

CHASSIDIC WEDDING

RUDY TEPEL AND HIS ORCHESTRA PLAY DANCE MELODIES OF VIZHNITZ • LUBAVITCH • MODZITZ • SATMAR • SKULEN • MEA SHEARIM

PRODUCED BY B.-H. STAMBLER

SHPILT, KLEZMORIM!

Shpilt, klezmerim! This is the command that opens the wedding festivities, and, indeed, who can imagine a wedding without the musicians? In the old days in Europe the *klezmerim* (music-makers, a corruption of the Hebrew *kle-zemer*, musical instruments) were usually a sorry group of amateurs, who worked at other jobs (if they were lucky), and made merry at the occasional weddings and social affairs that frequently involved the whole village. Generally the instruments used were violin, bass fiddle, cymbals, and sometimes drums. Life in the United States has made a tremendous change; today's *klezmer* is a successful, well-trained musician who devotes his full time to weddings; these, in turn, have become elaborately catered affairs. The instrumentation now favors the saxophone, trumpet and clarinet, with drums, piano and accordion all adding to the full sound.

On this disc is presented a program of twenty of the most popular wedding songs of the ultra-orthodox Chassidim, arranged according to their wedding procedures. They are superbly played by the dynamic Rudy Tepel and his orchestra, one of today's best-known wedding bands.

CHASSIDIC WEDDINGS

What occasion in Jewish life is more joyous than a wedding? On this happy day the young couple carry out a major Biblical commandment and a primary obligation of all mankind, "Be fruitful and multiply." Marriage is regarded as a holy act in itself, since it results in the creation of life. According to one *Midrash*, all marriages are ordained in Heaven, for even forty days before one is created the name of his destined mate (*tzivuk*) is proclaimed on high.

Chassidim strive to maintain all the ways of the old country in their wedding customs. In New York alone today there are several hundred such weddings a year. At these functions one sees many bearded men, some of whom still wear the high white socks, knee breeches, and fur-trimmed *shtrayml* (hat) that were the customary holiday garb of the European Chassid.

A TIME TO MARRY

Not every day will do for a wedding. The Sabbath and all holidays and fast days are, of course, automatically excluded. The favorite day among Chassidim is either Tuesday (for on that day of creation G-d twice said, "It is good.") or *Rosh Khodosh* or any other weekday in the first part of the Jewish month. Saturday evenings and Sundays are not usually chosen. Weddings may not be held at all during three proscribed periods: the seven weeks between Passover and *Shovuos* (except for *Lag B'Omer*, *Rosh Khodosh*, and the last three days of the period), the Three Weeks preceding *Tisho B'Ov*, and the Ten Days of Penitence between *Rosh Hashonoh* and *Yom Kippur*.

KING AND QUEEN

On their wedding day a Chassidic groom and his bride are regarded as a king and queen. All are obligated to assist in their rejoicing, to take some active part in making them happy. So important is the joy of a wedding that no other festivity is permitted to encroach upon it; hence there are no double weddings, for example. The jubilation begins in the synagogue on the Sabbath before the wedding, when the groom is called up to the Torah (*oyfruf*) to the accompaniment of showers of raisins, almonds, and sweetmeats. This custom of honoring the groom goes back to the days of the First Temple, when King Solomon had an entrance gate specially constructed for bridegrooms. The bride does not attend this festivity, for even though, in these modern days, she may have seen the groom several times during their formal engagement, among Chassidim the couple are kept apart for at least the last week prior to the wedding.

GREETING THE BRIDE AND GROOM

Since men and women do not ordinarily mingle at Chassidic weddings, receptions are held in separate rooms for the bride and groom. At the groom's reception (*Kabbolas Ponim-Khoson*) the engagement (*t'noim*) and marriage contracts (*k'subo*) are filled out and signed, amid much singing and dancing. The groom attempts to deliver a learned discourse to prove his scholarship and there is much high-spirited fun as the young men interrupt him with their singing.

