SONGS OF THE BOBOVER CHASSIDIM, VOL. 1
Collected and Sung by RABBI LAIZER HALBERSTAM
The Chassidic Chorus - Velvel Pasternak, Director
accompanied by
The RUDY TEPEL ORCHESTRA.
Music Consultant: Richard J. Neumann
Produced by B.-H. Stambler
MEMBERS OF THE CHORUS: Tsvi Altman, Moshe Levinson,
David Mann, Binyamin Plokin, David Schwarzner, Avraham Shapiro

Bobov, a tiny village in West Galicia, was the home of a remarkable Chassidic
dynasty of rebbes, known not only for their personal magnetism, erudition and dedication
to the education of youth but also for their great tradition of music. Before the Nazi holocaust
there was hardly a town in West Galicia without a Bobover shibli. One could tell a
Bobover Chassid by his immaculate dress, high-crowned velvet hat, carefully-curved
earlocks, and, most uniquely, by his knowing a song for every occasion.

Bobover neginah began one day, tradition has it, when the first rebbe, Rabbi Sholomo Halberstam,
called his only son, six-year-old BenZion, to him and told him to begin the study of Mishlieh (Proverbs).
As the lad came to the fifteenth verse — "B'ni ... My son, walk thou not in the way with them" — he started to hum a tune to himself.
Thius was born the first Bobover nignon, to be followed by hundreds of others; thus emerged the
composer in the future Bobover Rebbe.

B'ni is a most appropriate text for the beginning of this first recording of Bobover
melodies, for it was the underlying theme of the life and work of Rabbi BenZion Halberstam
— safeguarding Jewish youth against straying from the ways of their forefathers.

A notable achievement of the Bobover Rebbe was the establishment of a system
of Chassidic education. Chassidic yeshivoth (rabbinical colleges) were unknown in
Galicia until the time when the first Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Sholomo Halberstam, opened
one in Vishnitze, Galicia, where he himself taught the senior group. Before this a young Chassid
had no choice but to study by himself in the shibli of his isolated home-town. A revolution in
Chassidic life took place when the Rebbe's son, Rabbi BenZion Halberstam, opened
the gates of learning to the young throughout Galicia by expanding the one big
yeshivah established by his father into forty-six branches of the Yeshivah Ets Hayyim,
with the center at Bobov.

Boys and young men came to Bobov from everywhere, from cities and hamlets,
from the Polish mountainside of Torki, where their fathers tilled the hillside lands. No one
knew how the name of Bobov reached them but they came, making their way hundreds of
miles on foot. Too poor to afford the train fare, they walked, with their shoes tied together
over their shoulders to save wear and tear. Hypnotized by the name of Bobov, they came
from high schools and universities, from all parts of Europe and overseas, from pious homes
and homes long assimilated to Western ways. They came and they stayed, becoming ardent Chassidim, devout Jews, outstanding Talmud scholars and great rabbis.

Wherein lay the magnetism of Bobov that drew these masses? Surely it was the
personality of the Rebbe, his unequalled influence as a leader, his charm, wit and learning,
his organizing ability, and the overflowing love he had for his followers. Still another
powerful factor was the rich treasure of neginah in Bobov. It is the dynamic force of this
music which the present recording attempts to reproduce.

The Bobov Dynasty
All Chassidic dynasties reckon their spiritual genealogy in generations of dis-
clipship beginning with the Ba'al Shem Tov (1700-1760) and his successor, Rabbi Dov
Ber, the Magid of Mezeritz (1710-1772). In the third generation leadership divided more
or less geographically among Rabbi Dov Ber's disciples. The recognized head of the
Chassidim of Poland, Galicia and Hungary became Rabbi Elimelech of Litzhensk (1717-
1787). After him one of his disciples, Rabbi Yaakov Yishak, the Hozeh (Seer) of Lublin
(1745-1815), led the Chassidim of Poland and another, Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Rymenov
(d. 1815), led in Galicia. When Rabbi Menahem Mendel passed on the Chassidim of
Galicia were headed by Rabbi Naftali of Ropchitz (d. 1827), who had been a disciple of both
the Hozeh and the Rymenover.

Then for half a century Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Sandz (1793-1876), the
famous Sandzer Tsadik, was the overall leader of the Chassidim of Poland, Galicia and
Hungary, becoming known as the Rebbe of Rebbes. Although a disciple of the Hozeh,
whom he called My Teacher, he considered himself principally a follower of the Ropchitz
Rebbe, whom he called The Holy Rebbe. To the Sandzer came as Chassidim (followers)
rebbes of great renown in their own right, bringing with them their own Chassidim.

