

I. Read the following sources

● **Sheindele the Chazente – Biographical Sketch.**

Type of source: **Musical program** of Sheindele the Chazente's concert at the Musical Arts Trio, December 24th, 1944. Part of the *Shandele di Chazante Papers* (1941-1963), Collection 3491, Box 1, folder 1. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



"Sheindele die Chazente" was born in Philadelphia as Jean Gornish, **the daughter of strict orthodox and Chasidic parents**, Mr. and Mrs. Shloma Gornish. She received her education in the Philadelphia public school, Hebrew and Sunday Schools, and was graduated from West Philadelphia High School.

Miss Gornish showed great talent for singing and pronouncing Hebrew words when a mere child, not even of elementary school level. Her childlike voice changed into a sweet and colorful alto many years before she finished elementary school. Thus, we find her the leader of her class in singing, and also a very **fine interpreter of cantorial music.**

After being graduated from high school, Miss Gornish received many flattering offers to appear in swanky nightclubs, and as soloist with outstanding bands [but] Her mind was already made up –to launch out on a **professional career as a woman cantor- as she expressed herself: "I shall dedicate my life to singing prayers of God."**

Under the professional name of **Sheindele the Chazente**, she had appeared, and with astounding success in concerts and recitals of **liturgical music** in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and lately in Chicago, Grand Rapids and many other cities. She also assisted in conducting High Holiday services as soloist in her hometown Philadelphia, as well as New York and Atlantic City.

Her great popularity in the concert stage gained for her the attention of radio sponsors. Since 1938, when her unique style of singing and colorful voice was for the first time heard on the radio, she has appeared on Jewish radio programs [...]

After an extensive study of the meaning and significance of the many cantorial compositions and prayers she sings, both on the concert stage and on the radio, Sheindele has started to preface each number she sings with brief explanations in English, elucidating the history and shedding light upon the background of each hymn and prayer, for the benefit of those who are not so well versed in the Hebrew.

Her latest endeavor is being **warmly endorsed by outstanding rabbis and prominent Jewish leaders all over the country** wherever and whenever she appears either on the concert stage or on the radio.

● **“Beautiful Girl Cantor is Dramatic in Recital”**

By C.J. Bullet

Type of source: **newspaper article**. Extracted from *Chicago Daily News*, Tuesday Dec. 26 1944. Part of the *Shandele di Chazante Papers* (1941-1963), Collection 3491, Box 1, folder 1. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Much as Father O’Malley’s boys of the Paulist Choir brought medieval Catholic Church music to a lay audience in Orchestra Hall last week, so on Sunday afternoon a **beautiful, slender, stately and earnest young woman, clad all in white, in the same auditorium, gave all the comers an intimate idea of time-honored Jewish liturgical chants.**

“Shandele the Chazante,” the girl is called, which being translated freely is **“the little girl cantor,”** and her name is Jean Gornish. She is of Philadelphia, daughter of **orthodox Chasidic parents.**

Her bringing of the ancient liturgical music of her people to the multitudes is less orthodox than the singing in secular hall of the Paulist Choristers.

For the Paulist boys, including the young sopranos, are a direct and simple reversion to ancient church practices, **while “Sheindele” intones prayers generally reserved for males.**

To a lay listener, the young woman’s such alto chantings (sic) were dramatic and right.

She offered no apology, in either word or manner, for what she was doing. **She gave the impression that she had as much right as a man to appeal to the God of her father to “cast not off our people,” to “hear our voice.”**

Her manner and her voice were dramatically easy and without restraint. Were (sic) she choose the secular stage, she would be an instant hit, or authoritative, so sure is she, **without sacrifice of feminine dignity.**

Her audience, naturally, was overwhelmingly Jewish, and the reception of each of her numbers **was proof positive that anything freakish there might be in her invasion of a man’s world** was overwhelmingly offset by her artistry. [...]

II. In groups, discuss the readings and answer the questions:

1. Where and when was Jean Gornish born?
2. What does the first article say about Jean's parents?
3. What kind of singer was Gornish? What was her stage name?
4. Was it common for women to become a *chazante*?
5. Why do you think the authors chose to write about Jean Gornish? What can we, as historians, learn from it?