Meanwhile the friends of the bride have seated her in a throne-like chair (*bazetsns*) in another

reception room, where, robed in all her bridal finery, she greets her women guests (*Kabbolas Ponim-Kallo*). This is quite unlike the usual practice of keeping the bride hidden away until the theatrical moment when she walks down the aisle in the wedding chapel. At this reception the Chassidic girl wears the crown of a bride, but her hair and face are not yet covered.

THE BAKKHON

A prominent figure in all this festivity is the *badkhn*, a rhymester, a merry-maker and a bit of a scholar, who combines in himself the functions of master of ceremonies, jester, and preacher. In witty Yiddish rhymes, he announces the guests, pointing out their lineage (*yikhus*) and later proclaiming their wedding gifts. In heart-rending tones he lectures the groom and the bride separately about their obligations to each other.

THE VEILING OF THE BRIDE

The most dramatic moment before the wedding ceremony itself comes now, when the groom, escorted by the two fathers and surrounded by his friends and male relatives, proceeds to the women's reception room. Amidst singing, clapping, and fanfares by the band the groom looks at his bride and covers her head with a special veil (*badekns*), a custom based on an incident in the story of Isaac and Rebecca (Gen. 24:65). This signifies that she is his promised bride; it is the first step in the ritual that will bind them together as husband and wife. From this moment until the conclusion of the wedding blessings, no one will see the bride's face uncovered. The blessing given Rebecca by her brother is recited (Gen. 24:60): "Thou art our sister; be thou the mother of thousands..." In some groups it is the two fathers who perform the *badekn* ceremony.

THE GROOM PREPARES

Next comes the ceremonial dressing of the groom. As a sign of *t'shuvo* (penitence) he robes himself in his *kittel* (a white ritual gown) over which he wears his overcoat. Ashes, a sign of mourning for the destruction of the Temple, are placed on his head under his hat; both he and his bride have been fasting all day as well, for the wedding day is considered a personal *Yom Kippur* on which one prays to be absolved of all his sins.

THE KHUPPO

Now the ceremony begins, in the shelter of a velvet canopy or *khuppo* under the open sky. This is held to be the survival of the ancient custom of leading the bridal couple to their own tent in the courtyard of the bride's father's house where they would start their life together and live for the whole week of post-nuptial festivities. Nowadays the *khuppo* may actually be set up in the open, either in the courtyard of the synagogue or on a hotel rooftop, or, most spectacularly in recent years, in a street closed to all motor traffic for the occasion. In New York City Chassidic weddings are so numerous that skylights built to open directly above the *khuppo* have been installed in a number of catering establishments to provide the necessary bit of sky over the happy pair.

There is no theatrical procession. The groom, escorted by the two fathers, carrying lighted braided tapers as a sign of *Yom Tov*, and followed by the invited rabbis, enters first. During this public appearance good manners require that the groom keep his eyes downcast, while he meditates on the solemn step he is undertaking. The more rabbis and religious notables who stand under the *khuppo*, the greater the honor and social and religious standing of the two families. There are no bridesmaids. Escorted by the two mothers, the bride enters next, heavily veiled. The mothers, also carrying tapers, lead the bride around the groom seven times. This is an ancient Kabbalistic custom; the circuits are seven because of the seven heavens and the seven marriage blessings.

Chassidic music for the procession varies from one group to another; the *nigunim* are usually selected by the bridegroom. On this disc the wedding march is a very popular Modzitzer *nigun*, *V'yiten L'kho*, usually played for the bride's entrance.

Perhaps wider knowledge of this kind of Jewish music will replace, among those less orthodox people who succumb to acculturation, the two professionals most widely used. One is the creation of a notorious anti-Semite to celebrate a Christian wedding (*Lohengrin*), the other the work of the son of an apostate Jew, written for a pagan ceremony (*Midsommer Night's Dream*); therefore both are highly inappropriate, almost offensive to informed Jewish ears.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

The actual wedding ceremony as we know it today is a combination of two ancient rituals that were once separate in time from each other—the *erusin* or betrothal and the *nisuin* or marriage vows.

