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#### Article abstract

The injunction to remember – in Hebrew, *Zakhor* – is perhaps the most powerful command in the Old Testament, and memory of the past has therefore always been a central component of Jewish experience. Alfred Fisher's character and music suggest both erudition and practicality as crucial components of the Jewish heritage that has formed an increasingly central part of his life and music during the past decade. In the song cycle *Zakhor: Remember*, poetic and musical cross-referencing of memories is the framework for a fascinating dialectic that informs the structure and the language of the cycle. In this article, the author studies the different levels of unity in the cycle and discusses its tonal structure, which can be characterized as post-Schoenbergian chromaticism, in which much of the harmonic language is controlled by a limited number of pitch-class sets. Remembrance and reflection are here interwoven with Fisher's emotional responses into the intellectual framework of a profound work of art.

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## THIN PARTITIONS: REMEMBRANCE AND REFLECTION IN ALFRED FISHER'S *ZAKHOR*: *REMEMBER*\*

*Christopher Lewis*

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Perhaps the most powerful recurrent command in the Old Testament is the injunction to remember – in Hebrew, *Zakhor*. Almost two hundred times, the people of Israel are enjoined to “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee” (Deut. 32:7). This historical imperative is delivered as a religious commandment to an entire people,<sup>1</sup> and memory of the past has therefore always been a central component of Jewish experience, and the historian has *not* been the primary custodian of things remembered. As individuals, we derive from memory our sense of time, of proportion, of our very selves, for as is made clear over and over in Western art, we live not in the impossibly ephemeral present but in our memories of the immediate and distant past. For many of us, individual memory is infinitely enriched by collective memories. I do not mean by this term a kind of genetic coding, nor do I use it only as a metaphor for a sense of group identity; rather, it is a social reality – in the case of Jews, fueled by Biblical injunction and is deliberately sustained and transmitted by the conscious efforts and institutions of the group.<sup>2</sup>

The act of remembering is one of the most precious, and most dangerous, of human indulgences. Fond remembrances help us cope with loss. Accurate remembrance, however, requires the ability to face truth, which is often unpleasant, and as individuals, or as members of a group, we constantly edit our remembrances of ourselves, so we may be left with a suitably respectable past. As the international politics of the last few decades have so clearly demonstrated, governments repress and alter memory, hoping that by doing so they can alter history. But whether the revisionism is individual or societal, history is nonetheless not what we want to have been, but what was. In a cosmology in which

\* After the present article was accepted for publication, the author died tragically in an automobile accident. Richard S. Parks kindly agreed to review the manuscript and suggested minor editorial adjustments in the text and the examples. (*ed.*)

1 Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 9.

2 Yerushalmi, *Jewish History*, xv.

morality, religion, and culture are one with history, in which one sees oneself as the most recent representative of a human context extending back almost six thousand years, remembering what happened, and why, is indeed a sacred duty.

Alfred Fisher's personal memories extend back almost to 1942, when he was born in Boston. The foundation of his education was laid in New England, first in the schools of Boston, and then at Colby College in Maine. His higher degrees are from Boston University and Michigan State, and his university education includes successive majors in music history, piano performance, and composition. In the meantime, he formed at a very young age a powerful and lasting interest in Canada, particularly in the Canadian wilderness, and in 1969 he seized the opportunity to move north. He has been Canadian ever since, teaching first in London, Ontario and then in Wolfville, Nova Scotia before moving to Edmonton in 1978, after a year in the wilds of northern Saskatchewan. It is hard to imagine a more pronounced opposition of aggressively non-Jewish life-styles than those of the almost cloistered halls of Colby College – the atmosphere that Tom Lehrer characterized as “ivy-covered professors in ivy-covered halls” – and the Canadian True North. Yet, both highly civilized erudition and gritty, down-to-earth humanity are part of Fisher's character and his music – and both erudition and practicality are crucial components of the Jewish heritage that has been for the last decade or so an increasingly central part of his life and of his music.

Fisher passionately believes in the relevance of the historical context of art, and he has suggested that art grows from a double seed of creativity and experience – experience held in the memory. To be of value, however, to avoid an art-industrial cultural debasement, experience itself must be original, genuine, and understood.

