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The First Concert (Old Memories)

Just uttering the word “concert” was once considered heresy amongst religious Jews.

Even though a large section of Częstochowa youth at the time favoured the new, modern life, we still needed to be extremely cautious nonetheless.

The Jewish periodicals “*Der Freund*” [The Friend], “*Der Telegraph*”, “*Heint*” [Today], “*Moment*”, and various holiday fliers, as well as the weekly “*Roman Zeitung*” [Novels Newspaper], which also contained a section on music and concerts, already then had a great influence on us youngsters.

So, we plucked up the “courage” to attend the first concert ever played at the great theatre, under directorship of the renowned concert musician Pinkus [Paweł] Kochański and his two brothers, who performed a trio for viola, piano and cello.

The spacious theatre was fully packed with the Jewish and Polish aristocracy, as well as the with our city’s higher-ranking Russian officials. We were “stuffed up” into the highest gallery. With the sound of their first notes, some of us quite simply uttered forth a “*Shehecheyonu*”¹, so momentous was our experience. Our enthusiastic and unceasing applause was beyond description. A new world had been revealed before us. The tones became deeply imprinted in our hearts and, when the younger Kochanski began playing the “*Kol Nidrei*” melody on his cello, the tones carried us off and we repeated the holy prayer of “*Kol Nidrei*” silently word by word. A divine tremor passed through our limbs. It seemed to us as if the Spanish *Conversos* were there, murmuring this prayer together with us. A surge of thunderous applause awoke us from our dreams and we began to slip out of the concert hall one by one, so as not to be caught, heaven forbid, in the “transgression”.

Such were the circumstances the first time we “gave in” to “sin”, and attended our first concert.

It had been the first, but - by no means the last! Those were the days!

¹ [TN: Heb., “Who has given us life”; a blessing which is said on particularly joyous occasions.]