, girl, dance. Vocal suite on ten children's verses by Y.L. Peretz. For voice and piano. Warsaw: Kultur-Lige.

Issue 4: Milner, M.

Good night!. Vocal suite on ten children's verses by Y.L. Peretz. For voice and piano. Kyiv: Kultur-Lige.

Issue 5: Milner, M.

Dance, girl, dance. Vocal suite on ten children's verses by Y.L. Peretz. Kyiv: Kultur-Lige.

Issue 6: Dzimitrovsky, A.

Twitter, Twitter: A song on verses by L. Kvitko for the female voices choir. Solo soprano or violin. Kyiv: Kultur-Lige.

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Once again about the fate of M.Ya. Beregovsky. In: Beregovsky, M. *Jewish folk musical – theatrical performances* (p.12–27). Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2001.

Book Chamber of Ukraine. (2000).

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The Yiddish Kultur-Lige. In: *Modernism in Kyiv. Jubilant Experimentation* (p. 197– 217). Toronto: Toronto University Press.

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The St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music. St. Petersburg.

Puchkov, A. (2015).

Osip Mandelshtam's 'Kiev' in intonations, explanations, pictures. Kyiv: Dukh I Litera

Rybakov, M.O. (Ed.) (2001).

The truth of History: the activities of the Jewish cultural and educational organisation Kultur-Lige in Kyiv (1918–1925). Collection of documents and materials. Kyiv.

Shainin, Yeshua Pavlovich (1930)

Our vocal performances: (To the concerts of the UkSSR chapel EVOKANS in Moscow and Leningrad) In: *Vesti.* 12 June 1937

Shaytka, S. (1930)

Evocans: (Jewish Chapel). In: *Music to Masses*, No.3, 1930

Volosatykh O. Matviiy Hozenpud (2015).

The Forming of the Artist. In: *The Scientific Herald of the P.I. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine. The 100th Anniversary of the Kyiv Conservatory: composers and musicologists of the Kyiv Conservatory (1923-1941). Collection of articles.* (Vol.113, p. 154–175). Kyiv: Ukrainian Tchaikovsky National Academy of Music.