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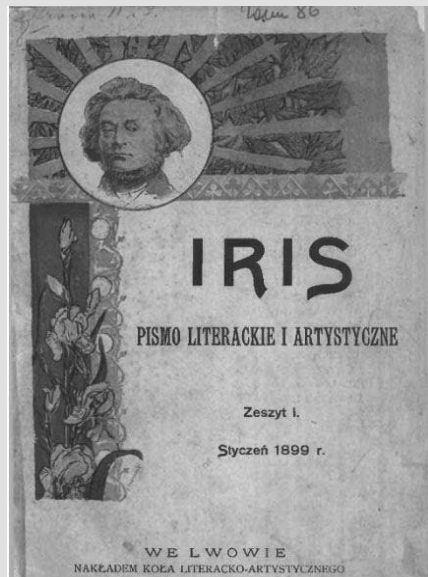
### THE WOLFSTHAL FAMILY OF MUSICIANS: A GENEALOGICAL CASE STUDY<sup>1</sup>

“In Lwów, we are accustomed to associate the Wolfsthal name with diligence and true artistic modesty”.

Stanisław Kuczkiewicz

Music Commentator

“Iris. Pismo Literackie i Artystyczne” 1899, z. 1



### Introduction and Family Lineage

The Commander General of the Israeli Police Forces, commending a national hero, granted a medal of distinction on November 6th, 2018 to the late Tuvia Wolfsthal, who, sixty-four years earlier, had died while protecting his country<sup>2</sup>. The research reported in this paper was inspired by late recognition of Tuvia and his act of ultimate bravery. In this paper, several years after this research commenced, we provide a genealogical overview of the Wolfsthal family of musicians from Galicia, from which Tuvia was descended.

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of study was published in Academia.edu on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Judah Ari Gross, *Border Guards Killed by Jordanian Arab Legion in 1954 Given Police Commendations*, “Times of Israel” 1918, November 7.

The earliest known family ancestor is **Majer Leib Wolfthal**, the municipal cantor of the small village of Tysmenytsia (Polish name: Tyśmienica; now in Ukraine)<sup>3</sup>. Majer Leib formed with his seven sons a band that performed at local events and concerts throughout Galicia. They were known as the **Wolfthal Brothers** (Polish: Braci Wolfthal) orchestra, and gradually adopted the surname **Wolfsthal**. The cantor's sons all grew up to be career musicians. The sons of Majer Leib, and some of their renowned descendants, are listed below. Highlights of key members of the family follow in the next section, and in the last section we bring analysis and insights on the family's place in the Jewish history.

1. **Chaim Hirsch [Herman]** (1842–1920).
2. **Josef Dawid** (1846–1905), father of **Abraham Ber [Bernhard]** (1885–1948) and
3. Grandfather of **Ignacy** (1897–1943) and **Henryk** (1903–1943), Tuvia's father.
4. **Chune** (1851–1924).
5. **Maurycy** (1855–1937), father of **Bronislaw** (1881–1944) and **Emma** (born 1889).
6. **Lazar [Louis]** (1857–1915), father of **Max** (1884–1933) and **Josef** (1899–1931).
7. **Michal [Emil]** (1859–1923).
8. **Arnold [Aron]**, born 1869.

### Summary of Sources

The biographical and genealogical details in this research have been extracted, among other sources, from the Polish state archives (AGAD) and the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine (TsDIAL), Jewish genealogy sites (JRI and Gesher Galicia), Polish and Austrian national digital libraries, historical press archives in Poland, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine, and on-site visits to archives in Poland, Austria, Israel and Belgium, and cemeteries in Europe and the US.

### Selected Highlights

This section provides abbreviated descriptions of the above musicians with a focus on newly found facts. These descriptions expand and refine the information that was previously published in the excellent bibliographic dictionary of L.T. Błaszczyk<sup>4</sup> and in other sources.

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper, Polish/German spelling is used in names when referring to the period of the Austrian empire (approx. 19th C. – 1918). Polish spelling is used for the period of the Polish state (1918–1939). Ukrainian spelling is elaborated for completeness.

<sup>4</sup> L.T. Błaszczyk, *Żydzi w kulturze muzycznej ziem polskich w XIX i XX w. Słownik biograficzny*, Warszawa 2014.

