

REBOOT STEREOPHONIC: history sounds different when you know where to start listening

**"Make your ear like a funnel!"** — Rabbi Yohanan, Babylonian Talmud

**"Abre cuto guiri mambo"** — Arsenio Rodriguez, from the Congo saying "open your ear and listen to what I'm going to tell you"

**W**e believe that music creates conversations otherwise impossible in daily life. Our goal is to incite a new conversation about the present by listening anew to the past. We will do this by unearthing lost classics from the archive, sounds that are languishing in thrift-store crates across the nation. The stories that accompany them have yet to be told: hybrid identities, eclectic communities, racial dialogue and pioneering musical style. This is music that forces listeners to ask themselves anew, who am I, what have I inherited, and what am I going to do about it?

We will do that with no museum stuffiness. This is music you might actually want to throw on at a party, music that will make you laugh, will make you think, stuff you probably have never heard before and will definitely not find on any Jewish music compilation your Hebrew School teacher gave you to get in touch with your roots. Our approach is new school, secular (but we hear the spirit when it calls), multicultural, progressive, irreverent, obsessive, self-deprecating and urban. The label is helmed by Jews who grew up on New Wave and punk, know what a dub-plate is, and put mambo, Tupac and The Ramones on the same iPod playlist, and

who believe, more than anything, that history sounds different when you know where to start listening. Be in touch with us: [www.rebootstereophonic.com](http://www.rebootstereophonic.com)

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HI FIDELITY REPRODUCTION FROM THE ORIGINAL WAX CYLINDER RECORDINGS

**For The First  
Time In Nearly  
A Century**



**Perhaps The  
Most Offensive  
Album Ever  
Made**

# JEWFACE

**MONROE  
SILVER  
THE  
HEAVENLY  
HEBE**

**RHODA  
BERNHARD  
THAT ZANY  
ZAFTIG  
MEIDELE**



**"WHEN MOSE  
WITH HIS  
NOSE LEADS  
THE BAND"**

AND **15** OTHER

**GOLDEN GREATS  
BY THE LEADING  
YIDDISH WARBLERS  
OF OUR TIME**

**"COHEN OWES ME 97 DOLLARS" AND OTHER HITS BY IRVING "IZZY" BERLIN**

History sounds different when you know where to start listening...

Some songs are more Jewish than others. Uncomfortably Jewish. Take a vaudeville hit of 1915, "Cohen Owes Me 97 Dollars." It tells the story of the "Old Man Rosenthal," a terminally-ill businessman obsessed with collecting unpaid debts before he dies. Its melody drips with Jewish dolor; its lyrics ("Levi Brothers don't get any credit/They owe me for a hundred yards of lace") were delivered by vaudevillians in a thick, malaprop-ridden travesty of Yiddish dialect. All in all, "Cohen Owes Me 97 Dollars" seems more like a case for the Anti-Defamation League than a triumph of Jewish cultural production. And yet, the song was composed by a Jew, Irving Berlin, published by a Jewish-owned music publishing firm, and performed by Jewish singers before cheering Jewish audiences.

These 16 rare recordings, originally released on wax cylinders and 78 rpm discs and presented here on CD for the first time, revive a lost musical era – the gaudy and enchanting age of the "Hebrew comedian," a fixture of the vaudeville stage, and one of the first pop stars America ever knew. His was an art of extravagant crepe beards, gargantuan putty noses, broad ersatz-Yiddish accents, and catchy songs filled with Sadie Salomes, Tough Guy Levis, and Old Man Rosenthals. Today, we like to forget how thoroughly our musical heritage is entwined with minstrelsy. But from the turn-of-the-century to the First World War, coarse racial and ethnic caricature was America's favorite form of entertainment. And few performers were more popular than vaudeville's singing and spritzing wearers of "Jewface."

