

THE JAZZ SINGER

BY
SAMSON RAPHAELSON

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To
ALBERT LEWIS
A gentleman from the East Side and a scholar from Broadway

FOREWORD

I wish to express my gratitude to Albert Lewis, who directed and produced "The Jazz Singer" and who, in the long hours of many days and nights, gave values to the play and stage wisdom to me which I hope never to forget; to Stuart Sherman, who encouraged me when my faith lagged; and to the members of the cast, especially George Jessel and Sam Jaffe, for the many happy touches they have contributed.

Samson Raphaelson.

PREFACE

American life, in this year 1925, consists essentially of surfaces. You may point out New England communities and say here is depth, and I will answer, true, but New England is dead so far as the America of now is concerned. You may show me an integrity in the West where a century ago pioneers came, and I will answer, that integrity resides with the elders and not with the mightier young ones. He who wishes to picture today's America must do it kaleidoscopically; he must show you a vivid contrast of surfaces, raucous, sentimental, egoistical, vulgar, ineffably busy—surfaces whirling in a dance which sometimes is a dance to Aphrodite and more frequently a dance to Jehovah.

In seeking a symbol of the vital chaos of America's soul, I find no more adequate one than jazz. Here you have the rhythm of frenzy staggering against a symphonic background—a background composed of lewdness, heart's delight, soul-racked madness, monumental boldness, exquisite humility, but principally prayer.

I hear jazz, and I am given a vision of cathedrals and temples collapsing and, silhouetted against the setting sun, a solitary figure, a lost soul, dancing grotesquely on the ruins.... Thus do I see the jazz singer.

Jazz is prayer. It is too passionate to be anything else. It is prayer distorted, sick, unconscious of its destination. The singer of jazz is what Matthew Arnold said of the Jew, "lost between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." In this, my first play, I have tried to crystallize the ironic

truth that one of the Americas of 1925—that one which packs to overflowing our cabarets, musical revues and dance halls—is praying with a fervor as intense as that of the America which goes sedately to church and synagogue. The jazz American is different from the dancing dervish, from the Zulu medicine man, from the negro evangelist only in that he doesn't know he is praying.

I have used a Jewish youth as my protagonist because the Jews are determining the nature and scope of jazz more than any other race—more than the negroes, from whom they have stolen jazz and given it a new color and meaning. Jazz is Irving Berlin, Al Jolson, George Gershwin, Sophie Tucker. These are Jews with their roots in the synagogue. And these are expressing in evangelical terms the nature of our chaos today.

You find the soul of a people in the songs they sing. You find the meaning of the songs in the souls of the minstrels who create and interpret them. In “The Jazz Singer” I have attempted an exploration of the soul of one of these minstrels.

Samson Raphaelson.

New York, October, 1925.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Cast of characters in the first production of "The Jazz Singer,"
by Lewis and Gordon in association with Sam H. Harris at the
Fulton Theatre, New York City, Sept. 15, 1925.

CANTOR RABINOWITZ	<i>Mr.</i> <i>Howard</i>
	<i>Lang</i>
MOEY	<i>Mr.</i> <i>George</i>
	<i>Shafer</i>
SARA RABINOWITZ	<i>Miss</i> <i>Dorothy</i> <i>Raymon</i> <i>d</i>
YUDELSON	<i>Mr. Sam</i>
	<i>Jaffe</i>
JACK ROBIN	<i>Mr.</i> <i>George</i>
	<i>Jessel</i>
CLARENCE KAHN	<i>Mr.</i> <i>Robert</i>
	<i>Russel</i>
GENE	<i>Mr. Ted</i>
	<i>Athey</i>
EDDIE CARTER	<i>Mr.</i> <i>Barney</i>
	<i>Fagan</i>
HARRY LEE	<i>Mr.</i>

	<i>Arthur</i>
	<i>Stewart</i>
	<i>Hull</i>
MARY DALE	<i>Miss</i>
	<i>Phoebe</i>
	<i>Foster</i>
RANDOLPH DILLINGS	<i>Mr.</i>
	<i>Robert</i>
	<i>Hudson</i>
MISS GLYNN	<i>Miss</i>
	<i>Mildred</i>
	<i>Leaf</i>
FRANKLYN FORBES	<i>Mr. Paul</i>
	<i>Byron</i>
A STAGE DOORMAN—	<i>Mr. Tony</i>
JIMMY	<i>Kennedy</i>
LEVY	<i>Mr. Nat</i>
	<i>Freyer</i>
SIX CHORUS GIRLS	<i>Misses</i>
	<i>Mildred</i>
	<i>Jay, Ruth</i>
	<i>Holden,</i>
	<i>Eleanor</i>
	<i>Ryan,</i>
	<i>Mildred</i>
	<i>McDono</i>
	<i>ugh,</i>
	<i>Viola</i>
	<i>Thomas,</i>
	<i>Betty</i>

A SCENE SHIFTER

DOCTOR
O'SHAUGHNESSY

Wilton,
Rita
Crane
Mr. Jack
Hill
Mr. Tony
Kennedy

THE JAZZ SINGER

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I—The home of the Cantor on the East Side. The 14th of August, afternoon.

ACT II

SCENE 1—About a month later. Back-stage at the Fulton Theatre, New York.

SCENE 2—A few minutes later. Jack's dressing room.

ACT III—Same as Act I. A few hours later.

