

**Memorial Book of the Community of Turka  
on the Stryj and Vicinity  
(Turka, Ukraine)**

Edited by: J. Siegelman and former residents of Turka (Stryj) in Israel

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Excerpted chapters translated by Wolf Krakowski (pp137-143)

1. Chaim Pelech: **Klezmorim Come To the Shtetl** (begins pg. 137)

At the beginning of the year 1870, on a beautiful morning, a horse and covered wagon driven by a Jew with not a bad-looking beard, arrived in the Turker marketplace

The Turker Jews soon approached the wagon -- they thought these people were Gypsies. The Jewish stranger spoke up -- and said: "Good-morning, Jews. I have come to you because I had heard that here in your town there are no Jewish musicians to play real Jewish music at Jewish weddings."

"And I present myself to you," continued the Jewish stranger. "I have come to you from Bessarabia: I am the musical director (kapelmeister). This is my wife and this is my band. I will play things for you at Jewish weddings that you have never heard in your lives . . ."

In the wagon sat a woman and five small boys. They were a musical family. The father was called Fridl Operman and his sons were: Shmuel, Moshe-Avrum, Dovid-Itzik, Berl and Yosl.

The Turker Jews received them courteously, simply because they were so deeply needed . . .

And the musical director did not disappoint the Turker Jews -- they were first-class wedding musicians. Except for the fact that they could not read music, but played by ear -- they were experts at the real Jewish wedding music. The Turker Jews and the Jews of the surrounding area were very pleased and took pride in them . . .

Their name began to spread out through all of Galicia and across the Hungarian border . . . Rabbis and wealthy Chasidic Jews hired them for their weddings to gladden the guests. People "tore" at them from all sides. It came to pass that the Turker Jews alone had to postpone weddings because the band was occupied all over . . .



תזמורת אופרמן - די אפערימאן קאפעליע.

Caption : The Operman Kapelye

The musical brothers grew up in Turka and led truly Jewish and interesting lives there. Three of them wore beards and sidelocks; two were clean-shaven. The oldest brother Shmuel led the band; Moshe-Avrum was his substitute. The band contained all the necessary instruments required to play at Jewish weddings.

And weddings in the old days used to be especially festive. The children used to shout::

“Moshe-Avrum, Little goat/Cossak --  
Moshe-Avrum, Sorehead”

And the young men wearing *shtreymis* [fur-trimmed hat] and long silk coats (*bekeshes*, pl.) , with kerchiefs in hand, invited the "*vaybelekh*" to dance [*vaybelekh* --diminutive plural of "wife"—intended meaning: young men would customarily invite the brides to dance]. They approached the "*vaybele in a shaytl*" [the bride wearing a wig] and extended the kerchief. The "*vaybel*" then took the kerchief and began to dance. At first blushing with her head bowed down somewhat -- and the young men with the *shtreymis* danced intensely. If the musicians should happen to stop playing, they yelled:

“Moshe-Avrum, keep going, keep going, more, more -- a tip later. And the musicians played on; they were smoking hot! Who today could imagine and believe such a big party, an old-time wedding that captivated the guests? The Turker kapelye had a lot to do with it.

## 2. Moshe Fram -- **The Orchestra in Modern Times** (begins pg. 139)

Over time the primitive klezmerim modernized to fit in with the times. The sons of Moshe-Avrum and Shmuel Operman learned to read music and little by little transformed into an organized orchestra that played not only at Jewish weddings, but also gave concerts and accompanied theatre productions. They also played for dance evenings that were often organized among the aforementioned Turker youth.

Apart from that, the orchestra continued to develop after the First World War. The Opermans who found themselves refugees in Vienna, taught music there. And after they returned to Turka after the war, they once again took up their old livelihood.

In town where there was a cinema that showed silent films -- they accompanied the presentation with music. The audience often got more pleasure from the musical accompaniment than from the film itself. . . . Often different theatre troupes from throughout Poland came to perform in town and they hired the orchestra for these presentations that were performed in the houses of culture, “Sekul” and Proshvite.”