### Chaim Hersch [Herman] Wolfsthal<sup>5</sup>

The first-born of the brothers, a cellist and a music teacher. He lived in Ternopil (Polish name: Tarnopol) most of his life. In the middle 1880s Herman formed a band with his children, who also had musical talent, and played with them in locations across Galicia. Herman was connected through marriage to the Austrian musician Henryk Taborski.

### Josef Dawid Wolfsthal<sup>6</sup>

Josef Dawid was born in Tysmenytsia and lived in Ternopil most of his life. A klezmer musician and a performer, he was the vibrant spirit of the Wolfsthal Brothers orchestra. In a memoir by Jewish-Ukrainian writer Suma Morgenstern about his youth in Galicia<sup>7</sup>, he described Josef Dawid as follows:

a much-acclaimed virtuoso... his most successful showpiece was to amaze the listeners by, in one swift movement, slackening the violin bow and then using the bare wood of the bow to unleash a torrent of harmonics from the violin strings.

### Chune Wolfsthal<sup>8</sup>

Chune was a musician, composer and conductor. As a young man he served as a musician in the Austrian army. He lived and worked in Ternopil and Lviv<sup>9</sup>. In 1903, he was appointed musical director of the Jewish theater in Chernivtsi (Polish name: Czerniowce), and before the first world war he composed music for the Jewish Theater in Lviv. With the outbreak of WW1, Chune was forced to flee to Vienna where he worked as a musical director, and after the war he returned to Ternopil. Chune composed some operettas, including *Der Teufel Als Retter*, *Rabbi Yehuda Halevi*, *Der Komische Ball*, *Die Malke Schwo* (Queen of Sheba), *Die Tochter Jeruschalajims* (Daughter of Jerusalem), *Die Drei Matunes* and *Bostenai*. He also composed waltzes, marches and dances.

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<sup>5</sup> Herman Wolfsthal's name, without a biography, is referenced in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*ibidem*, p. 282). The musician's biography in this paper has been developed using metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300) and newspaper archives.

<sup>6</sup> Dawid Wolfsthal's name, without a biography, is referenced in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*ibidem*, p. 282). His biography in this paper is based on metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300).

<sup>7</sup> S. Morgenstern, *In einer anderen Zeit – Jugendjahre in Ostgalizien* (*In Another Time: Youth Years in Eastern Galicia*), zu Klampen Verlag, Germany 1995.

<sup>8</sup> An earlier biography of Chune Wolfsthal is included in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 283). Records from AGAD were also used for Chune's biography in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Lviv (Ukrainian name), Lwów (Polish name), Lemberg (German name).

His music became very popular and earned him a reputation, despite which he lived in poverty. Chune spent his last years in Lviv and died there. An obituary published in the United States shortly after his death referred to him as “the Jewish Verdi”.

### **Maurycy [Moritz] Wolfsthal<sup>10</sup>**

Maurycy was one of the most famous representatives of his musician family, an outstanding violinist who often performed on the concert stage with great success and led the Lviv opera orchestra for many years. He served as a professor at the Conservatory of the Galician Music Society<sup>11</sup> in Lviv from the early 1880s until the late 1920s. He converted to Catholicism around 1900. Maurycy died in December 1937 and was buried in the family tomb of one of his conservatory colleagues, in the Lychakiv Cemetery (Polish name: Cmentarz Łyczakowski), cemetery in Lviv. After his death, he was decorated with the Polish Golden Cross of Merit.

### **Lazar [Louis] Wolfsthal<sup>12</sup>**

Lazar was a music teacher and the father of two talented musicians, Josef and Max Wolfsthal. He moved with his family to Vienna towards the turn of the 20th century, in pursuit of better living conditions, nurturing the talent of his son Max. In 1899, the second son, Josef, was born in Vienna. From Vienna, the family moved to Berlin, where Lazar worked as a music teacher until he passed away in 1915.

### **Michał [Emil] Wolfsthal<sup>13</sup>**

Michał was a flutist and in his early twenties he lived in Vienna. He and his family immigrated to the UK in the early 1900s, seeking better life opportunities like Lazar and others in their family. Throughout his life, in Ternopil, Lviv, and finally in London, Michał worked as a musician. Some of his children became musicians as well in the UK.

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<sup>10</sup> An earlier biography of Maurycy Wolfsthal is included in L.T. Błaszczyk’s bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 284). This musician was also extensively referenced in interwar Polish newspapers.

