

Professor [Icchak] Zaks

The name of Professor Zaks is connected with the musical life of Jewish Częstochowa. He was a pupil of the master of Jewish music, Abram-Ber Birenbaum and the cantor [Abram] Fizel, both former Head Cantors at the German Synagogue.

I. Zaks studied song and music incessantly, until he received the title of “professor”. He worked as Professor of Music at the Jewish Gimnazjum, where he taught singing and organised a woodwind orchestra, which developed quickly and was the best in town.

He was an expert in discovering young talent in the fields of singing and music, and he organised them within the “Lira” Society. He would do this by listening to how the choir sang in the German Synagogue - to *Hisoreri*¹ on a Friday night or *Umalochim Yechofeizun*² on the High Holidays. In this manner, he brought the best forces together.

In the evenings, Saturdays and holidays, when everyone was out promenading in the city and enjoying their private lives, Professor Zaks was very busy. He sat separately with the altos, tenors, basses and sopranos and taught them, preparing the public appearances.

Professor Zaks was the best interpreter of the creations of his teacher - the Chief Cantor Birenbaum - especially of the *Ba’Meh Madlikin* rhapsody, in which he excelled in his stressing of the “*yeshiva* songs”, which brought his Częstochowa Jewish public great delight.

His concerts were cultural achievements that were the result of great efforts and the preparation of first-class works, such as Haydn’s *The Four Seasons*, and works by Tchaikovsky, Mendelsohn and others. In his last public appearance at the “Luna” hall in Częstochowa, 180 people participated - 120 men and women singers in the choir, and 60 musicians.

Following this concert, Zaks was invited to Łódź, where he directed a representative choir and performed the opera *Carmen* in Yiddish. He soon gained fame throughout the globe and was invited to America to take part in a [worldwide] competition.

Professor I. Zaks well earned his title and fame. His life was a world of song and music³.

¹ [TN: Heb., “Bestir yourself!”; part of the “Lecho Dodi” song which is sung to welcome the Sabbath.]

² [TN: Heb., “And angels will be frenzied”; part of the “Unesanneh Tokef” prayer recited on Rosh Ha’Shanah and Yom Kippur.]

³ [TN: According to various historical sources, Professor Icchak Zaks was murdered in Treblinka in the summer of 1942.]