

Sarai

A Chamber Opera

The story of Sara, Abraham and Isaac is told from the point of view of Sara, who is called in this work by her original name Sarai. There are countless versions of the legend, also countless – and contradicting- chronologies. This will be just one more tentative telling of the ancient tale.

The story is set in six scenes (plus prologue and epilogue) for the six wailings and cries that Sarai let out when she heard of Isaac's binding (sacrifice). Each cry contains a part of her biography in a loosely chronological order. Yet it is the emotional importance that drives the narrative more than historical facts or biblical literal meaning.

The sound of the shofar (ram's horn) is central to the story of Sarai. To this day on Rosh Hashanah the instruction is to take up the shofar (representing the taking of Isaac to Mount Moriah for sacrifice) and to blow the shofar (representing Sarai's pain and sadness when she hears of Isaac's binding). During the traditional Jewish holiday four different sounds of the shofar are used. These sounds and the shofar as an instrument are an organizing principle of this chamber opera.

The four sounds of the shofar are:

TEKIAH, a call for the individual to transcend to community, to gather for celebration – or for confrontation. To join forces for a challenge or join hands in gratitude or joy. It is a low blasting sound.

SHEVARIM, a wailing, mournful sound, hearing the brokenness of the world, a discord in need of resolution, a cry for healing and justice. It is a wailing undulating treble sound.

TERUAH, a wake-up call, an alarming sound, an urge to move forward towards meaning and knowledge. A treble sound, staccato-like.

TEKIAH GEDOLAH, a sound of hope in the ultimate triumph of goodness and joy. Related to the simple TEKIAH but three times as long.

(Examples of the different shofar sounds can be heard on YouTube. The interpretation above is taken from various sources, but primarily from Rabbi Donald Rossoff, Temple B'nai Or in Morristown, NJ.)

The Music of Sarai

The shofar plays a major role in the music of Sarai, serving as the primary indication of the larger musical structure by introducing each of the six scenes with its echo of one of the six cries of Sarai. It also concludes the six scenes by re-stating the TEKIAH GEDOLAH in the final measure of scene six. These scenes are framed by the prologue and epilogue, each of which is introduced by an echo of the shofar's TEKIAH GEDOLAH in the opening chords of the solo violin. The shofar also plays a structural role within some of the scenes, introducing changes of location or characters. In addition, the four sounds of the shofar are used as motivic elements in the development of the music, such as in terms of the rhythmic intensity of the TERUAH emerging as a driving force during the sixth scene, particularly in the instrumental depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac.

The characteristic G to D interval of the shofar's TEKIAH, SHEVARIM and TEKIAH GEDOLAH is reflected in the harmonic structure of Sarai. The first four chords of the work alternate between F minor and B minor, a diminished fifth that resembles but transforms the perfect fifths of the shofar sounds. The six scenes alternate between these two keys, with the scenes of conflict (2, 4, 6) in F minor and the scenes of reconciliation (1, 3, 5) in B minor and the closely associated keys of D major and G major. The alternation of keys also plays a motivic role, reflecting the conflicting worlds confronting Sarai: the destructive world of Abram's obsession and the supportive world of love and friendship. The increasing opposition between these two worlds comes to a head in the sacrifice of Isaac and Sarai's six cries following Isaac's re-telling of that experience. In those six cries, the opposing chords sound at the same time, in the moment when those worlds come into unbearable conflict for Sarai.

The conflict between those two worlds is also expressed in the rhythm and timbre of the music in the six scenes. As the opera progresses, Abram's world becomes increasingly dark and oppressive, reflected in the spare, stark voicing of the instruments that accompany his solos. His world also becomes increasingly conflicted, reflected in the increasing rhythmic uncertainty in his solos and in those of Sarai and Hagar as they speak of or become entangled in his obsession. The shifts of meter in Abram's, Sarai's and Hagar's solos create a world unstable, foreign and filled with turmoil. This comes to a head in the music of Isaac's sacrifice, in which the interjected exclamations of the B minor and F minor chords disrupt the already jagged and urgent rhythmic complexity of the music.