The Hebrew comedian had a distinctive shtick, and look. He had bulging eyes that darted above the ubiquitous beard

THAT'S  
YIDDISHIA LOVE  
NOVELTY SONG

Sung By  
WILLIE HOWARD of  
HOWARD AND HOWARD

Words  
and Music By  
JAMES BROCKMAN

M. WITMARK & SONS  
NEW YORK CHICAGO LONDON PARIS

and enormous hook nose. He wore oversized shoes, a tattered black overcoat, and a derby cap pulled tightly across his head so that his ears jutted out. The character he played was a hodgepodge of Jewish stereotypes old and new, both a crafty grasper and a bumbling immigrant greenhorn: Shylock lifted out of Venice and deposited in the bewildering polyglot scrum of the Lower East Side. He went by various names – Rosenstein, Levinsky, Cohen – worked in pawnshops, and was obsessed above all with money-making schemes. He was a buffoon, forever losing his shirt in pinochle games and his best girl to an Irishman, who would beat him up for good measure. Occasionally he'd leave New York and head west, determined to become a cowboy or Indian chief, an adventure that would invariably end with a pratfall into a cactus. There were Hebrew comedienne, too – less garishly clothed than their male counterparts, and not quite as outlandish in their antics, but just as popular.

On the one hand, Hebrew comedians were just that, comedians: joke tellers and monologists. The first comedy record to sell over a million copies was Joe Hayman's 1913 recording of "Cohen on the Telephone," one of dozens of Cohen routines recorded over the years. But songs were the centerpieces of the Hebrew comic's act. In the 1890s and the first few years of the new century these were mostly Jewish-themed send-ups of well-known pop tunes. (See Julian Rose's 1906 "Hebrew Vaudeville Parody on 'Then I'll be Satisfied

With Life.") But by 1910, Tin Pan Alley publishers were churning out hundreds of original numbers, a kind of Jewish analogue to blackface "coon" songs – "Yiddisha Feet," "Roll

Your Yiddisha Eyes for Me," "At the Yiddish Cabaret," "At the Yiddish Wedding Jubilee" – which were delivered by vaudevillians in thick dialect over brooding pseudo-Judaic melodies, and punctuated by frequent cries of "oy!"

Jewface contains some of the finest examples of this peculiar art. Several top stars dabbled in Hebrew comedy – Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, Belle Baker, Fanny Brice – but the records were made mostly by little-remembered specialists, and these long-lost voices are compelling. You can hear shades of everyone from Sid Caesar to Woody Allen in the wry records of Monroe Silver, and Rhoda Bernard is an extraordinary soprano boomer with a set of pipes to rival Tucker's. And if the songs themselves aren't exactly "Over the Rainbow," there's no denying the wit of "Pittsburgh, Pa.," the galloping catchiness of "I'm a Yiddish Cowboy," and the sheer exoticism of Ada Jones' manically warbled "Under the Matzos Tree," which takes the favorite Tin Pan Alley trope about spooning under stretching boughs into the realm of the surreal.

Not everything here is for the faint of heart. The modern listener may recoil at the Jewish John Philip Sousa of "When Mose with His Nose Leads the Band," who uses his gigantic Yiddishe schnozz as a conductor's baton; at the scheming shop owners in "My Friends, Morris and Max"; at the endless insinuations of Jewish dollishness and greed. The most common theme of the songs is courtship, but affairs of the heart and business affairs are frequently conflated, as in "That's Yiddisha Love": "First you find a lady that is smart in the head/Then you ask her pa how much you get when you wed;/If

she's honest and frank/And has money in the bank/Oy! Oy!  
that's Yiddisha love."

# I'M A YIDDISH COWBOY

"TOUGH GUY LEVI"



TED · S · BARRON  
MUSIC · PUBLISHER  
NEW · YORK  
5

BY  
LESLIE  
MOHR  
AND  
PIANTADOSI

These songs caused considerable alarm among Jews of a certain station. Editorialists in the establishment Jewish press called on song publishing houses and vaudeville impresarios to ban Jewish dialect material. In 1909, a leading Reform rabbi deemed Hebrew comedy "the cause of greater prejudice against the Jews as a class than all other causes combined," and later that year, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform movement's governing body, launched a nationwide campaign "to drive this from vile, outrageous and undignified creature from the boards."