When authentic experience is expelled and the cultural vault emptied, what then can be the fate of memory? Divested of experience, what can degraded memory hold? Can memory as a functional component of creativity and intellection continue to be precious, its power heuristic? Without memory, “history” and “tradition” become off-the-shelf product-signs, their referents, identity – available at any price, chosen from the vast array and produced by an industry that can only be described as diabolically “user-friendly.”<sup>3</sup>

3 Alfred Fisher, “Coming into Focus: Scanning Horizons Past and Present,” a paper presented at the conference “*Resonant Intervals: Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Music*” (Calgary, Alberta, 9 May 1991), 3–4.

Perhaps it is in the very nature of worthwhile art, as of worthwhile memories, not to be user-friendly to the mass market. Fisher acknowledges an intellectual debt to Schoenberg; like Schoenberg, he is “a composer and an intellectual for whom location within a historical framework is essential,” like Schoenberg, he sees theory – system and method – as “tools of liberation, and history as a medium of personal empowerment,” like Schoenberg, he is willing to run the risks attendant upon the avoidance of easy solutions to the challenge presented by the need to integrate the present and the past.

If there has been reasoning at all in any of the distinct neighborhoods within the shapeless *mélange* of the “postmodern,” it has been informed by theories of marketing and distribution, and less so by the bending of intellectual steel that so preoccupied composers at mid-century. But composers do not understand themselves now any more than they have in the past as the instruments of history ... morally obliged to take up its challenges and reconcile its contradictions. Making things “right” is apparently not their avocation. They are more than capable of self-righteousness, but not in the cause of history. Neither has there been a failure of rational empiricism in music. Its energy surpasses its flaws. It continues – often brilliantly in music theory, less often brilliantly in composition.<sup>4</sup>

David Burge says of Fisher’s *Six Fantasy Pieces for Piano* that they “rank among the strongest piano works of the last two decades,” and “brilliantly express the perceptions of a passionate, serious, introspective human being.”<sup>5</sup> The song cycle *Zakhor: Remember*, composed in 1983 on a commission by the Canadian Music Centre in Calgary, is, no less than the *Fantasy Pieces*, a deeply-felt testament founded on uncompromising musical and intellectual convictions. Fisher’s music often directly remembers his cultural heritage. The artistic performance of the duty to remember is effected not only by invocation of images of the Psalms, or of the Holocaust, or of Yiddish folklore, but also by the composition of music whose intellectual framework derives from the great tradition of Jewish thought. Both *Zakhor* and the clarinet quintet *Diary of a War Artist* (commissioned by the CBC and broadcast on the national network 11 November 1990) are typical of his ability to blend materials from the past with those of the present to create music of a marvellously expressive and powerful beauty. In Fisher’s music, eclecticism does not become a style as it does, for example, in Rzewski’s *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*,<sup>6</sup> nor are the

4 Fisher, “Coming into Focus,” 6, 18.

5 David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 255.

6 Burge, 231.

older materials a mask concealing failure either to understand or to be interested in contemporary materials. Too often, the “new tonality” of the eighties is evidence of a lost faith and a lost voice – with Puccini pastiches replacing originality and creativity – but in *Zakhor*, older styles are a symbol of memory, and the poetic and musical cross-referencing of personal and collective memories is the framework for a fascinating dialectic that informs the structure and the language of the cycle. In a more metaphorical sense, that dialectic is the source of the music’s delicate balance between lyrical inspiration and intellectual composition.

The texts for the six songs of *Zakhor* are drawn from sources spanning three thousand years – the Psalms, the Talmud, Yiddish folklore, and the pseudonymous poets A. I. Jacob and Henry Edwards. (The full texts are printed at the end of this essay.) “Chosen Twice” is derived from a famous photograph showing the arrest of a small boy in the Warsaw ghetto. “The Gazelle” ironically answers that horror with an allegory in which the best-loved of God’s creatures is chosen because it “loves God’s peace.” The third song is a setting of Psalm 130, the “De Profundis;” the psalmist’s voice cries out from the depths, and then gives the provisional answer to its own supplication: Wait and hope in the Lord. “The Eternal Question,” a reworking of an old Yiddish folksong,<sup>7</sup> gives a tongue-in-cheek secular equivalent of the Psalm’s avoided resolution. “Roxbury Fountains” evokes the character of the New World on an August afternoon in the Boston of Fisher’s childhood, and then the final song explicitly remembers the textual images of the first five pieces: the old men, the noise and children, the mountain, and the burning bush.