The thematic elements of the music also contribute to both structure and characterization in Sarai. In the first scene, Sarai's opening solo "When I opened my eyes" introduces a theme that is used for expressions of love throughout the opera; beneath that theme, the strings introduce the theme that is used for expressions of friendship, such as Sarai's opening solo in scene 3, "When I opened my tent". But these

two themes, integrated in Sarai's opening solo, separate as the opera progresses, rejoined only in the epilogue in the solos and duets of Rebekah and Isaac. That is the only time when the love theme is used in a multi-voice piece; though there are earlier duets, trios and quartets, they are set to the friendship theme. Abram, significantly, never joins with another character in a duet. He is alone even at the beginning of the opera, when he loves Sarai, and becomes increasingly isolated as the opera progresses.

Above all, the music in Sarai is intended to strengthen and deepen the libretto's deeply affecting expression of Sarai's story, inviting you to share in her joy and her grief, her love and her despair..

Cast of Characters

Eliezer, (Baritone) a man of Damascus and longtime servant of Abraham

Rebekah (Soprano), the future wife of Isaac

Sarai/Sarah (Soprano), Abraham's wife

Abram/Abraham (Bass), patriarch of the family

Pharaoh (Tenor), ruler of Egypt

Hagar (Mezzo-soprano), Sarai's maid and Abram's concubine, mother of Ishmael

Ishmael as boy (Alto), son of Abraham and Hagar

Ishmael as adult (Baritone)

Isaac as boy (Soprano), son of Abraham and Sarai

Isaac as adult (Tenor)

PROLOGUE

Eliezer, who was asked by Abraham to find a wife for Isaac, and Rebekah, the chosen bride, are traveling from Rebekah's childhood home near Haran to her new place in Canaan. There she will stay at the side of Isaac. Eliezer, Rebekah and their entourage are about to end the day's journey.

Characters: Rebekah, Eliezer

Rebekah:

We've traveled far, my friend.
Let's rest and make a fire.
And there with food and drink before us
You'll tell me of the place I will call home.

You've praised your master well
Held in esteem the house of Abraham.
Isaac's binding you related to my father
And the pain this other father must have felt.

Yet Isaac was son to a mother too,
A woman teaching him of love and beauty.
Who was she?
And what do you know of her?

Eliezer:

She was indeed a splendid mistress,
A princess with an ever open home.
Her dough increased tenfold,
Her light burnt bright and steady
The entrance to her tent was crowned
By heavenly clouds.
Such was Sarai, your future husband's mother.
Throughout her life she loved and laughed and grieved
- a long and complicated story...

Rebekah:

Man of Damascus, you must tell me more!
For I'm to take her place in Isaac's heart.

Eliezer:

The story goes:
When Sarai heard of Isaac's fate
She did emit six cries and wailings
Before her soul departed from her
And she perished. -
Alas, they got it wrong!

Although part of her soul has left her
When she heard of her husband's deed,
Sarai did not pass away.
Bravely she lived her life
Until her time on earth was up.
She did cry out though!
Six times
The shofar sounded.
And Isaac's mother
Voiced her joys and sorrows
To those willing to hear.

SCENE 1

This scene is about the love of Sarai and Abram, their growing up together, their friendship, marriage, and life in Ur, then Haran. It ends with the call of God to leave the homeland and emigrate to "the land I will show you".

*We hear the celebrating sound of the shofar, the TEKIAH.
Characters: Sarai, Abram, Eliezer in the role of narrator*

Sarai:

[Her opening words correspond to the TEKIAH]
Praise be to God
For I knew the blessing of love.

Beginning of Aria:

When I opened my eyes
He stood before me,
Handsome, smiling,
With open face and open mind.

He guided me through childhood,
We laughed and played,

Shared chores and celebrations,
Year after year, until one day...

Abram:

...Looking at Sarai,
I was blinded by her beauty,
Her voice the only sound
I could still hear.

When she touched me
I changed from brother
To lover
From childish boy
To man.

Sarai and Abram

Abram:

You've moved my heart,
Sister and spouse.
With one gaze of your eyes
One link of your necklet.

Sarai:

I was yours, beloved,
And your desire was toward me.
You kissed my mouth
With kisses sweeter than wine.

Abram:

Many waters
Could not quench this love
Nor rivers flood it.
I was hers and she was mine.

Sarai:

As a fruit tree in the forest
So was my beloved among sons.