The first Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Sholomo Halberstam, was a grandson of the
Sandzer Tsadik. His father, Rabbi Meir Natan, passed away at an early age, leaving his
only son, born in 1847, an orphan at the age of eight. Thus the child was reared by his
grandfather, the Sandzer Rebbe.

Under the guidance of this world-renowned gaon (scholar) and Tsadik, Sholomo
grew in Torah and wisdom. So high was the Sandzer Rebbe's regard for him that the
grandfather used to urge his own Chassidim to go to his grandson, Rabbi Sholomo, where
"m'ken shepen Yiras Shomayim mit lefel" — "one could steep himself in awe and reverence
of the Divine." In one of the Sandzer Rebbe's responsa he even asked his grandson to
pray for him.

At first Rabbi Sholomo served as a rav (rabbi) in Bukovsk, Galicia, then in
Oshpetzin (where years later the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp was to be
located). He became recognized as a great gaon. It was in Vishnitze that he founded his
yeshivah and began his leadership as a rebbe. From Vishnitze he moved to Bobov, where
he became world-renowned as the Bobover Rebbe. In 1905, when he passed away, his son
Rabbi BenZion, only thirty-one, was proclaimed the new Bobover Rebbe. To pledge their
allegiance to him came all of his father's Chassidim, many of them distinguished rabbis
who had known the Sandzer Tsadik himself.

Rabbi BenZion, in addition to his emphasis on the education of youth, vitalized
the tradition of song in Chassidic life. He composed many new nignonim himself, revived
those of the Ropchitz and the Sandzer Rebbebs, and encouraged the composition of nignonim
by his followers.

The same pattern was followed by the Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Sholomo, who
succeeded to the leadership after the murder of his father by the Nazis in 1941. Thus today
in a cluster of buildings around a spacious central courtyard in the Crown Heights section
of Brooklyn, New York, one can find the Bobover Beth Hamidrash, the Yeshivah B'nei
Zion (named after the late Rebbe) with its many classes, the Mestviva Ets Hayyim, dormito-
ries, and other related institutions. In Israel the Rebbe erected a new settlement, Kiryat
Bobov, to perpetuate the name of the European Bobov of old. In the principal cities
of Israel, Bobover shibliach once again add their bright color to the Jewish rainbow as they
did in the past.

In Brooklyn on a Simchas Torah eve, when the Bobover Rebbe dances untringly
in his Beth Hamidrash for hours with the Sefer Torah in his arms, the synagogue and the
courtyard are jammed with dancing Jewish masses. The golden chain of Bobov is unbro-
ken. The song of Bobov lives on.

Notes by B.-H. Stambler

Laizer—Sing!
An Autobiographical Sketch
by Rabbi Laizer Halberstam

I am an alumnus of the Yeshivah Ets Hayyim of Sandz, a city made famous by my great-grandfather, the saintly Sandzer Tsadik, Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam. On both sides of my family I am a
direct descendant of the Sandzer Tsadik: my paternal grandmother Nehumel and my
maternal great-grandmother Yitta were his daughters.

It was my paternal grandfather, Rabbi Yitschak Tovye, of blessed memory, who
placed the talit (prayer shawl) over the shoulders of Rabbi BenZion on the first Sabbath
eve after the passing away of his father, Rabbi Sholomo, in 1905. In Chassidic circles this
act constitutes the investiture of a new rebbe.

My other grandfather, Rabbi Mandel Baron of Yaslo, the son of Rabbi Laizer
Krakover, after whom I am named, was a close friend of Rabbi BenZion in Vishnitze.
They had in common a deep love of music, since Rabbi Mandel was a great menagen and
beat tejilah. It was a delight for the "oylok" (worshippers) when Rabbi Mandel prayed at
the amud (reader's stand) on special Sabbaths or holidays in Vishnitze or Bobov.

My father, "traveling to Bobov," in the Chassidic phrase, as did I. In fact my
father, Rabbi Moshele Rubin-Halberstam, of blessed memory, was dubbed the "foreign
minister" of Bobov, since he represented Bobov in governmental affairs and matters of
general Jewish interest.
I can still remember Simochas Totah night in Bobov, when, wet to the skin with perspiration, we would dance for hours, standing in one place, keeping exact time with the varying rhythms of each new song. So great was the influx of Chassidim for this Yom Tev that there was no room to turn around in the wooden shulah constructed especially to hold the crowd. Nevertheless, everyone was dancing, and so was the building — it moved up and down and shook so much that one wouldn't think it had been erected on a foundation of springs!

