

Notes on the Present Edition of *Kol Nidre* by Henry Russotto (1870–1923) as Adapted by Stanley M. Hoffman (2013)

If you are looking for a new engraving of this public domain setting in its original form, you have come to the wrong place.

When I set about the task of typesetting it, the reason was that I could not find a clean copy of it anywhere, either in paper form or as a PDF on the Internet. The temple choir I currently conduct sang from the original version in 2012. The sheet music was such a mess that a singer asked me to clean it up, which I did using software. After we struggled to sing from that edition during High Holiday services, I realized that I could never get rid all of the problems associated with music which had been hole punched, written on and photocopied time and time again, so I decided to engrave it for the forthcoming 2013 High Holidays.

When I began to do so, I soon realized that it was not only the condition of the music which was fighting the performers, but also the notation itself. I am a composer who makes his living editing sheet music. I have been Chief Editor at ECS Publishing since 1998. As a choral director I have rehearsed and performed from the original edition dozens of times with three different temple choirs and, as much as I like the essence of what Henry Russotto was trying to do with the traditional melody in his setting, I always found myself somehow at odds with it.

Next I perused the piece repeatedly and realized that, from the standpoints of music notation (mainly) and composition (somewhat), there is actually a great deal wrong with it. I wrestled with whether to 1) go back to engraving the original edition, or 2) to substantially alter the notation, or 3) to abandon the project. As I am not a quitter by nature and am usually up for a good challenge, I opted for the most difficult choice, #2. I have never encountered an instance of someone having rewritten a synagogue classic before, but there is a first time for everything. I realize that doing so takes a lot of *chutzpah* (audacity) but, for the reasons I have put forth, I feel uniquely qualified to do so.

The original keyboard part is written for organ, but low B-flats appear which are beyond the range of the instrument. (!) Once I realized that, all bets were off. I decided to go at the new edition with complete freedom to do whatever I felt necessary editorially. My goal was not to change the way the piece sounds. On the contrary, it was make it sound as much like the original edition as possible while still fixing both poor notation and certain compositional ideas which seemed to suffer on account of the state in which the composer and publisher left them. The intended result is an edition which is easier to understand from the performers' standpoint, i.e., one that is both more logical and more musical.

Rather than offering a blow-by-blow description of what I did in the present edition, I will offer the main points roughly in chronological order (as they appear in the music). The original (but digitally cleaned-up) edition appears on my Website as a point of reference. <www.stanleymhoffman.com/KOL_NIDRE_RUSSOTTO-cleaned-up.pdf>

The cantor's line is raised from above the organ part to the top staff, and a parenthetical eight (8) is added beneath the treble clef so that the solo part may be sung by either a male or female cantor.

The soprano and alto lines now appear on separate staves.

The mandatory organ part is now an optional keyboard part so that it can be played on piano or synthesizer or omitted entirely in favor of an unaccompanied performance. Stems down notes are for the organ pedal when the work is performed with organ. Passages which are difficult to play on the piano can be rolled between the hands, etc.

Metronome markings are added.

Passages which were marked "*Bocca chiusa*" (closed lips, i.e., hummed) are now sung on "oo." This is done because choirs were, as a rule, much bigger in Russotto's era than in ours.

The transliteration is changed from Ashkenazic to Sephardic Aramaic pronunciation. The lyrics are now also grammatically correct, (i.e., punctuation marks and uppercase and lowercase letters are added).

Both musical and linguistic expressive markings are added.

Rhythms and time signatures are substantially changed; the entire piece is re-barred. I feel that cadences which should be metrically strong fall on weak beats of bars in the original edition. Now they fall on strong ones.

Some breath marks are reinterpreted as rests, others are added, and others are retained.

Some grace notes are rewritten as actual rhythms, others are retained.

Tuplets in the cantor's flourishes are eliminated in some cases and redrawn as metrically logical rhythms or, in instances where tuplets have been retained, they now make rhythmic sense (i.e., they add up to a correct number of beats).

A small number of syllables are shifted to other notes to correct errors in prosody.

Kol Nidre is supposed to be sung three times; 1) in G Minor, 2) in G# Minor, and 3) in A minor. The original edition appeared only in G Minor. The present edition presents the setting sequentially in all three keys.

The original Aramaic text and a public domain English translation appear on the penultimate page of the new edition.

I created this edition for my own purposes but am sharing it *freely* with the world. If you want to use it for your High Holiday services or even for concerts where you wish to expose your audiences to Jewish liturgical music, great. All I ask is that you credit me as the adaptor and editor in your concert programs.

If you find any possible errata which might require repair feel free to report them to me.

Enjoy!

—Stanley M. Hoffman, Ph.D.
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