These poems naturally group themselves into three pairs (figure 1). Each pair ironically contrasts a “serious” with a “naive” text, a distant with a recent memory, and an intellectual abstraction with a practical reality. At one level, the texts form a chiasmic design, for each of the two outer pairs deals with experience while the central pair offers reflective commentary. At another level, the design is progressive, for the first pair deals with diabolical and divine “selection,” the second with sacred and secular questions, and the third with answers given by contemporary and ancient experience. An overall sense of unity is woven into the tripartite division by the interlocked time-senses of the various songs. The three “serious” songs, “Chosen Twice,” “De Profundis,” and “Zakhor,” move back from living memory, through Biblical times to the beginning of the Law; the three naive songs “The Gazelle,” “The Eternal Riddle,” and “Roxbury Fountains,” move the other way. Moreover, the final song, “Zakhor,” draws together

7 The folksong is also the source of a simple setting by Ravel, “L’énigme éternelle,” in *Deux mélodies hébraïques* (1914).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Chosen Twice	The Gazelle	De Profundis	The Eternal Riddle	Roxbury Fountains	Zakhor
Serious	Naive	Serious	Naive	Naive	Serious
Recent	Distant	Distant	Recent	Recent	Distant
Reality	Abstraction	Abstraction	Reality	Reality	Abstraction
Experience--The selection		Commentary--The question		Experience--By what we live	
Talmudic times		European diaspora		Living memory	
Living memory		Biblical times		The beginning of the Law	
Post-Schönbergian chromaticism	Tonal melodic line	Post-Schönbergian chromaticism	Tonal parody	Tonal parody	Post-Schönbergian chromaticism

**Figure 1:** Textual structure of *Zakhor: Remember*.

the whole historical span by evoking remembrances of “Roxbury Fountains” and the middle pair on its way back to the beginning. Thus, Yeats’s “widening gyre” is folded back upon itself to form a chronological double spiral, which serves as a metaphor for eternal continuity. Past becomes future, and future, past – for one of the functions of memory is to enable the two to co-exist.

The music of *Zakhor: Remember* is congruent with the textual structure and content at many levels. As figure 1 indicates, there is a broad stylistic differentiation between the “serious” and the “naive” songs. The “serious” songs are all founded solidly in Fisher’s “contemporary” style, instantly recognizable to listeners familiar with his music. This style can perhaps best be characterized as a post-Schoenbergian chromaticism, much of the harmonic language of which is controlled by a limited number of characteristic pitchclass sets; but, grafted onto, or rather, providing the underpinnings for the atonal vocabulary, is a sense of tonal hierarchy – however tenuous it may be at times – and of delineation of the structure by recurring references to specific pitches and pitch-classes. On the other hand, the three “naive” songs evoke musical memories through conscious parody of tonal styles. The simple G-minor melody of “The Eternal Riddle” is harmonized by a dominant-based ostinato over a dominant pedal. After a highly chromatic introduction, “Roxbury Fountains” explodes into a fast romp through a 1940s swing tune. “The Gazelle” presents a more complex face. Fisher’s composition drafts reveal that he apparently began sketching the piece in E major, but abandoned that idea for the present setting, with a chromatic, leaping,

Rab-bi Le - vi \_\_\_\_\_ in the name of Si-me-on Ben La - kish \_\_\_\_\_ said: The ga-  
zelle \_\_\_\_\_ is the a - ni - mal \_\_\_\_\_ most be- loved by God

**Example 1:** “The Gazelle,” vocal line, mm. 22–36.

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gazelle-like accompaniment to a melody loosely based in E-major (example 1). The explanation for this compromise is, I think, both simple and logical: the musical styles of “Roxbury Fountains” and “The Eternal Riddle” are instantly recognized as contemporary with, and evocative of, the texts, but no similar musical parallel for the Talmudic text of “The Gazelle” could possibly have been worked into the cycle.