But there was a catch: Hebrew comedy was largely a Jewish enterprise in the first place. This irony was noted in a 1913 editorial in Baltimore's *Jewish Comment* newspaper:

*We have taken but a mild interest in the campaign against the vaudeville stage Jew, not because he is not an objectionable personage in most instances, but because we thought that there was something insincere in the campaign; In the matter of the stage Jew, we find that in most cases that the actor is a Jew, his manager is a Jew, and he is in a circuit where Jews have the most say. And we may add that audiences are largely composed of Jews, too. The thing is Jewish from start to finish...and if Jews go, applaud and come back for more, what are you going to do about it?*

Why would a Jew embrace "Jewface" music? For one thing, the songs performed a neat little cultural jujitsu, smuggling bits of Yiddishkeit into the American mainstream. The Jewish tinge that you can detect in golden age popular standards may first

have slipped into American music in dialect ditties like "Cohen Owes Me 97 Dollars."

And of course, no one likes a good Jewish joke more than a Jew, and to an immigrant audience bent on assimilation, songs that sent up the struggles of greenhorns served a purpose beyond mere amusement. To mock the "Hebrew" was to cast off your Jewish parochialism, affirm your sophistication, cleanse yourself of the old world taint. If you got the joke of "I'm a Yiddish Cowboy," it's pretty certain you weren't him.

That audience would soon move away from the old immigrant enclaves, and onto entertainment befitting happily acculturated Jewish-Americans. By the late-1920s, Jewish themes had largely disappeared from popular song. The Jolson-style Jewish rafter-shouters who dominated vaudeville soon gave way to a new breed of All-American singing stars – Bing Crosby, Rudy Valle, Fred Astaire – whose dulcet crooning projected post-ethnic ease and reserve. Songwriters like Berlin stopped chronicling Abie Cohen's misadventures, concentrating almost exclusively on 32-bar variations on the theme "I love you."

But Jewish dialect pop was kept alive in the Catskills, on the cruise ship circuit, and in the heroically vulgar and exuberant records of clarinetist/bandleader Mickey Katz. And by the early 1960s, Jewish themes would resurface on Broadway, when a new generation of Jewish-Americans began to lust for, of all things, the pogrom-scourged Pale of Settlement. What was the Fiddler on the Roof score if not a collection of latter-day Jewish dialect tunes?

MARRY  
A YIDDISHER BOY

SONG

Words by  
A. SEYMOUR BROWN

Music by  
GEORGE BOTSFORD

5

JEROME H. REMICK & CO. NEW YORK DETROIT

The image shows a vintage sheet music cover for the song "Marry a Yiddisher Boy." The title is written in a large, stylized, white serif font at the top. Below the title, the word "SONG" is centered. The authors' names, "Words by A. SEYMOUR BROWN" and "Music by GEORGE BOTSFORD," are printed in a smaller, white serif font. The cover features a decorative border with a repeating floral or scrollwork pattern. In the center, there is a graphic of two stylized, leafy plants with small, square, yellow and brown blocks above them, possibly representing musical notes or a specific theme. At the bottom, the publisher's name "JEROME H. REMICK & CO. NEW YORK DETROIT" is printed, along with a small number "5" and a signature.

And at least one of these "Jewface" tunes has haunted American culture for decades. "When Mose With His Nose Leads the Band," that song about the Jewish Sousa, was composed in 1906 by a trio of Irish songwriters, Bert Fitzgibbon, Jack Drislane, and Theodore Morse. It was a minor vaudeville hit, and was recorded that same year by Collins & Harlan, one of the most popular and prolific singing duos of the early sound recording era.