<sup>11</sup> Conservatory of the Galician Music Society (Polish name: Konserwatorium Galicyjskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego) in 1848–1918, Conservatory of the Polish Music Society in Lviv (Polish name: Konserwatorium Polskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego we Lwowie) in 1918–1939.

<sup>12</sup> Lazar Wolfsthal’s name, without a biography, is referenced in L.T. Błaszczyk’s bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 282).

<sup>13</sup> Michał Wolfsthal’s biography is based on metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300) and British metrical records.

**Arnold [Aron] Wolfsthal<sup>14</sup>**

Like his brother Maurycy, Arnold was an acclaimed music teacher in Lviv. He taught cello at the private Music Institute of Anna Niementowska, the Conservatory of Mykola Lysenko Music Society, and the Ignacy Jan Paderewski Music School, all in Lviv. Arnold also performed in concerts and was known for his performance in ensembles with his family members, including Maurycy. He lived in Ternopil and Lviv. His final resting place remains unknown.

**Max Wolfsthal (son of Lazar)<sup>15</sup>**

Max, born in Ternopil in 1884, was the older brother of the renowned professor Josef Wolfsthal (they were both sons of Lazar/Louis Wolfsthal). In his youth, Max became famous as a child prodigy and performed across Europe, including Russia, Turkey and the UK. Max studied with Carl Flesch who considered him one of his best students<sup>16</sup>. In 1914, Max lived in Berlin with his father Lazar. In later stages of his life, Max lived and was professionally active in Gdansk (1915–1928) where he was a member of the Danzig Trio, and subsequently in Frankfurt (1931–1932). Max married Florentina, a Lutheran, in Gdansk (1926) and died in Berlin (1933).

**Josef Wolfsthal (son of Lazar)<sup>17</sup>**

Josef was born in Vienna in 1899. He was a child prodigy, a pupil of Carl Flesch, who referred to Josef in his memoirs as the *most outstanding representative who came from the Wolfsthal Polish family of musicians*<sup>18</sup>. In 1919, at the age of 20, Josef was appointed concertmaster in Bremen, and subsequently worked as concertmaster in Stockholm (1920), and the Staatsoper in Berlin (1921). At the age of 26 Josef became a professor at the Academy of Music in Berlin (the youngest musician to ever be appointed to such a post by the Academy). In 1928, he became deputy Head of the Orchestra of Kroll's State Opera House in Berlin, which was led by Otto Klemperer. In 1931, Josef died in Berlin prematurely due to untreated pneumonia.

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<sup>14</sup> An earlier biography of Arnold Wolfsthal is included in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 282). The musician's biography in this paper has been developed using metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300) and newspaper archives.

<sup>15</sup> A biography of Max Wolfsthal, with an incorrect lineage, is included in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 283).

<sup>16</sup> C. Flesch, *The Memoirs of Carl Flesch*, London 1958, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> An earlier biography of Josef Wolfsthal is included in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 283).

<sup>18</sup> C. Flesch, *The Memoirs...*, p. 274.

**Abraham Ber [Bernard] Wolfsthal (son of Josef Dawid)<sup>19</sup>**

Abraham acquired his formal musical education in the conservatories of Lviv and Berlin. According to unverified reports, he served in the Austrian army. He moved to Vienna in 1916 where he became a successful band leader (Kapellmeister). His band was called the Wolfsthal Kapelle. Abraham and his band were active on shows and radio broadcasts. Abraham Ber started in the late 1930's to seek refuge for his family from the Nazi oppression, moved to the UK where he was eventually naturalized, and died in London, England in 1948.

**Ignacy Wolfsthal (grandson of Josef Dawid)<sup>20</sup>**

Ignacy was a famous practicing musician, a composer and a conductor. Between 1929 and 1939, he was the Kapellmeister of the Polish Railway Workshop in Nowy Sącz. Under his leadership, the orchestra gained significant recognition across Poland. During WW2, Ignacy was an activist in the anti-Nazi underground. He was murdered by the Gestapo on August 13, 1943, during a Nazi raid on a school in Olszana, 15 kilometers south-west of Nowy Sącz.

**Henryk Wolfsthal (grandson of Josef Dawid)<sup>21</sup>**

Henryk, the father of Tuvia Wolfsthal, was a talented musician: a pianist, a violinist, a composer and a conductor, who acquired his musical education at the Conservatory of Lviv. He was a music band master in Bielsko, a town in southern Poland. Henryk perished in the Holocaust at the Janowski death camp in Lviv, where he was a member of the camp's orchestra.