And I recall the Rebbe, of blessed memory, the talmid covering his head and face, singing the Hakafot Zemirot Navaah Sandek. Again and again he repeats the words, "Holy and exalted are your children amongst nations; they have given you up as bitter outings and peace offerings." One cannot see the Rebbe's face, only his torso, big as pearls rolling down his beard in a steady stream. I remembered that scene and that verse again when I heard of how the Nazis murdered the Rebbe and his youngest son, Moishe Arkel.

According to Chassidic thinking, it is a great segulah (safeguard) to have an inscription of the Rebbe before one's eyes in moments of danger. The Bobover Rebbe was my only rebbe and his image was before me in all the grave situations that I encountered during the years of Nazi persecution. Thus, I could clearly see him as I was hiding in an attic in Yasló, while my grandfather, Rabbi Mandel, my uncle, Rabbi Yanov, and a friend of the family, Reb Selig Kotziner, were shot by the Nazis on the floor below. In concentration camps, in ghettos, stealing across frontiers at the peril of My life, in insurmountable other dangerous situations of those dreadful days, his image was constantly with me.

When I was finally rescued from Europe and reached the shores of free America, I spent my first Shabbat in an East New York synagogue, designated by the Bobover Rebbe to speak in behalf of the Bobover Yeshivah in America, which was then in its infancy.

At this moment I see the late Rebbe's image before me in a different connection. It is in a Polish resort town (Krynica) where the Rebbe spends the hot summer months. I have come to speak for Shabbat. It is Friday evening. The Rebbe sings Shalom Alehem and recites Ribeen Kol Hoolamim with his usual fervor. I am privileged to stand near him and, as he finishes, he turns to me and says, "Laizer, sing!" He means me to continue by chanting Esther HayaH. The "song" is astonished and I am stunned, for this poem is usually sung by one of his sons or sons-in-law, never by an outsider, even one so closely related as I.

Although known as a courageous youngster, I feel almost paralyzed and I cannot open my lips. If I sing, then what is sung by the Rebbe's children, will it mean that I am ranking myself with them? What other niggun shall I sing? Perhaps it is more appropriate politely to refuse to sing at all? But the Rebbe has said, "Laizer, Sing!" and one does not refuse the Rebbe. When one feels hundreds of expectant eyes fixed on him, there is no time to contemplate. I finally begin with a rebbeke niggun, hardly the best choice, for one does not sing this before a rebbe. But the Rebbe has said, "Laizer, sing!"

Today I think of this long-past Sabbath eve as I undertake the preparation of this recording. Am I fit to assume the responsibility for presenting Bobover melody to the world? Which segulah are the best circumstances?

It is not to let oneself be overcome with questions. The Rebbe has said, "Laizer, sing..."

Velvel Pasternak, chorical conductor, is a graduate of Yeshiva University.
Rudy Tepel, clarinetist, is the leader of the most popular wedding band in New York City.
Richard J. Neumann, graduate of the Prague and Vienna Composers, is a composer of liturgical music.
B-H. Stambler, producer, are a husband and wife team who was active in Jewish recording for many years.

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1. P'ily Eis • My Son
WORDS: Priven 1155 • MUSIC: Rabbi Ben Zion Halberstam
My son, walk thou not in the way of the wicked.
2. Bikut • Dance
WORDS AND MUSIC: Chassidic Folk Song
3. HayaH Babi • Whether in the Valley
WORDS AND MUSIC: Chassidic Folk Song
4. Hava • Whether in the Valley
WORDS AND MUSIC: Chassidic Folk Song
5. Shalom Alehem • The Peace
MUSIC: Arie Mandelbaum, 1939. (A great influence on the youth of Bobov during Rabbi Ben Zion's early years)

6. L'Chachma • Wedding Processional
MUSIC: Arie Mandelbaum, 1939
7. Ben • The Bridge of Rejoicing
WORDS: Psalm 118:15-16 • MUSIC: Rayaev David Blau of Saud, later came to Chevra (He isn't out as a pitcher in the wedding of one of Rabbi Ben Zion's daughters. A scene from the festivities is pictured in the cover of this disc.)

The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the breast of the righteous. The right hand of the Lord shall exalt. The right hand of the Lord shall exalt. Long live to the Rebbe — May Tov! To all Chassidim, May Tov! And again, May Tov! To the groom's company, May Tov! To the bride's company, May Tov! To all relatives, May Tov! And again, May Tov!