At that time, eighteen-year-old Israel Baline was a singing waiter at the Pelham Café, a divey saloon in New York's Chinatown. A decade later, Baline had a new name, Irving Berlin, an exalted place among popular songwriters, and a habit of interpolating bits of half-remembered songs into his own numbers. This is what he did in 1917, when he sat down to write a patriotic tune, and plopped the exact melodic phrase that opens the "When Mose With His Nose" chorus into his new song. Listen to Collins & Harlan's weather-beaten 100-year-old recording, and it's unmistakable: the six notes that accompany the lyric "Abie then starts to play" are instantly recognizable as the opening strains of "God Bless America." It's an irony to relish, and not a bad metaphor for the alchemy of Jewish-American musical assimilation. And like the fifteen other garish, tuneful songs on this record, "When Mose With His Nose Leads the Band" passes a more important test: a full century after it was recorded, it still sounds like a hit.

Jody Rosen  
New York City, June 2006

## 1. PITTSBURGH, PA.

(Harry Ruby, Joe Burns, Murray Kissen)

**MONROE SILVER**

Recorded in New York City, January 28, 1920

Released June 1920

[Edison Blue Amberol 4004]

Silver, a Lower East Side native, was one of the most celebrated Jewish dialect comics, with a recording career that stretched from 1911 to 1943, when he cut his final piece, "Casey and Cohen in the Army." He was a prolific recorder of Cohen monologues, routines he claimed to have developed watching shopkeepers talk on the telephone back in the old neighborhood — almost certainly an apocryphal tale, since the famous "Cohen on the Telephone" skit was first recorded in England a year before Silver made his debut. Still, there's no doubting Silver's skill in putting a song across, or his keen ear for the cadences of Yinglish speech. In 1918, a Victor Records flack wrote of Silver: "The peculiar brand of humor so characteristic of the lower East Side of Broadway has come to have a definite place in the American world of entertainment. And Monroe Silver is a past-master in the art...His tones are the tones of the Bowery, and as he speaks one can see his dark eyes gleaming and imagine the expressive gestures so typical of this canny, humorous race of Orientals."

## 2. MY YIDDISHA MAMMY

(Alex Gerber, Jean Schwartz, Eddie Cantor)

**IRVING KAUFMAN**

Recorded in New York City, May 5, 1922

Released 1922

[Columbia A3625-A]

This sprightly parody of Jolson's signature number — the blackface oedipal ode "My Mammy" — was co-written and

# COHEN OWES ME NINETY SEVEN DOLLARS



introduced by a young Eddie Cantor. Here it's performed by Irving Kaufman (1890-1976), one of the great tenor singers of the 1920s, who recorded hundreds of sides under his own name and a variety of pseudonyms. The song's lyrics gives the Old Southland clichés of Jolson's tune a humorous twist: "I love my mammy/But she don't come from Alabammy/Her heart is filled with love and real sentiment/Her cabin door is in a Bronx tenement."

## 3. COHEN OWES ME 97 DOLLARS

(Irving Berlin)

**RHODA BERNARD**

Recorded in New York City, April 5, 1916

Released 1916

[Victor 18023-B]

There was no more prolific composer of Jewish dialect novelties than Irving Berlin, who produced a dozen such songs between 1909-1915, and as late as 1924 wrote an unpublished Jewish dialect lyric intended for Fanny Brice, "Yiddisha Eskimo" (featuring the priceless line "I'm one of God's frozen people"). Perhaps the most famous of Berlin's Jewish numbers was "Cohen," which has been recorded several times over the years, including a rousing 1999 reworking by pianist Uri Caine, a fixture of New York's downtown avant-jazz scene. The song was introduced by Belle Baker at the Palace Theatre in 1915, but is sung here by Rhoda Bernard, a remarkable, large-lunged vocalist about whom next to nothing is known. She cut at least two Italian dialect sides (including the only recording of Berlin's unpublished "Hey Wop"), but her specialty was Jewish material. In the same April 5, 1916 Victor session that produced the "Cohen" record, she did the tantalizingly titled "When Isadore Sang 'Il Trovatore,'" which, tragically, was never issued.