In *Zakhor*, there is another kind of musical memory, which actually works as a unifying device, counteracting – without neutralizing or trivializing – the symbolic diversity of styles. By this I mean the recurrence of certain key gestures and motives for the explicit purpose of underscoring subtle textual connections and associations among the songs. In particular, this technique of assisting our textual memory informs the last song of the cycle, and gives it the character not of a recapitulation, but rather of a summarizing, reconciling conclusion.

The poem of “Zakhor” falls into three sections; each begins with the invocation “Adoshem” in normal voice, and continues with a “remembrance” in falsetto. The whole is preceded by a brief piano introduction, and concludes with a final invocation, “Adoshem ... remember ...” in normal voice.

The piano introduction comprises five arpeggio gestures that recall the opening of “Chosen Twice,” and the resemblance is more than casual. Although the arpeggios of “Zakhor” expose five different pitch-class sets (identified as sets A, B, C, D, and E on example 2), all are supersets of the opening pentachord. In consequence, as figure 2 shows, all five also hold in common the trichords (0,1,4), (0,1,5), and (0,4,8). Not only are these same trichords also subsets of the first heptachord of “Chosen Twice,” but the entire opening pentachord (0.1,3,6,9) of that song is linked by inclusion to set B of “Zakhor.” Now, abstract trichordal relationships are rarely exciting, especially when they are buried in 6-, 7-, and 8-note supersets. But in this case, the sets (0,1,4), (0,1,5), and (0,4,8) are the basic motivic building blocks for all the songs in the cycle, and they literally saturate

**"Zakhor" mm. 1-5**

**"Chosen Twice" mm. 1-2**

**Example 2:** Sets in "Zakhor," mm. 1–5 and "Chosen Twice," mm. 1–2.  
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Set-type	Subset (0,4,8)	Subset (0,1,4)	Subset (0,1,5)	Subset 0,1,4,8
Set A: (0,1,2,3,4,8) [6-Z40]	X	X	X	X
Set B: (0,1,2,4,6,7,8,10) [8-25]	X	X	X	X
Set C: (0,1,2,3,6,7,8) [7-7]		X	X	
Set D: (0,1,3,4,5,6,8,9) [8-17]	X	X	X	X
Set E: (0,1,2,4,5,6,8,9) [8-19]	X	X	X	X
Set Z: (0,1,2,3,4,8) [5-13]	X	X	X	X

"Chosen Twice" pentachord (0,1,3,6,9) is a subset of Set B, above.

**Figure 2:** Pricipal sets in "Zakhor," mm. 1–12.



The musical score for "Zakhor" (mm. 6-12) is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 6-8) shows the vocal line with the lyrics "A - do - shem". The piano accompaniment features complex arpeggiated patterns. The second system (mm. 10-12) includes a "silento" marking for the piano and the vocal line with the lyrics "A - do - should you re - mem - ber ?". The bass line is also shown. Various trichords and sets are circled and labeled with numbers like (0,1,4), (0,4,8), and (0,1,5). The score includes annotations such as "[see next measure for sets]", "(0,1,4) twice", "Set E", and "Set C".

**Example 3:** Sets in "Zakhor," mm. 6–12.

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"Zakhor" itself. Example 3, which should be read as a continuation of example 2, shows the most important of these very basic set relationships, although for the sake of clarity, the many occurrences of trichord (0,1,5) have not been indicated.