The orchestra was beloved by the town’s population and their reputation spread far from Turka area. When the Munkacser Rebbe, may His Memory Be a Blessing, married off his daughter<sup>1</sup>, he hired the Turker musicians to play at the wedding. And though Munkacs was within the borders of Czechoslovakia, the rabbi arranged for special permission for them to cross the border and the musicians stayed there a month as guests of the rabbi’s court. This wedding was one that the Turker musicians would long remember . . . Besides eating and drinking the best of everything from the rabbi’s table, they brought home a pot of money. It was enough for wood and potatoes to last all winter and there was money left over for shoes and clothes for the children. The misfortune was, however, that these rich weddings happened once in a blue moon . . .When all was said and done our, musicians were paupers and struggled hard to survive. They sometimes showed more creativity putting a *shabes* [meal] together than they did with their music . . . And so everybody had to have a day-job, otherwise they could not make ends meet.

The activities of the orchestra further established the Operman family. Soon the name itself in Turka came to mean musical competence. Some of them studied music in the Vienna Conservatory when they were, as previously mentioned, refugees in Austria due to World War I. One of the family was actually a great virtuoso; however he remained in Vienna and never returned to Turka . . . The director of the orchestra was Itshe Operman; they called him “Itshe Gratsch.” He took care of all the bureaucratic red-tape. In the band, he would purposely not play first violin. He was a *balebatisher yid* [householder] with his own little house on the railway street --full of children . . . And since a livelihood was hard to extract from his struggles, he broke with family tradition and allowed his children to learn other trades.

His brother, Laybish Operman, was a good violinist. Besides playing in the band, he also gave music lessons, and in this way made a living for his large family.

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<sup>1</sup> There is video available for online viewing called [“Jewish Life in Munkatch - March 1933”](#) that includes some footage of the wedding of Frime Chaye Rivke Shapira - daughter of Grand Rebbe Eleazer Shapira of Munkatch. At approximately the 2:47 minute mark, there is brief footage of the klezmer musicians, most likely of the Operman family, playing at the khupe. An [online search](#) indicated that the Grand Rabbi only had one daughter leading me to believe the musicians must have been the Opermans (HW).

The best musician in the family was Matye Operman, and to be sure, with him, music was a side-occupation. His main source of income was a colonial shop (*Kolonial gesheft*<sup>2</sup>) on Railroad Street. With this orchestra he only took serious engagements, for example, concerts or musical theatre pieces when a Jewish or Ukrainian theatre company would come to town. He seldom played at weddings. It used to be that when a town big-shot married off a child and he made a special request that Matyas Operman<sup>3</sup> play at the wedding -- then the fee would be much higher. But not everyone could allow himself such an extravagant luxury.

And, to tell the truth, it was a special pleasure to hear Matye play first violin. At such times, he would stand seriously in front of the whole orchestra and majestically pull the bow up and down, drawing out tender and robust tones from his fine instrument: One did not have to be a music expert in order to feel that we had a musician here bursting with talent.

Maybe the music sounded so good with him because he did not play for the sake of a livelihood alone: he himself took pleasure from his music, perhaps even more than his uplifted audience. Playing with him, the other musicians played more accurately . . . Not rushing to get through. They used to say: "With a good wagon, it is easier to go on foot."

Pinchas Schwartz was also a great musician; he played many instruments; violin, trumpet, contrabass and others. He could also sing from sheet-music, led the choir of the youth organizations and directed their productions.

Pinchas Schwartz came to Turka as a young boy, before the First World War. He brought with him the town cantor, Issur May and he sang with him as a *meshoyrer* [accompanying chorister] in the synagogue. Over time he married and settled in town. He did not create any great joy: He worked hard: At night playing and giving lessons by day -- and from all this did not make enough for *shabes*... And to support his wife and four children he worked as a night watchman at a lumber-yard.

Laybish Artel played clarinet, flute, alto and also violin. But, as the saying goes: "The more instruments, the less livelihood;" he worked as a barber to earn extra money.