#### 4. MY FRIENDS, MORRIS AND MAX

(Bert Kalmar, Edgar Leslie, Harry Ruby)

**MAURICE BURKHART**

Recorded in New York City January 29, 1920

Released June 1920

[Edison Blue Amberol 4002]

A famous songwriting triumvirate – Tin Pan Alley luminaries Harry Ruby, Edgar Leslie, and Bert Kalmar – composed this droll 1918 character sketch about penny-pinching partners in the schmatta business. Sophie Tucker performed the song on the vaudeville stage, but this 1920 Edison cylinder was cut by Maurice Burkhart, a singer, vaudevillian, and songwriter who made a number of dialect records over the years, including the sole recordings of several of Irving Berlin's Jewish tunes.

#### 5. MARRY A YIDDISHER BOY

(A. Seymour Brown, George Botsford)

**PREMIER QUARTET**

Recorded in New York City, November 1911

Released 1912

[Edison Wax Amberol 949]

Rifle through old sheet music and you'll discover a surprising number of Jewish dialect tunes arranged for vocal quartet. The only one to be recorded was this lovelorn plaint of a "Yiddisher buttonhole finisher" facing that perennial melting pot peril: losing his girl to a goyishe lothario. The Premier Quartet (a.k.a. American Quartet), one of the top vocal groups of the period, is led here by the most celebrated of all acoustic era recording artists, Billy Murray (1877-1954), who breezes through his only recorded Hebrew turn with an audible twinkle in his eye.

As featured in SAM S. and LEE SHUBERT'S (inc.)  
Musical Production

THE GAY WHITE WAY

UNDER THE  
MATZOS TREE

A GHETTO LOVE SONG

SUNG BY  
ALEXANDER  
CARR

Words by  
ALEXANDER  
CARR

Music by  
FRED FISCHER

FRED FISCHER MUSIC PUB. ©  
NEW YORK  
PUBLISHED BY SCARF & SHAW

#### 6. מ'י א צווישן קוואל

(Leslie Mohr, Al Piantadosi)

**EDWARD MEEKER**

Recorded in New York City, July 1908

Released 1908

[Edison Gold Moulded Record 9984]

Two stock Hebrew comedy scenerios – the Jewish fish-out-of-water tale and the intermarriage fantasy – collide in this rollicking 1908 hit about "Tough Guy Levi," a Bronco-riding, cigarette-smoking Hebe on the Range. The singer is Edward Meeker (1874-1937), a sometime stage Jew who assured his immortality by bellowing the spoken introductions to thousands of Edison cylinders, as he does here. (He also was the first man to record "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" in 1906.)

#### 7. UNDER THE MATZOS TREE

(Alexander Carr, Fred Fisher)

**ADA JONES**

Recorded in New York City, October 19, 1907

Released 1908

[Edison Gold Moulded Record 9752]

Ada Jones (1873-1922) was a woman of a thousand voices, a vaudeville comedienne who became a full-time recording artist famous for her mastery of many dialects. A Victor Records promotional catalog boasted: "Whether Miss Jones' impersonation be that of a darky wench, a little German maiden, a 'fresh' saleslady, a cowboy girl, a country damsel, Mrs. Flanagan or an Irish Colleen, a Bowery tough girl, a newsboy or a grandmother, it is invariably a perfect one of its kind." She also recorded at least three Jewish sides, including this delightfully nutty song by lyricist Alexander Carr and the composer/song publishing mogul Fred Fisher.