Abram:

As a rose among thorns
So was my beloved among daughters.

Sarai:

Abram then spoke these words
To take me with him
On life's journey:
"Arise, my fair one, come away.
Winter has passed,
The rain is over and gone.
The time of singing now has come
Let me hear your pleasant voice
Let me see your lovely face."

Abram:

And this was Sarai's wedding vow:
"Let us go out to the fields.
Let us see the vine flourish
And the tender grapes appear.
Where the pomegranate buds forth
I give you my love
And all the fruit I kept for you."

Sarai:

Our tent was strong as cedar
And our bed was soft and green.
Our love was strong as death,
Its fervor a great flame...

Eliezer:

Many a year they lived
In Ur as man and wife,
Took care of cattle and of sheep
And shared their joys and sorrows.

Thereon they moved to Haran
In search of fertile grounds
And of the promised nation.
They hoped for sons
To carry on what they began.

Yet still, the couple was not meant to rest.
Abram again heard God's command
To break up camp
And move to unknown lands.

SCENE 2

Sarai and Abram traveling to Egypt. Abram asking his wife Sarai to act as his sister to protect his own life. Sara in the harem at the Pharaoh's court. Encounter with Pharaoh. Telling the truth about her marriage. Leaving with gifts and Hagar as a handmaid and friend.

*We hear the wailing sound of the shofar, the SHEVARIM
Characters: Sarai, Abram, Eliezer, Pharaoh, Rebekah, Hagar*

Sarai

[Her opening words correspond to the SHEVARIM]

Have mercy on me, O God,
For I bore the betrayal of love.

Beginning of Aria:

As we moved on to distant lands
My husband too grew distant.
No longer could I see compassion
In his eyes, nor love or laughter.
He spoke to God now, not his lowly wife.
His passion aimed for greater things
Than love between a barren couple.
The promises of God he lived for -
Whereas I put my faith in him, my man.

When we reached Egypt
On our flight from famine
Abram approached my tent
With this request:

Abram:

Sarai, you are a woman
Beautiful to behold.
When the Egyptians see us
As man and wife,
They will kill me,
And let you live
For your great beauty.
Say, you are my sister,
That it goes well with me
Because of you

And that my life be spared
On your account.

Sarai:

What could I say but: Yes,
I will do anything
To save your life, my love,
My brother and my spouse.

Eliezer:

When Egypt's princelings saw Sarai,
Bright as the morning star,
They praised her divine beauty.
Magnificent the prize they paid
To Abram for his sister:
Cattle and sheep,
Camels and asses,
Men and women slaves
Changed hands.
Before Sarai herself
Was brought to Pharaoh's chambers.

*Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of SHEVARIM,
to mark the change of place within the scene.*

Sarai:

All through the night
I lay face down
And waited -
Waited to be raped.
Closed in by the dark
I pleaded with my God and with Abram.
But neither heard my cries.
Instead I heard the voice of Pharaoh
Wooing me with sweet words.

Pharaoh:

Behold, you are fair, beloved,
Behold you are fair.
Behind your veil
Your eyes are doves,
Your hair a flock of goats
Streaming down the slopes of Bakhu,

Your teeth white as shorn sheep
Who come up from their washing,
Perfect every one of them.
Your lips a scarlet riband
Gracing your lovely mouth.

Until the day breaks
And the shadows flee
I will hie to the mountain
Of myrrh and frankincense.
Come with me, my bride,
Come, my fair love.

Rebekah:

Sarai's new lord sounds kind and gentle,
He offered her his heart and land.
Did she still grieve for her lost love,
Long for her people,
Her own tent?

Eliezer:

Despair descended on her,
A gloom so deep it swallowed
Each and all in Pharaoh's house.
There was no joy in Egypt anymore.
Not one new child was born.
Life stood still.
At last Sarai told Pharaoh
The truth. She said:
"I am a married woman
And Abram is my spouse."

Pharaoh was well angry
With the man from Ur,
He scorned his guile.
For Sarai's sake though
He sent the pair away
Far richer than they came.
The mighty king commanded Hagar,
His own slave-daughter,
To serve the one
He himself would have
Loved to serve.

Hagar:

Sarai, my friend and mistress,
I am servant to my father's love now.
With Susinum I will anoint you
And dress you in a festive gown.
I will restore your star-like beauty
And see you home.