**Bronisław Wolfsthal (son of Maurycy)<sup>22</sup>**

Bronisław studied in Vienna, Leipzig and Berlin. In 1907 he was the director and conductor of the Lviv Opera. After WW1, he worked at the conservatory of the Polish Music Society in Lviv. In 1926–1928 he was the first conductor

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<sup>19</sup> Abraham Ber Wolfsthal's name (with incorrect lineage) is referenced in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 282). The musician's biography in this paper has been developed using metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300) and the ANNO Austrian newspaper archives.

<sup>20</sup> Ignacy Wolfsthal's biography is based on metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300) and in newspaper archives from Nowy Sącz.

<sup>21</sup> Henryk Wolfsthal's biography is based on metrical records from the Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD, Fond 300) and newspaper archives from Bielsko-Biała and Lviv.

<sup>22</sup> An earlier biography of Bronisław Wolfsthal is included in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, pp. 282–283). This musician was also extensively referenced in interwar Polish newspapers.

of the Volksoper (opera) in Vienna, and later he moved back to Poland. In 1933–1935 he was the conductor of the Grand Theater<sup>23</sup> in Warsaw, and in 1935–1936 he was a member and the conductor of the Warsaw Philharmonic. By the late 1930's, Bronisław was recognized as one of the most prominent conductors of the 20th century. He was murdered by the Nazis during the Warsaw Uprising.

### Emma Wolfsthal (daughter of Maurycy)<sup>24</sup>

Emma was educated under her father's direction at the Conservatory in Lviv. She continued her musical studies at the Academy of Music in Berlin. She began giving concerts early and performed in Lviv, Cracow and many European cities, including Vienna in 1908, and then in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Munich and London. She was active in her hometown from 1920 as the second concertmaster of the Lviv Opera Orchestra in the Grand Theatre<sup>25</sup> and as a teacher in the 1930s in the Conservatory of the Galician Music Society. During the first and second Soviet occupation she worked in opera. In 1946–1947 she worked at the Komedia Muzyczna Theatre in Szczecin. She then moved to Silesia and from 1947 she was a member of the orchestra of the State Silesian Opera in Bytom.

## Insights and Analysis

In the 19th century, poverty in Austrian Galicia was extreme. The reasons for this included population growth resulting in small peasant plots; inadequate education; primitive agricultural techniques; and a vicious circle of chronic malnutrition, famine and disease, which reduced productivity. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Austrian government and major landowners had little interest in reforms. In 1888, the book *Nędza Galicyi (The Misery of Galicia)* demonstrated with economic data that Galicia was one of the poorest regions in Europe<sup>26</sup>. These difficulties were suffered well into the 20th century and during WWI. The Jewish families of Galicia, which were a large part of the population, lived in a challenging economic environment, and had to find ways to adapt and survive the hardships of the time.

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<sup>23</sup> Teatr Wielki w Warszawie.

<sup>24</sup> An earlier biography of Emma Wolfsthal is included in L.T. Błaszczyk's bibliographic dictionary of Polish Jewish musicians (*Żydzi w kulturze...*, p. 283). Emma Wolfsthal was also extensively referenced in interwar Polish newspapers.

<sup>25</sup> Polish names: Teatr Miejski we Lwowie (1900–1918), renamed Teatr Wielki we Lwowie (1918–1939).

<sup>26</sup> S. Szczepanowski, *Nędza Galicyi w cyfrach (The Misery of Galicia in Figures)*, Lwów 1888, <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/37606/edition/34263/content> (14.07.2022).

The work described in this paper, which started as a limited genealogical study of the Wolfsthal family of musicians, gradually expanded to provide a broad view of the means by which the Jews of Galicia addressed the economic and social difficulties of their environment. These means varied between *lightweight adaptation*, e.g., name changes, to *radical assimilation*, a term coined by Endelman<sup>27</sup>. The specific means were determined by how members of the family viewed their present and future chances for success and happiness while remaining Jewish<sup>28</sup>.

### Naming

One of the most common forms of lightweight adaptation used by the Jews of Galicia was observed in naming schemes. It was very common to give newborns both Jewish names and Polish or German names. For example, Louis/Lazar and Arnold/Aharon. In the same vein, many members of the family changed their surname from *Wolfthal* to *Wolfsthal*, aiming to “Germanize” the sound of the name. The first occurrence of this specific surname adaptation was recorded in the end of the 18th century with one of the family forefathers in Husiatyn<sup>29</sup>. The bulk of these changes occurred during the second half of the 19th century, mostly in the 1890s timeframe.

