

SUTZKEVER Project



Poems by AVROM SUTZKEVER

music by

OLIVIER MILHAUD

(Darius Milhaud's grand nephew)

with

MÉLANIE GARDYN, *Soprano*

NATACHA MEDVEDEVA, *Piano*

Batia Baum, Literary Adviser





Sutzkever Project

Big Winners IJMF.

The Sutzkever Project won the first
prize of the International Jewish
Music Festival 2017.

The jury report said:

The Sutzkever Project deserves the first prize because of the artistic way in which the performers brought the poetry of Sutzkever and the compositions of Olivier Milhaud to life.

Singer Mélanie Gardyn sang expressively and was accompanied with exquisite finesse by pianist Natacha Medvedeva.

We encourage the composer and the performers to extend this project and bring this work of beauty to the world.

History

In 2010, the composer Olivier Milhaud met the translator Batia Baum who is still today the literary adviser of the project.

She made him discover the beauty of Sutzkever's poems.

In 2015, Olivier Milhaud met Mélanie Gardyn and later with Natacha Medvedeva who joined the group, *Sutzkever Project* was born.

In May 2017, *Sutzkever Project* won the Grand Prize at the International Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam and the special Mira Rafalowicz Award for the best Yiddish performance.

In december 2018, they released their first album.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_nj7QTLj7LH8JrXOWtxjxuxgKJ6LjpTYQk

They played several concerts : Cukierman's Price in Paris, Medem's Center, *Journées européennes de la culture juive* in Metz, Cercle Bernard Lazare, Shoah's Memorial, Rivesaltes' Memorial (Radio France)...

THE CONCERT

The concert takes us into the poetic works by Abraham Sutzkever where words seem to have engulfed the outside world to make spring from the horror, nature, love, creation itself... splendor and beauty.

The poems are set to music that relates to very different themes and universes :

Childhood in Siberia (*Sibir*), nature embodied in two trees and their symbiotic love (*Tsvey Beymer*), an abandoned nest (*Di farloyrene nest*), prayer and remembrance of the grandfather (*Tikn os*), horror transfigured into a kind of painting-poem, of vision (*Farfroyrene yidn, Ikh lig in an orun*), a love



by a sunny night (*Durkh zunike nekht*), a wagon full of shoes (*A vogn shikh*), the hallucination of a sunset in the lime as verses of poems (*Disturmisten*), the disillusionment of an era (*Penemer in zumpn*), a mystical interrogation (*Tsou vemen geher ikh?*), an apparition - or an interior fantasy ? (*Baym Narotch*), Who will remain ? (*Ver vet blaybn ?*)

Within each song forms a “musical signifier” (such as a word, a leitmotiv for Sutzkever), which can be a harmonic pattern, melodic and/or rhythmic motif, from which the rest flows.

The music is inspired by the Jewish liturgy and joins in the lineage of Bloch, Ravel, Eisler, Shostakovich ...



Statement of the composer

“It fell to me to witness... a suffering which must be transmuted into magnificence.” (A. Sutzkever)

This injunction to create is not only in the service of beauty or splendor, but rather immediately celebrates life and the force of creation. *A weapon against death*, said Sutzkever.

Thus, this conviction of a world of one's own allows one to traverse history, times of horror and even death. For in this inner world that fuses with the outer world, what matters in the eyes of the poet is not so much what he sees, as what he wants to see, with words... Sutzkever sees with words. In this sense, he is not

just a poet-witness, a poet who serves history, but "a poet for life" (Y. Niborski), who places above all poetry as faith ; simply, as life.

As a condition of life.

Sutzkever displays something of poetic hallucination... from there, one senses that his work flows with great freedom and borders seem to vanish. There are no longer real borders between the thing and the word, between the word and the mouth, between man and matter, the self and the world...

The words deconstruct the world so it can be reborn. A tree can be endowed with love whereas the sunset is horrifying. Still-bitter beauty is embodied by a bee, a broken violin, the distant melody of a memory, the words of the dead or the living addressing the dead. He questions the Yiddish poet and his language, history as it unfolds, and poetry itself... This is the source of the extreme richness of tones, subjects, forms, grammar and the creation of many neologisms.

This approach particularly speaks to me because freedom in musical writing is primary in my work. It is the condition for addressing both the living and the dead; for believing in notes in place of words, words in place of objects; for believing that no borders exist between oneself and the world, and that this world belongs to us as ourselves. We release the created object into the world, as the only proof of its existence. Only this object can create the illusion that belief makes sense. Only this belief can give life.

Olivier Milhaud

AVROM SUTZKEVER

the light child (Rachel Ertel)



Abraham Sutzkever was born on July 15, 1913 in Smorgon, now part of Belarus, and died in Tel Aviv on January 20, 2010.

Fleeing pogroms, his family escaped to Siberia, where the light and nature inspired him. He described Siberia with the delight of childhood in *Sibir poem* (1936/1953). His father passed away there when he was seven years old.

A. Sutzkever by Chagall

The family settled in Vilnius in 1922. At the end of the 1930s, Avrom Sutzkever was a member of the cutting-edge artistic and literary movement *Yung Vilne* in Vilnius. This was a movement of young



artists with different sensibilities, consisting of notable writers and Yiddish poets, such as K. Rank and S. Kaczerginski.

In 1941, the Sutzkever family was confined to the Vilna ghetto. There, he worked for the "Paper Brigades," who, under orders from the Nazis, sorted out

the works and remarkable documents from exceptional collections of the YIVO Library to create the "Museum of an Extinct Race" in Berlin. Sutzkever's mother and his baby daughter were murdered.

After escaping the ghetto with his wife and the poet Shmerke Kaczerginski on September 12, 1943, he managed to join the partisans.

In 1944, he wrote the prose piece *Vilner geto (The Ghetto of Vilno)* in Moscow, where he stayed until 1946. This work generated an immense response, as he became a fundamental witness of the *Black Book*, a collection of testimonies of



Nazi barbarism, gathered by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassily Grossman for the Anti-Fascist Committee.

In January 1946, as a survivor and witness of Nazi extermination, he was also chosen by the Soviet Prosecution to be called as a witness to the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. However, his testimony was ordered in Russian, even though he wanted to speak in Yiddish. Moreover, it was carefully filtered to the Soviet citizens and publication was forbidden by Stalin.



After living some time in Lodz and Paris, Abraham Sutzkever moved to Israel in 1947, where he remained until the end of his life.

He became the dominant figure of the movement of Yiddish writers *Yung Yisroel* (Young Israel). He was the founder and director of the prestigious literary journal, *Di goldene Keyt*, or *The Golden Chain* (Tel Aviv, 1949-1995).

Abraham Sutzkever is a father figure of Yiddish culture, whose life and work were adorned with beauty, heroism, and creation. According to Rachel Ertel, his



poetry aims to "bring light," to illuminate poetic silence and intimacy. His work permeates and speaks to all ages, as it is in itself a miraculous crossing of flashes of life force experiences.

Technical details

Concert duration : 1h15

Required material :

- Grand piano
- A music stand
- Stage lighting
- Vocal mic (according to the size of the room)



To join us :

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