8. **WHEN MOSE WITH HIS NOSE LEADS THE BAND**

(Bert Fitzgibbon, Jack Drislane, Theodore Morse)

**COLLINS & HARLAN**

Recorded January 25, 1906

Released 1906

[Victor 4626]

The novelty song that begat "God Bless America" has other things to recommend it, too: a brisk martial tempo, spirited two-part harmony vocals, and one of the most fanciful Jewish surnames ("Schwartzenboom") ever dreamed up. Arthur Collins (1864-1933) and Byron Harlan (1861-1936) sang comic duets for over twenty years, specializing in coon and ragtime songs; their 1916 "That Funny Jas Band from Dixieland" was the first record to make reference to jazz. "When Mose" was the duo's only Jewish number, and they sing it pretty straight, avoiding dialect almost entirely, except for the delightfully nonsensical exclamation "Oy, oy, oy, oy/Mazel tov!"

9. **NO HOT WATER WAY UP IN THE BRONX**

(Composer Unknown)

**MONROE SILVER**

Recorded in New York City 1924

Released 1924

[Cameo 527]

Recorded in 1924, and it shows: the scene has switched from the hardscrabble Lower East Side to that bastion of second-generation Jewish upward-mobility, the "Bronex."

# WHEN MOSE WITH HIS NOSE LEADS THE BAND

## MARCH SONG

WORDS BY

**BERT FITZGIBBON  
AND  
JACK DRISLANE**

MUSIC BY **THEODORE  
MORSE**



COMPOSERS OF  
**BLUE BELL**

KEEP A LITTLE COSEY CORNER

IN YOUR HEART FOR ME

JUST A LITTLE ROCKING CHAIR  
AND YOU

**Ed. Daviland**  
NEW ZEALAND EDITOR  
PUBLISHING COMPANY  
BROADWAY & 97<sup>th</sup> ST. NEW YORK

10. **BECKY IS BACK IN THE BALLET**

(Leo Edwards)

**FANNY BRICE**, 1922

Recorded in New York City July 13, 1922

Released 1922

[Victor 45323]

Fanny Brice (1891-1951) was an eighteen year-old fledgling vaudevillian who had never done a Hebrew turn when, in 1909, Irving Berlin persuaded her to sing his Jewish girl gone wild farce, "Sadie Salome, Go Home." A star was born. Brice became history's most famous Hebrew comedienne, with a repertoire of funny, affectionate Jewish lampoons: "Second Hand Rose," "I'm an Indian," "The Sheik of Avenue B," and this 1922 number about a dangerously klutzy ballerina, complete with virtuoso Jewish mother monologue.

11. **THAT'S YIDDISHA LOVE**

(James Brockman)

**EDWARD MEEKER**

Recorded in New York City, September 1910

Released 1911

[Edison Amberol 597]

12. **NAT'AN**

(James Kendis)

**RHODA BERNARD**

Recorded in New York City, April 5, 1916

Released 1916

[Victor 18023A]

13. **THE ORIGINAL COHENS**

(Composer Unknown)  
**ADA JONES & LEN SPENCER**

Recorded in New York City, October 19, 1905

Released 1906

[Edison Gold Moulded 9215]

This half-sung, half-spoken skit starring Ada Jones and her frequent duet partner Len Spencer (1867-1914) offers a taste of a vaudeville Hebrew comedy "two-act." The song is an adaptation on one of the earliest Jewface numbers, of 19th century vintage, "Solomon Levy." The sketch, set in the Cohen's Baxter Street pawnshop, features a pun the title of a huge blackface hit "All Coons Look Alike to Me," a preposterous bit involving a pants-shopping amputee, and as many rapid-fire jokes as any two minutes of *Airplane!*