### Assimilation

As described in the previous section, the family had religious Jewish roots. Some of the cantor’s descendants operated largely within their Jewish community. For example, Chune Wolfsthal, who was referred to as the Jewish Verdi, made a name for himself as the composer of operettas focused on Jewish history like *Daughter of Jerusalem* and *Bustenai*<sup>30</sup>. His brother, Josef David, performed as Badhan (Entertainer) in Jewish weddings<sup>31</sup>. Other family members expanded their horizon of making a livelihood and earned a living by performing to general audiences in theaters and entertainment venues. For example, during the interwar period, Abraham Ber Wolfsthal was the conductor of a small orchestra that performed in Vienna and in the same period, his cousin’s son, Henryk Wolfsthal, did the same in Bielsko in southern Poland.

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<sup>27</sup> T.M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, Oxford–Princeton 2015.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*; P. Jasnowski, Review of T.M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, “Acta Poloniae Historica” 2017, vol. 116, pp. 375–379.

<sup>29</sup> Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine (TsDIAL), Fonds 19, 20 and 146 (1789–1820), *Land Registries*.

<sup>30</sup> Stanford Libraries Search Works catalog, Microfilms 4018015 and 3134367, <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/3134367>; <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/4018015> (14.07.2022).

<sup>31</sup> S. Morgenstern, *In einer anderen Zeit...*



Other members of the family, e.g., Maurycy Wolfsthal, took the full route to radical assimilation as defined in Endelman's category<sup>32</sup>. Maurycy and his family converted from Judaism to Catholicism in order to better assimilate in Lviv, where Maurycy was a distinguished professor of the conservatory. Similarly, his cousin's son, Ignacy, converted from Judaism and his career took him to lead the orchestra of the Polish Railway. It should be noted that a large number of family members, including luminaries such as Bronisław, Henryk and Ignacy, were murdered by Nazis in spite of their assimilation in the local community, and regardless of their conversion. Other members of the family, like Emma, barely escaped. Indeed, at the end of the day, the members of the family could not escape their Jewish heritage.

### Living in Local, European and Global Venues

The economic impoverishment in Galicia also resulted in mass emigration<sup>33</sup>. Members of the family relocated from their birth places, seeking a better life and livelihood, especially in greater Europe. Not surprisingly, members of the Wolfsthal family engaged in their musical careers across Galicia (Ternopil, Lviv, Nowy Sącz) as well as across continental Europe (Vienna, Berlin, Warsaw), and the United Kingdom. One of them (Sigmund Wolfsthal, son of Josef Dawid) became a career musician in the Austro-Hungarian army<sup>34</sup>. This research, finally, revealed evidence of musicians from the family who settled and practiced music in the United States.

### Summary

This paper is an interim report about the Wolfsthal family of musicians from Galicia. What started as a genealogical quest of the family's roots, gradually expanded and revealed previously unknown facts and insights about this family, as a microcosmos of Jewish life in Galicia. Members of the family, many of whom made a name for themselves as exceptional musicians, sought different ways to withstand the challenges of their environment, and in doing so left their mark on music and humanity. Additional information about the family exists and will be published by the author in subsequent versions of this paper.

### Acknowledgements

The author, a member of the Wolfsthal family, deeply thanks the many historians, musicologists, friends and family members in Austria, Germany, Poland, UK, Ukraine, Canada, USA and Israel who supported this study.

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<sup>32</sup> T.M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold...*

<sup>33</sup> R. Manekin, *Galicia Chapter* [in:] *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/galicia> (14.07.2022).

<sup>34</sup> Multiple articles in *Wiener Zeitung* and *Dr. Bloch's Wochenschrift*, 1910–1914.

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### Abstract

This paper describes an ongoing extensive study focused on the Wolfsthal family of musicians. The family left its mark on the European history of music for several generations, in multiple locations and disciplines. While there exists prior research about this musician family, the current research is based on previously unseen documents and testimonies that were unravelled during several years of investigations in public and private archives, cemeteries, digital libraries and interviews of surviving family members.

**Keywords:** Galicia, genealogy, musicology, Wolfsthal