The opening arpeggios (shown only on example 2) are arrayed so that a quasi-sequential series of (0,1,4)s clearly emerges in mm. 1,2, and 3. The interval pattern of each trichord [+4, -1 (measured in semi-tones)] precisely anticipates that of the voice's entry with "Adoshem" in m. 7; this pattern will be referred to hereafter as the "Adoshem" motive. After the arpeggiated introduction, both melodic and harmonic events are saturated with overlapped statements of (0,1,4). Furthermore, since the introduction established the practice of linking this set with the augmented triad, (0,4,8) (as in m. 1), we may regard the two trichords as subsets of the tetrachord (0,1,4,8) – which is itself a subset of each of sets A, B, and D. The linking of sets (0,1,4) and (0,4,8) culminates in mm. 10 and 11 in harmonic (the chord in m. 10) and melodic (the vocal line of mm. 10

(a) "Psalm 130," mm. 11–12 and 17–23.

(b) "Psalm 130," mm. 43-44.

(c) "The Eternal Riddle," mm. 9-12.

(d) "Roxbury Fountains," mm. 1-4.

**Example 4: The "Adoshem" Motive.**

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and 11) utterances that link statements of (0,1,4) with set (0,4,8). Fisher's concept of set identity and set relations is very flexible indeed. He is little interested in making abstract connections of doubtful aural integrity by means of mechanical systematic manipulations. Large sets in specific registral dispositions often suggest shapes that can be imitated and varied at the cost of losing abstract set identity (although some inclusion relations may remain). That is the process by which mm. 1–5 are developed, and by which they are related to "Chosen Twice." Contrarily, certain sets are regarded as basic points of reference; larger sets are formed as accretions of smaller ones and they appear like

Song:	"Zakhor"	"Chosen Twice"	"Gazelle"	"Psalm"	"Eternal Riddle"	"Roxbury"
Adoshem, Adoshem, do you remember? The old men, the noise Noise and children?	"Little lad"	Rabbi Levi et al.		"Fregt di velt"		"Rip and yell"
Adoshem, do you remember? that language, that music its melancholy			Language of Psalm	Traditional tune		
Adoshem, You remember the glow in the late summer sky, in the heart, In the heart of your priests, In the mountain, in the bush Adoshem ... remember ...	Holocaust ovens					Summer sun
		Rabbi Levi et al.	The Psalmist	Yiddish tradition		
	Remember ...	Remember ...	Remember ...	Remember ...	Remember ...	Remember ...

Figure 3: "Zakhor": Textual remembrances.

(a) "Zakhor," mm. 16-21.

(b) "The Gazelle," mm. 22-26.

Example 5: Back-references from "Zakhor," part 1.


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clusters of crystals forming a large, variegated shape, whose identity derives as much from the character of the components as from that of the whole. That is the process which forms the basis for the harmonic and melodic structures of mm. 6–12. Sometimes the two techniques are combined with more traditional set relationships, as in mm. 8–12, where concatenations of the three fundamental

trichords (especially (0,1,4) and (0,1,5) give rise to recurrences of the large sets E and C from example 2. In any event, here, as elsewhere in Fisher's music, aural musical relationships are both the starting point and the goal of the compositional process – technique is a tool rather than a goal.

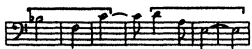
As we have observed, the opening arpeggios of the song adumbrate the emergence of the “Adoshem” motive in the voice in m. . But the invocation

(c) "The Gazelle," mm. 49-52.



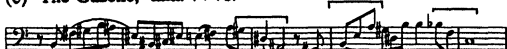
And when she fears the beasts, the beasts of the

(d) "The Gazelle," mm. 57-62.




Cour... age... fear... age... and strength...

(e) "The Gazelle," mm. 74-78.



And why \_\_\_\_\_ does God so love the ga-zelle? so love \_\_\_\_\_ so love the ga-zelle?


(f) "The Gazelle," mm. 40-42.



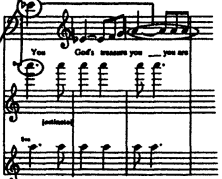
and God heals her with herbs  
to Sh

to 5g

(g) "Chosen Twice," m. 1.



(h) "Chosen Twice," mm. 20-22.