THE JAZZ SINGER

ACT ONE

SCENE: It is the flat of Cantor Rabinowitz in the heart of the East Side of New York. We see a rather large living room with a curious mixture of furniture and crockery. The Cantor lives in better style than most of his neighbors. The furniture is massive, elaborate, of fine wood, the kind of furniture a wealthy Jew in Russia would be likely to have. Everywhere there are shelves loaded with bric-a-brac—china, glassware and silver.

There are two windows through which can be seen the stained glass windows of the synagogue next door. There is a phonograph, a sideboard, a settee, a bookcase, a Morris chair. On the wall are pictures, including one of an old-fashioned Russian Jew, one of the Cantor, one cheap chromo showing some kittens, and the framed citizen papers of the Cantor.

AT RISE: Before the curtain rises we hear a boyish treble sweetly singing an old Hebrew cantor tune. As the curtain rises, we see little Moey and the Cantor seated at the table. The Cantor is a lean man of medium height. He has a neatly trimmed, grayish beard and is wearing a skull-cap. His face is wrinkled, gentle, austere. He is a holy man among a humane people—and all which that implies. He knows the ways of kindness, but the spirit in him is stern with following the God of Vengeance for sixty years.

MOEY is singing.

CANTOR

[*Stops him*]. No, no, no! Didn't I tell you how you should sing it? Sing it with a sigh. Do you understand, my child? With a sigh! You are praying to God. Nu, try it again. [MOEY *tries again, and again is stopped by* CANTOR.] No—do you understand what it means, them words you are singing? What does “Vaanee Sefeelosee” mean?

MOEY

It means, “I, my prayer.”

CANTOR

And what means “Lecho Adoshem”?

MOEY

That means, “To you, O God.”

CANTOR

Good! And what does it mean, “Ais Rutzon Elohim”?

MOEY

“When you are ready, O God.”

CANTOR

That's right. You're a smart boy, Moey. Now what does it mean “Berov Chasdecho Aneni Be-emes Yishecho”?

MOEY

[*Hesitates*]. I don't know what that means.

CANTOR

Is *that* nice? A smart boy like you what has the most beautiful voice in the choir? You will never learn to sing until you know

what the words mean. Now, listen, Moey. This is what it means. "I offer my prayer to you, when you are ready, O God, with your multitudes of benedictions—answer me, O God, with truth, and help me." Sing it again, Moey. [MOEY *begins to sing again. The CANTOR rises, impatiently. He is irritated with MOEY, yet he has forgotten the child. He speaks more to himself than to MOEY.*] No, no! Oh, I wish I had my Jakie here. He could show you how to sing it. The words he understood even when he was a little boy smaller than you. And a voice he had like an angel.

MOEY

Why did Jakie run away from home?

CANTOR

[*Pause*]. Who said.... Where did you heard that?

MOEY

Gee, everybody knows that ... all the boys in the choir....

CANTOR

Sometimes little boys know too much, Moey. Sometimes little boys think they know more than their papas.

MOEY

[*Rises*]. I'm hungry. Can I go home now, Cantor? My mama told me to come home early tonight for supper.

CANTOR

You shouldn't speak from supper, Moey, when we are speaking from God.

MOEY

Can I help it? I'm hungry.

CANTOR

[*Craftily*]. In the kitchen we got nice cookies.

MOEY

Cookies? What kind?

CANTOR

With raisins in them.

MOEY

Oh, I like them. Can I have some?

CANTOR

Certainly, my child, but sing first.

[MOEY picks up the prayer book and sings the melody conscientiously and beautifully. He sings it straight through to the end. There is a quality of plaintiveness in this rendition which pleases the CANTOR. As MOEY is singing, SARA enters from the kitchen, a small brass chopping bowl in her hand. She pauses until the boy finishes. SARA is a small woman, thin, tense, with large, vivid black eyes and gray hair parted neatly and drawn back in a knot. She wears an apron over a black and white dotted voile dress. The CANTOR speaks with delight.]

CANTOR

Ain't that beautiful, Sara?

SARA

It's very nice the way you sing, Moey. I'm going to tell your mama what a good boy you are.

MOEY

You bet I am. Can I have some of your raisin cookies, Mrs. Rabinowitz?

SARA

Raisin cookies?

CANTOR

I promised Moey he could have some if he sang nice.

SARA

They ain't ready yet.

CANTOR

Well, you come back in an hour, Moey. Then they'll be ready.

SARA

Yes, go my child. I'll keep a whole lot of cookies warm for you.

MOEY

[*Takes prayer book*]. Thank you, Mrs. Rabinowitz.

SARA

You're welcome. Give my love to your mama.

MOEY

[*Moves to door*]. Thank you. Goodbye. I won't eat much at home.
[*He goes.*]

CANTOR

He's a willing boy, Sara, and it's a pleasure to hear him singing in the choir. And his papa, peace be with him, was a rabbi. Maybe from Moey I can make yet a Cantor.... Yes.... [*Sits.*] From him I will make a great Cantor.

SARA

[*Casually, with a prosaic little sigh*]. It seems like yesterday our Jakie was standing the same way—a little boy—a darling—and you was learning him to sing.

CANTOR

Sara, I asked you a thousand times, don't speak his name in my house. You know what it does to me.

SARA

I heard you from the kitchen—you spoke it yourself to Moey.

CANTOR

Well, Moey and me—we was singing and—well, I made a mistake.

SARA

A mistake? A papa should speak from his only son one time in five years—that's a mistake?

CANTOR

It's so long since I found a boy with a voice like Moey.... I forgot myself.

SARA

Our Jakie had a voice even more beautifuller—even before he ran away—

CANTOR

Sara, please—it ain't good that we should think too much about that boy. He didn't think of us.... God knows if he's maybe now in jail or not.

SARA

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