In the *erusin* portion of the ceremony are two blessings—that over wine, symbol of joy, and that proclaiming the sanctity of marriage. The bride and groom drink from the same cup of sanctified wine. Now the veil is lifted so that the groom may

look at his bride once more (lest the deception practiced on Jacob be also worked upon him). The groom places the ring upon the index finger of the bride's right hand. This finger, with which one points to read the Torah, is regarded as the finger of the intelligence. Only a plain gold ring may be used, though the bride may wear a more elaborate ring later if she wishes. (The double ring ceremony is not permitted). The groom repeats the marriage formula—"Harey at mekuddeshes li... Be thou consecrated unto me by this ring according to the law of Moses and Israel." The contract (*k'subo*) is read aloud. Written in Aramaic, it details the obligations of one partner to the other. Then follows the *nisuin*, the seven wedding benedictions, which are allocated to and recited by the rabbis and notables present. The couple drink from a second cup of sanctified wine. Last the groom resoundingly stamps upon and breaks a glass, an act which serves as reminder of the destruction of the Temple and marks the end of the ceremony.

Amid cries of "Mazel Tov" and bursts of joyful music, the newly-wed couple leave the marriage chapel for the last step in the wedding ritual, which is to retire to a separate chamber, where they spend a few minutes alone (*yikhud*), breaking their fast together over a light refreshment.

Meanwhile the guests are seated for dinner. On this disc the dinner music played for the guests is suddenly interrupted by the rollicking *Od Yishoma*, a *nigun* which heralds the first public appearance of the newly-married couple. The bride has shed her veil and now wears either the modest cap of the married woman or her brand-new wig.

MITSVO DANCES

During the evening much zestful dancing takes place among the men, who elevate the bride and groom in chairs and dance about with them on high, for the bride and groom are reigning royalty to be entertained. There is no mixed dancing, nor is there mixed seating during the meal. The bride, holding a handkerchief between them, will dance with the male relatives, thus enabling them to fulfill the commandment to share in her rejoicing. This is called a *mitsvo* dance, or *kosher-tants*.

SHEVA B'ROKHOS

At the wedding dinner and at each meal during the week thereafter, whenever there are ten men present, the seven wedding blessings, *Sheva B'rokhos*, are said as part of the Grace after Meals. If there is to be a wedding trip, it is taken after this week.

COIFFURES AND WIGS

On the morning after the wedding the bride will have her hair cut short and appear in the full glory of her new wig (*sheytl*), which in these modern times is usually a highly modish Paris creation, sometimes far more attractive than her own hair, and very expensive. Those Chassidic brides who do not wear wigs will from now on never appear in public without a head covering, either a scarf or a hat.

But enough talk about weddings—*Shpilt, klezmerim!* On this disc Rudy Tepel and his orchestra play the following *nigunim*. (For those sung with words, text and source are indicated):

SIDE ONE

1. KABBOLAS PONIM-KHOSON

- VIZHNITZ RIKUD
- VAHARIKOSI LOKHEM B'ROKHO *I will pour you out a blessing* (Words: Malachi 3:10; Music: Lubavitch)
- LUBAVITCHER RIKUD
- KI MITSION Tete Tora *For out of Zion shall go forth the Law* (Words: Isaiah 2:3; Music: Popular dance sung at Satmar—thought to be a composition of the Satmarer Rebbe's *gabay*, Rabbi Yosef Askinazi)

2. KABBOLAS PONIM-KALLO

- WALTZ BEN ZION (Music: Composition of the celebrated Chassidic *m'nagen* Ben Zion Shenker, to which the words of *Mizmor L'David*, the Twenty-Third Psalm, are usually sung.)