SCENE 3

Scene 3 is about the friendship of Sarai and Hagar, their living side by side in a male dominated world and giving each other comfort and joy and support. The scene ends with Sarai and Hagar agreeing that Hagar shall be surrogate mother for Sarai who cannot conceive a child of her own.

*We hear the celebrating sound of the shofar, the TEKIAH.
Characters: Sarai, Hagar*

Sarai:

[Her opening words correspond to the TEKIAH]
Praise be to God
For I knew the gift of friendship.

Beginning of Aria:

When I opened my tent
She stood there, before me,
Beautiful, smiling,
With open face and open mind.

We saw ourselves as sisters
We laughed and cried,
Shared chores and celebrations,
Year after year, until one day...

Hagar:

...Looking at Sarai,
I could no longer bear
Her profound sadness,
The constant yearning for a child.
Too strongly she reflected
My own need for a babe.
As handmaid far from home,
I was barren like her.

Sarai and Hagar

Hagar:

You move my heart,
Sister and friend.
In your eyes I see
The unborn son you grieve each day.

Sarai:

And you, Hagar,
You look at children too
With longing and with love
And miss one of your own.

Hagar:

I am still young.
I can conceive
A child for both of us,
A baby with two mothers.

Sarai:

Are you in readiness
To take Abram
As father of this fruit?
Will you lie with him
To come with child?
Do you feel strong enough
To face the pains of giving birth?

Hagar:

I am prepared to do and bear
What any mother must endure.
To have a family.
And children of her own
For soul and spirit to live on
In future generations
For years and years to come.

Sarai:

As a fruit tree in the forest
So will be our son.

Hagar:

As a rose among thorns
So will be our daughter.

Sarai and Hagar (Duet):

Our child is coming,
Skipping over the mountains,
Jumping over the hills.
For winter has passed,
The rain is over and gone.
The time of singing has come,
Of singing a baby to sleep
With pleasant voices
In perfect harmony.

SCENE 4

The friendship of Sarai and Hagar is sorely tested when Hagar conceives a child by Abram. All relationships change. And Sarai, Hagar and Abram have to find a new equilibrium. The life of the family and tribe is disrupted yet again when Abram enters his covenant with God.

*We hear the wailing sound of the shofar, the SHEVARIM
Characters: Sarai, Hagar, Abram, Rebekah, Eliezer*

Sarai

[Her opening words correspond to the SHEVARIM]

Have mercy on me, O God,
For I knew the falls of friendship.

Sarai and Hagar

Sarai:

How are you, Hagar?
Do you have good news for me?

Hagar:

Indeed, I do, my lady.
What you failed to do
For many years
I did achieve
In a short time:
I am with child.

Sarai:

At last a time of singing!
We'll sing a child to sleep:
A fruit tree in the forest,
A rose among thorns...

Hagar:

O, stop that childish talk, Sarai.
Those were mere dreams.
This is reality:
I, the Pharaoh's daughter,
Must no longer be
A slave and stranger
In your land.
I am the mother now,
Of Abram's son -
And, I might add:
I won his favor.

*Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of SHEVARIM,
to mark the change of dialogue within the scene. Sarai now confronts Abram.*

Sarai:

May the wrong done to me
Be upon you, my husband!
I gave my maid to your embrace
With pure intentions.
Yet when she saw she had conceived
She looked on me with great contempt
And claimed she'd won your favor.
Have you, again, betrayed our love?
And sacrificed it for your visions?
God shall be judge
Of your life and of mine

Abram:

I merely did obey
What God commanded:
"Look toward heaven"
He has told me,
"And count the stars
If you can number them.
For so shall your descendants be."

For this mission I forsake
All mundane matters.
The maid is yours,
Do as you please.

*Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of SHEVARIM,
to mark the change within the scene.
Hagar tells of her flight from and her return to Sarai and Abram.*

Hagar:

When I carried Abram's child,
Sarai treated me harshly.
And my lord neglected me.
I fled towards Egypt and
landed in the wilderness.
There by a spring
I met the grace of God
Whom I named Lahairoi,
The Living One That Sees Me.