You God's treasure you... you are  
[instrumental]

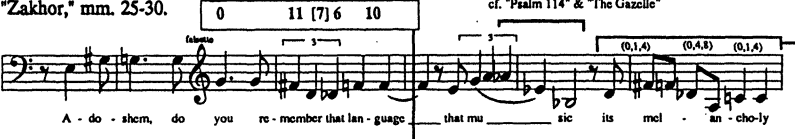
“Adoshem” is a call to remembrance, and attentive listeners will find the motive itself already familiar from the first five songs. Example 4 shows some of the prominent earlier motivic statements of (0,1,4). Although there are buried references to it in the first two songs of the cycle, the motive begins to emerge clearly only in the third song, when God’s presence is explicit in the scriptural text. As example 4a shows, the piano introduction of “Psalm 130” clearly foreshadows the multiple occurrences of (0,1,4) – here, as elsewhere, linked with set (0,4,8) – in mm. 21ff. of the opening vocal phrase. Example 4b quotes two particularly pregnant moments from the second half of “Psalm 130,” developed from the music of example 4a. This version of the motive, with the characteristic upper neighbour and falling third, then becomes the principal motive of “The Eternal Riddle,” the Psalm’s secular counterpart (see example 4c). The motive from the Psalm is intact in the accompaniment, and inverted in the vocal line. Thus, while the text of “The Eternal Riddle” avoids giving an answer, the music does not – and when the motive fully emerges in the final song with the word

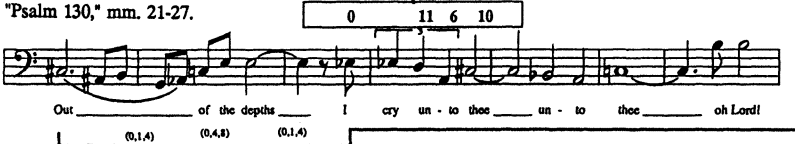
“Adoshem” – the name of the unnameable God – that unvoiced answer can be remembered.

More subtle, presumably because God’s presence is less obvious on the streets of Boston than in the shtetis of the Old World, is the opening of “Roxbury Fountains” (see example 4d). Nonetheless, set (0,1,4) plays a crucial harmonic role that is all the more obvious if we compare m. 4 of this song with the accompaniment to the repetition of “Adoshem” in m. 10 of “Zakhor” – both chords comprise set 6-Z19 (cf. ex. 3), which may be regarded as in union of forms of trichords (0,1,4) and (0,1,15). The whole of the introduction of “Roxbury Fountains” devolves from this material, and is thus harmonically linked to the last song.

Part I of “Zakhor” invokes textual images that very subtly recall four of the earlier pieces (see figure 3). As we recall the “old men,” the psalmist and the Talmudic scholars of “The Gazelle,” the accompaniment drops away to expose the melody (see example 5a, m. 17). The chains of *perfect* fourths (under the brackets) are otherwise important motives only in “The Gazelle,” where they are the single most prominent component of the motivic structure of the vocal line. They occur first, both melodically and harmonically, with names of the two Rabbinical scholars, Rabbi Levi and Simeon Ben Lakish (at the first invocation, even with identical pitch-classes). To make clear the symbolic identity of the gazelle with the scholars and thus with all the people of Israel, every succeeding reference to the gazelle or to her virtues is set to conjunct perfect fourths (see examples 5b–f). The musical back-references from the old men of “Zakhor” thus subtly tie together the time-span of the cycle, forcing us to remember back to God’s covenant with Israel (the divine “selection”) in a powerful response to Deuteronomy’s injunction to “consider the years of many generations, ask thy elders and they will tell thee.”

The text of “Zakhor” also refers to children, and the music therefore recalls the child of “Chosen Twice” (examples 5a, 5g, and 5h). First, both the arpeggiated gesture and the first three left-hand notes from m. 18 of “Zakhor” bring to mind the very opening of the first song. The augmented triad, whose influence we have already noted in the discussion of the opening measures of the last song, is a crucial foreground and background sonority throughout “Chosen Twice.” The triad serves both musically and textually as a counterfoil to the “Adoshem” motive, and when it is overlapped with (0,1,4) immediately before the word “children” in “Zakhor,” its referential power is undeniable. In addition, the framing interval of the passage (the tritone E-flat/A), the pitch-class A<sup>4</sup> sung falsetto, and the repeated single note in the piano all directly link the children in “Zakhor” with the words “You, God’s treasure, you are chosen twice” from the

(a) "Zakhor," mm. 25-30. 