3. BADEKNS

- BORUKH ELOKENU *Blessed be our G-d Who created us for His glory* (Words: Liturgy; Music: Modzitz-Rabbi Saul Taub)
- MODZITZER RIKUD I (Rabbi Saul Taub)
- MODZITZER RIKUD II (Rabbi Samuel Eliyahu Taub, Israel 1956)

4. THE KHUPPO

- VOLOKH (Melody in Wallachian or Rumanian folk style) Improvisation by Rudy Tepel
- WEDDING MARCH—V'YITEN L'KHO *May G-d give you of the dew of the heavens* (Words: Liturgy, from Gen. 27:28; Music: Modzitz-Rabbi Saul Taub)

SIDE TWO

1. RECESSIONAL

- VAY'HI BISHURUN MELEKH *And He was King in Jeshurun* (Words: Deut 33:5; Music: Galician origin—exact composer unknown)

- YISM'KHU HASHOMAYIM *Let the heavens be glad* (Words: Liturgy, from Psalm 96:11; Music: Attributed by some to Rabbi Zishe Portugal of Skulen, who was interned in a Rumanian prison for "counter-revolutionary" activities; brought to the United States in 1960. Other authorities give the Czernowitzer Rebbe of Newark, Rabbi Abraham Leifer, as the composer)
- JERUSALEM RIKUD I (Music: Exact origin unknown; sung at weddings in the *Yishuv Hayoshen*—the old ultra-orthodox Jewish Settlement in Jerusalem)

2. THE WEDDING DINNER

- WALTZ—OMAR HASHEM L'YAAKOV *Said the Lord to Jacob* (Words: Z'miroh; Music: Modzitz, Rabbi Saul Taub)

ENTER BRIDE AND GROOM

- OD YISHOMA *Again may there be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride* (Words: From the Seventh Wedding Blessing; Music: Jerusalem rikud, exact origin unknown—Arabic influence)
- HUSIATINER RIKUD (Music: Sung and danced principally on Simkhas Tora in the courts of the Rishiner Rabbis, such as Husiatin and Kapitchnitz)
- MODZITZER RIKUD III (Music: Rabbi Samuel Eliyahu Taub, Israel, 1953)

3. MITZVO DANCES

- ASHER BORO *Who has created joy and gladness* (Words: From the Seventh Wedding blessing; Music: Galician origin; composer unknown)
- JERUSALEM RIKUD II (Music: Popular Simkhas Tora melody sung in *Mea Shearim*—the Hundred Gates, ultra-orthodox quarter of Jerusalem)
- KETSAD MERADKIN *Lifney Hakallo? How does one dance for the bride?* (Words: From the Talmud Tractate Kiddushin; Music: Origin uncertain)
- KI V'SIMKHO *You shall go forth with joy* (Words: Liturgy, from Is. 55:12; Music: Modzitz-Rabbi Samuel Eliyahu Taub, Israel 1955)

Notes by B.-H. Stambler



RUDY TEPEL

RUDY TEPEL has been a musician since he began to play the trumpet at the age of five and the clarinet at six. Born on New York's East Side and brought up in Harlem in the heyday of Yossele Rosenblatt, he has been steeped in a traditional Jewish atmosphere all his life. He joined his school band at the age of nine and played in various professional groups when he was only twelve years old; it soon became apparent that he would be devoting himself to music. By the time he was fifteen he had founded the first Rudy Tepel Orchestra. After a period of serious study with Bellison on the clarinet and Henri Barere on the flute, he began to specialize in Hebrew and Yiddish wedding music and has over the past twenty years achieved the reputation of leading the finest band for this kind of music in the United States. He estimates that he has played at almost five thousand weddings in the past twenty years. (Since he takes no engagements on Friday nights or Saturdays this is quite a record). Rudy is proficient at clarinet, saxophone, and flute and has a repertoire of over six hundred Chassidic melodies of various dynasties, probably the largest collection of such music written down for orchestra. His genial personality, gay antics, zestful playing and memorable tone have made him known far and wide.

B.-H. STAMBLER, the producers, are a husband and wife team who have been active for the past fifteen years in gathering, preserving and creating Jewish music. They have pioneered in recording Chassidic and Sephardic music, and in the restoration of historic cantorial discs.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Mr. Harry Trainer for his information and counsel.

Photos: Trainer Studios Design: Jules Halfant
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AND HIS ORCHESTRA