Hershele *Poyker* [Drummer] was also in the band. A little Jew, he made his main income from plastering. In his spare time he earned additional income banging on the drums. That's why they gave him the nickname, "Drummer."

Scroll down, continued below.....

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<sup>2</sup> According to Jeffrey Wollock, the Yiddish term "*Kolonial gesheft*" is the Yiddish expression for the Polish "*sklep kolonialny*," which translates as "colonial store" or "colonial shop." This most likely was a shop that sold imported and especially oriental items, such as coffee, tea, spices, but also porcelain and bric-a-brac ... This was a common Jewish occupation and evidence of it can be seen at this link <http://klodawa.org/2006/03/13/40-jewish-merchants-listed--do-your-recognize-the-names.aspx> , items 11, 24, 25. In Poland, such shops continue to exist.

<sup>3</sup> The implied meaning according to Jeffrey Wollock is "THE ILLUSTRIOUS MATYAS OPERMAN.."



תזמורת חובבים בטורקה, בהנהלת פנחס שוורץ.

אמאטארן ארקעסטער אונטער די לייטונג פון פנחס שווארץ.

Caption: Amateur orchestra under the direction of Pinchas Schwartz

Yes. Not an easy life for our musicians: They were always, as previously mentioned, struggling for survival. But lived . . . . . respectably and *balebatish* [orderly] and raised their children well. It is necessary to underscore an interesting event that characterizes their respectability. In spite of their business dealings, there were always conflicts among them, sometimes leading to arguments and even violence that usually ended with a *din-torah* [lit: torah judgement -- usually a hearing in front of a rabbi] or an order that would bring peace to our musicians. They lived, truth be told, as one family and their conflicts did not last. They shared their hard-earned pennies honestly. They were much beloved by the town's population, both Jewish and Christian



בעדיש פויזיס בשיחה חסופה מענייני דיזמא...  
א שמועס אין גאס

Caption: A chat in the street

**Afternote:** Elsewhere in the yizkor book, the following paragraph is written concerning the Opermans and the wedding of a young woman named Roizele (excerpted from the translation on [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)):

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/turka/tur057.html> (Stories from Turka, Roizele's Wedding)

As soon as everyone heard the blowing of the trumpets, all of the Jews, including women and children, set out for Roizele's wedding. Jewish homes were emptied and locked, and everyone went to the Rynek, along the route from Moshe Shechter's place until the bridge that led to the small alley where Roizele lived with her poor mother. Then the entire band of the large Operman family, with all of their assistants, drummers and flutists, began to play. The musicians were divided into two groups. One group played in the alley near the bridge where Roizele lived, and the second group played in the Rynek itself. The trumpeters on the roof also blew incessantly. In the meantime, hundreds of Christians ran out from the city. They thought that the Jews had taken leave of their minds...

#### **From The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names—Yad Vashem**

(I have been able to locate the following records from Yad Vashem)

**Motes Opermann** was born in Turka Nad Stryjem in 1890 to Shmuel and Dvora. He was a musician and married to Pesia. Prior to WWII he lived in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland. During the war he was in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland. Motes perished in 1942 in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland at the age of 52. This information is based on a Page of Testimony (displayed on left) submitted by his relative

**Leib Operman** was born in Turka Nad Stryjem in 1893 to Moshe and Gitl. He was a musician and married to Scheindel. Prior to WWII he lived in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland. During the war he was in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland. Leib perished in 1942 in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland at the age of 49. This information is based on a Page of Testimony (displayed on left) submitted by his nephew

**Yicchak Operman** was born in Turka Nad Stryjem in 1892 to Moshe and Gitl. He was a musician and married to Lea. Prior to WWII he lived in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland. During the war he was in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland. Yicchak perished in 1942 in Turka Nad Stryjem, Poland at the age of 50. This information is based on a Page of Testimony (displayed on left) submitted by his son.

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I wish to thank Jeffrey Wollock for his contributions to this translation.

----Helen Winkler