

From Rostov to Cape Town

Re-discovering a lost legacy of Jewish music



Froim & Lena Spektor, Rostov, c. 1915



'...a cable was received... the Spektors were leaving on the Balmoral Castle, due here on 19th...'

(Roeland Street synagogue committee, November 1928)

In 1928, Froim Spektor travelled from Rostov-on-Don, Russia, to Cape Town, becoming Cantor of the New Hebrew Congregation.

Rostov-on-Don, Russia



Spektor's commemorative folder contained his own manuscripts and music by other important Jewish composers, including Dowid Ajzensztadt of Warsaw, and David Nowakowsky of Odessa.

To the Deeply-Respected Cantor
F. N. SPEKTOR
From the Congregation of
THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE

Rostov-on-Don, 1925



Holocaust memorial, Rostov-on-Don

In August 1942, German soldiers murdered 27,000 residents of Rostov, mostly Jews. But the Spektors were already safe in Cape Town.

The manuscript folder bypassed the Holocaust, preserving the musical heritage of a lost world.

By re-performing this music today, we can learn more about Jewish society before the Holocaust and give a new voice to those who did not survive.



David Nowakowsky (1848-1921)



Froim Spektor (1888-1948)



Dowid Ajzensztadt (1890-1942)



Many of Nowakowsky's works were taken to America by his family, but this setting of 'V'shomru' ended up in Cape Town.



The organ accompaniment of Spektor's 'V'shomru' suggests that Rostov's Jewish community was liberal, since instruments are normally forbidden on the Sabbath.



Ajzensztadt's cantata 'Chad Gadya' reveals a skilled composer at the height of his powers. In 1942, he and his family were murdered on the Umschlagplatz in Warsaw.



Froim & Lena Spektor (later years)

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It's been fascinating to discover that so many unique, important Jewish music manuscripts from Russia and Eastern Europe ended up in South Africa, thereby circumventing the Holocaust. And a privilege to perform them!

Cape Town, South Africa

Background map of the world: 'Daily Mirror Atlas of the World, 1928'