

Introduction – “Die schönsten Lieder der Ostjuden”

With the reprint of the song collection ‘The Most Beautiful Songs of the Eastern Jews’, published in 1920, our ‘Project 2025 – Arche Musica’ adds another building block to the secular Jewish-German music history. It is a core objective of our project work to make these special songs accessible worldwide and to bring them back into everyday musical life, into our choirs, school classes and people's hearts.

The 47 songs collected and annotated by Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann and published in 1920 by ‘Jüdischer Verlag Berlin’ provide us today with a unique insight into a lost era of Jewish life and Eastern Jewish musical tradition.

Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann was born in Eschweiler in 1888 as the son of Rosa and Hermann Kaufmann. He studied history in Geneva, Munich, Marburg and Leipzig and was an excellent musician who campaigned vigorously for the unadulterated preservation of Eastern Jewish folk songs. He committed suicide in March 1922.

Kaufmann tried above all to convey his love of Eastern Jewish culture, the Yiddish language, literature and customs to Western Jews.

He was aware of the cultural significance of this special song repertoire, which is why he provided his song collection with a detailed introduction, which dealt in particular with the performance of the songs, the use of transcription and the exact pronunciation.

Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann made a wonderful selection of songs for the seven chapters he chose. By dividing them into ‘religious and Hasidic songs’, ‘lullabies’, ‘children's and cheder songs’, ‘love songs’, ‘girls’ and wedding songs’, “family and craftsmen's songs” and “soldiers” songs and songs from folk life’, he makes it possible for us today to discover the story(s) and message contained in this fascinating music. Word for word, note for note, these songs are a very special musical reminder of Jewish life, longing to be sung and loved.

Thomas Spindler

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