The angel said he'd seen my sorrow
He told me to go back
To fulfill my sacred duty.
My offspring would be greatly multiplied,
That was God's promise.
And so I bore a son
And named him Ishmael
For the God who hearkens.

Sarai :

Our child has come,
Skipping over the mountains,
Jumping over the hills.

Hagar:

For winter has passed,
The rain is over and gone.

Hagar and Sarai (Duet):

The time of singing has come,
Of singing a son to sleep
With pleasant voices
In perfect harmony.

*Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of SHEVARIM,
to mark the last change within the scene.
Eliezer tells of the years after Ishmael birth and of Abram's covenant with his God.*

Rebekah:

So Ishmael was raised
By both his mothers,
Two women, who had dared
To be close friends again,
Sisters who had known
The falls of friendship?
Did they find new peace
Together as a family?

Eliezer:

They loved and tried,
Shared chores and celebrations,
Year after year, until one day...

... Abram, the aged patriarch,
Heard divine voices from above.
Who ordered him to change his name
To Abraham, father of many nations.
His wife, the mother of these peoples
From now on should be called Sarah.

Abraham was full convinced
He read the word of God Almighty
Who offered him - and him alone -
An everlasting covenant:
The promised land of Canaan
Would be his forever,
The promised son by Sarah
Would finally arrive -
Provided that he cut
The flesh of his own foreskin
And of those living in his custody.
Obeying God's command.
Abraham took Ishmael,
His thirteen year old son,
And all the males
Who were born or bought
Into his house

And circumcised them
That very same day.

Rebekah

Did not one single boy or man,
One mother, wife or sister,
Have any say in this?

Eliezer:

Our human dignity was sacrificed
For Abraham's grand mission.

SCENE 5

This scene is about the announcement of Isaac's birth and Sarai's great joy in motherhood. It contains the banishment of Hagar – seen as a liberation to set her free to build a life of her own, no longer slave to Abraham's house.

*We hear the celebrating sound of the shofar, the TEKIAH.
Characters: Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael (as a boy)*

Sarai:

[Her opening words correspond to the TEKIAH]

Praise be to God
For I was given a son

Beginning of Aria:

I did laugh once, it is true,
At God's untimely promise.
Now only - an old woman -
I should have pleasure
With my lord
Him being old as well?

But then I chose
Hope against hope,
Love over pride.
Back from Abimelech
And his unwanted favors
I did forgive my husband's

Disregard - again! -
For my well-being.
And at last my worn-out body
Conceived a child.
God has made me laugh
So all who hear this
Will rejoice with me
And my son will be named
Isaac, for he is laughter.

Hagar:

As a fruit tree in the forest
So will be your son.

Ishmael:

Your child has come,
Skipping over the mountains,
Jumping over the hills.

Sarai:

For winter has passed,
The rain is over and gone.

Hagar, Ishmael, Sarai (Trio)

The time of singing has come,
Of singing a baby to sleep
With all our voices
In perfect harmony.

*Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of TEKIAH but in its more urgent version, calling
people together to pay attention to Isaac's circumcision*

Sarai:

The child was only eight days old
When Abram took him to his tent
And circumcised the little one
To please his mighty God.

The baby didn't cry long.
For I held Isaac to my breast
And stilled his pain.
His brother though, he wailed

All day and night
Until at last he fell asleep.

Ishmael:

I cry for baby Isaac
Feel sorry for his woe.
And for myself I cry as well
'cause I remember
What father Abraham
Has done to me
Not long ago
There in his tent.

I am afraid
Of things to come
In father's house.
What will befall my brother,
A tiny nursling
Who is already circumcised,
When he grows up
To be thirteen like me?

What other sacrifices
Are in store
For him, for me
And for our mothers
Just so the patriarch
Is able to fulfill
This secret sacred covenant?

Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of TEKIAH, in a calmer tone this time, calling Sarai and Hagar discuss and plan their own future.

Sarai:

I did give comfort
To my baby boy

Hagar:

And comfort was much needed
For his older brother.
We mothers helped each other out,
We saw ourselves as sisters.
We laughed and cried,

Shared chores and celebrations,
A few more years...

Sarai:

...yet we had made a plan
To shield our children
And ourselves
From further discretion
By Abram's zealous goals
For future generations.

Hagar:

Let him pursue his promised nations.
Meanwhile Sarai and I would tend
The land there is
And care for our people.