14. **BECKY THE SPANISH DANCER**

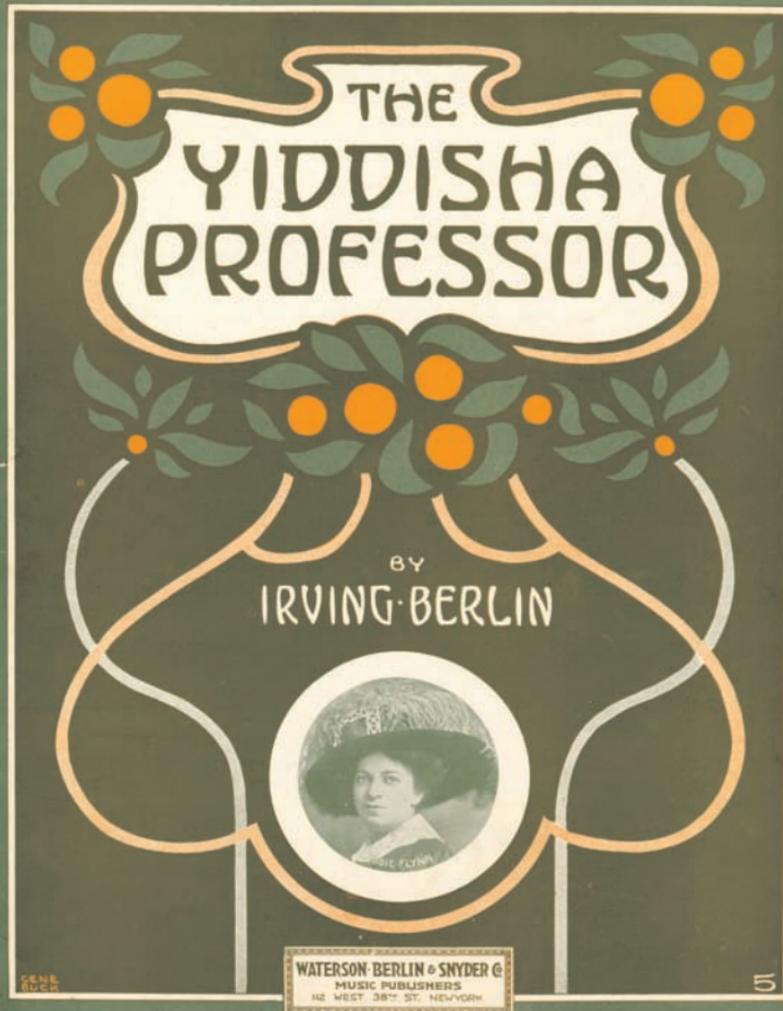
(Composer Unknown)  
**JULIAN ROSE**

Recorded in New York City, July 8, 1921

Released 1922

[Edison Diamond Disc 50952]

The Hebrew comedy career of Julian Rose (1869-1935) began inauspiciously, with a song-and-joke routine cobbled together for a show at the Philadelphia Turf Club. But the show went well, and Rose soon entered vaudeville, billing himself as "Our Hebrew Friend." By the early 1900s, according to a *New York Evening Post* obituary, he was a celebrity whose "matrimonial affairs were dully chronicled in the metropolitan press," and his comic skills were second to none. "He would pull his derby hat down over his ears, extend his hands in the attitude of a man about to swim the



Schuylkill River and reel off yards of Yiddish dialect." Those skills were intact some twenty years after his recording debut, on this irresistible Jewish-Spanish pastiche.

15. **THE YIDDISHA PROFESSOR**

(Irving Berlin)  
**MAURICE BURKHART**

Recorded in New York City, March 1913

Released 1913

[Edison Blue Amberol 1643]

16. HEBREW VAUDEVILLE PARODY ON

**"THEN I'D BE SATISFIED WITH LIFE"**

(Composer Unknown)  
**JULIAN ROSE**

Recorded in New York City, November 1905

Released 1906

[Edison Gold Moulded Record 9223]

All recordings digitally transferred from original cylinder and 78 rpm disc recordings at the University of California-Santa Barbara Sound Archives, Department of Special Collections, Donald C. Davidson Library, Santa Barbara, California. Sheet music cover reproductions courtesy of The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music, The Johns Hopkins University and Crouch Library for the Arts, Baylor University. Design by: Jimmy Hole

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