(b) "Psalm 130," mm. 21-27. 

**Example 6:** Back-references from "Zakhor," part 2.

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first song. The ironic juxtaposition of the old men and the fatally chosen child is itself a telling remembrance of the children who were not allowed to become old men.

Part II of "Zakhor" remembers language, music, and melancholy: that is, it remembers "Psalm 130." The line "Do you remember that language?" is set to virtually the same melody as the words "I cry unto thee" from the Psalm (example 6). In addition, the words "its melancholy" are sung to a reworking of the very first phrase of the Psalm, "Out of the depths." Not incidentally, this figure also refers back to the first "Adoshem, remember" in m. 10 of "Zakhor," with the characteristic motivic shape (+4, -1). In the Old Testament the command to remember is reciprocal: the Israelites are commanded to remember their God, and the Lord is constantly enjoined not to forget his people.

The final section of "Zakhor" draws the time spans of the cycle together, as it masses from living memory back through the rabbinical pats i archs to the giving of the law. The glow of the summer sky evokes images as disparate as the summer sun of "Roxbury Fountains" and the ovens lurking in the background of "Chosen Twice" while gently foreshadowing the burning bush of the closing lines. The reference to the priests and the giving of the law on the mountain forges links to the rabbinical worlds of "The Gazelle" "Psalm 130," and "The Eternal Question." Always permeated by the Adoshem motive symbolic of the one certain continuity through and beyond these times, the vocal line to which these references are set also blends in the crucial D-F#-B<sub>b</sub> augmented triad from "Chosen Twice," and the consecutive fourths of the second and third songs (example 7). The last phrase of "Zakhor" then, by means of the final melodic

## (a) "Zakhor," mm. 31-44.

A - - do - - shem - - You re - mem - ber the glow - - in the late sum - mer sky in the heart - - In the heart of your priests - - in the moun - tain - - in the bush - - A - - do - - shem - - re - mem - - ber - -

## (b) "Chosen Twice," mm. 9-11.

Their lips curl con - tempt - -

## (c) Psalm 130, mm. 24-27.

I cry un - to thee - - un - to thee - - oh Lord!

**Example 7:** Back-references from "Zakhor," part 3.

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interval, a rising major seventh, links the "Adoshern" motive with "Chosen Twice" and "Psalm 130." It must be emphasized that only three times in the entire cycle is the singer given a rising major seventh – and each time, the interval is powerfully and dramatically exposed. In "Chosen Twice," the seventh in mm. 9–10 sets the word "contempt," and articulates the arrival on a long-sustained G<sup>3</sup> to mark the cadence of the first vocal phrase of the song. In m. 27 of "Psalm 130" the rising seventh also ends the first vocal phrase of the song, setting the psalmist's heartfelt cry to the Lord. The linking of these three sevenths in our

memory in the dying moments of “Zakhor,” gives a response – perhaps the only possible response – to the murderous contempt of the ghetto selection: a promise that those who remember can hope for redemption.

The motivic manipulations in *Zakhor: Remember* are far more than simply a convoluted word-painting. The texts of the cycle are heavily freighted with meanings, many of which begin to become apparent only when ironic juxtapositions are created in the listener’s mind by the musical cross-references. Equally, the tonal parodies of the naive songs are not mere game-playing, nor are they the resort of a composer who has no confidence in his own language or in the language of his century. Rather, they too throw light on the meanings of the texts and on the structure of the cycle. Even more important, the parodies stimulate our historical musical memories, and demand that we re-evaluate not only traditional styles, but also the many languages that have succeeded them. To put it a slightly different way: in *Zakhor: Remember*, the styles themselves are metonyms representing, even for the serious, sophisticated listener, those characteristics which have been popularly attributed to them – the spiritual appeal of tonality and the intellectual coldness of “modern” music. Ironically, the reconciliation of diverse styles in a single piece is a symbolic demonstration that neither intellect nor emotion is the exclusive domain of any one of them. As Schoenberg said, quoting Balzac, “the heart must be within the domain of the head.”<sup>8</sup>

*Zakhor: Remember* carries appeals to the head and the heart on many levels: as much in the direct meanings of the poems as in the symbolism of the musical structure, as much in the ironic linking of texts with motivic and gestural cross-references as in the simple beauty of the musical expression. The cycle is a living embodiment of a couplet from Pope’s *Essay on Man* which could serve as its epigraph:

Remembrance and Reflection, how allied;  
What thin partitions sense from thought divide.

In remembering and reflecting, in weaving his emotional responses into the intellectual framework of a profound work of art, Alfred Fisher provides glorious windows through the thin partitions separating past and present, reason and reflection, mind and heart.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, “Heart and Brain in Music,” in *Style and Idea* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1946), 53.



Texts for the songs of *Zakhor: Remember*Chosen Twice [A. I. Jacob]

Little lad  
oh why so sad

The leer  
their lips curl contempt

Glacial-  
mit empfindung

You  
God's treasure  
you are chosen twice

Little lad  
oh why so sad

The Gazelle [Talmud]

Rabbi Levi, in the name of Simeon ben Lakish, said:

The gazelle is the animal most beloved by God  
She bears her fawn and God heals her with herbs.  
She is thirsty and God leads her to water.  
And when she fears the beasts of the night,  
God grants her courage and strength.

And why does God so love the gazelle?

Because she loves God's peace  
The peace of God's creatures.

Psalms 130 [Hebrew Scripture]

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, oh Lord!

Lord, hear my voice,  
Let thine ears hearken to the voice of my supplication  
If thou Lord should mark iniquities,  
Oh Lord who shall stand?  
But there is forgiveness in thee that thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the Lord,  
My soul doth wait and in his word do I hope.  
My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning,  
I say more than they that watch for the morning.

Let Israel hope in the Lord,  
For with the Lord there is mercy,  
and with him there is plenteous redemption,  
And he shall redeem Israel for all of her iniquities.

The Eternal Riddle [Traditional Yiddish]

Fregt di veit an alte Kashe:  
Tradl tradiridrom.  
Fregt di veit an alte Kashe:  
Tradl, tradiridrom.

Entert men, tradiridreylom, tradl!  
Tradiridrom. Un azmen vil,  
Kon men doch zog'n: tradl!  
Blaybt doch vayer di alte kashe:  
Tradl, tradiridrom.

Roxbury Fountains (after Charles Ives)  
[Henry Edwards]

Hot air  
Rubber air beating on my back  
Broken glass  
Forgotten trash gleaming in the sun  
Searing soles and burning streets,  
And when is it gonna rain?

Hey man, why don't ya  
Pull that plug,  
Why don't ya slip the sun,  
Cool your buns,  
Rip and yell,  
Raise some hell!

Here it comes, a mighty wall of wet  
Splashing the pavement cool--  
Goodbye glass,  
Forgotten trash,  
Burning back!  
I'm feeling alive  
I'm not ta jive!

Zakhor [A. I. Jacob]

Adoshem--do you remember?  
the old men  
the noise  
noise and children--  
that music  
its melancholy

Adoshem--do you remember?  
the glow in the late summer sky  
in the heart of your priests ?  
in the mountain?  
in the bush?  
Adoshem . . .  
remember . . .

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**Abstract**

The injunction to remember – in Hebrew, *Zakhor* – is perhaps the most powerful command in the Old Testament, and memory of the past has therefore always been a central component of Jewish experience. Alfred Fisher's character and music suggest both erudition and practicality as crucial components of the Jewish heritage that has formed an increasingly central part of his life and music during the past decade. In the song cycle *Zakhor: Remember*, poetic and musical cross-referencing of memories is the framework for a fascinating dialectic that informs the structure and the language of the cycle. In this article, the author studies the different levels of unity in the cycle and discusses its tonal structure, which can be characterized as post-Schoenbergian chromaticism, in which much of the harmonic language is controlled by a limited number of pitch-class sets. Remembrance and reflection are here interwoven with Fisher's emotional responses into the intellectual framework of a profound work of art.