Sarai:

At the feast of Isaac's weaning,
Hagar and I decided,
I would give my handmaid and her son
The freedom she attempted once,
So many years ago, all by herself.
I would send the pair away,
With words as harsh as were before -
But this time with a few provisions
So they might find that well again
And put up camp.

My friend no longer slave
But her own mistress.

Isaac and I, we followed soon
Weaned from the bosom of Abraham
And met our sister and brother
In the wilderness that is Paran.

SCENE 6

Scene 6 narrates Isaac's childhood with Sarai, Hagar and Ishmael; the boy's binding or sacrifice by his own father, and the return of Isaac and Ishmael back to Hebron and their mothers. Upon getting the news of Isaac's fate, Sarah cries out and faints. She and Hagar decide to part from Abraham and his religious dogma and to follow their own belief.

*We hear the wailing sound of the shofar, the SHEVARIM,
mixed with the alarming urgent sound of TERUAH.
Characters: Sarai, Abraham, Hagar, Eliezer, Young Isaac, Adult Ishmael*

Sarai

[Her opening words correspond to the SHEVARIM sound]

Have mercy on me, O God,
For I was robbed of a son.

Beginning of Aria:

In the open lands of our exile
My loved ones stood beside me,
Steadfast, beautiful and smiling,
With open face and open mind.

We saw ourselves as family
Two mothers and two sons,
Shared chores and celebrations,
Year after year, until one day...

My husband visited his sons
As was his right and custom.
This time though he requested
That Isaac join him on a journey.

Abraham:

Sarah, I want to lead my son
From boy to man, bar mitzvah.
Together we will make our way
According to my God's command.

Sarai:

Abram, I'm weary of divine commands
You obey from high above.
Too well I know the toll

They take on human lives below.
Yet I am nothing but a woman
You are the master of the house.
Go in peace, my husband.
Take young Isaac with you,
But take not him alone,
Let Ishmael, his brother, come with you
And Eliezer, our loyal servant, too.

*Instrumental interlude, retaking the sound of SHEVARI/TERUAH,
to mark a change within the scene.
Eliezer tells of the journey to the land of Moriah.*

Eliezer:

Three days we walked
Towards the high land of Moriah.
Then my master lifted up his eyes
And far-off in the distance saw a cloud
Resting on top of a mountain.
He commanded Ishmael
And me, his humble servant
To stay there with the ass.
He and the lad went yonder,
To worship their God.
With a burnt offering.

Abram put the wood on Isaac's back.
Took the fire in his hand
Likewise the knife
And they left together.
Yet before the two did disappear
Behind the mountain
We heard them speak
These words:

Isaac:

My father!

Abraham:

Here I am, my son.

Isaac:

Behold the fire and the wood,
But where is the lamb for our offering?

Abraham:

God will himself provide a lamb.

This instrumental interlude, retaking and expanding the sounds of SHEVARIM and TERUAH, tells the most dramatic part of the Akedah, the Binding of Isaac without words, using only sound and the imagination of the listeners to communicate the drama of Mount Moriah. After a change within the scene, we are back at the camp of Sarai and Hagar who are waiting for their sons' return.

Sarai:

For weeks and weeks
Hagar and I,
Two mothers without sons,
Shared chores and fears and worries
Until one day...

Hagar:

Sarai, I see them coming!
Back from the hills and mountains.

Sarai

Winter has passed
The rain is over and gone.

Sarai and Hagar (Duet):

The time of singing has come,
Of singing praise to our God
With pleasant voices
In perfect harmony.

Hagar:

How handsome is my Ishmael.
And Isaac too
He's surely now become a man.

Sarai:

A greatly troubled man,
He has returned, our Isaac.

Where have you been, my son?
What was your fate?

Isaac:

My father took me up the mountains
And then down into valleys
And up a mountain yet again.
On top of it
He built an altar,
Arranged the wood,
Prepared the offering-place.
But there was no lamb.

Abba took the knife
To slaughter me instead.
I was afraid
And helpless.
My hands and legs were bound.
I cried and wailed.
Then a great angel did appear.
He came from heaven
And called out to father:
"Lay not thine hand upon the lad,
And do not make a wound."

Sarai:

Woe unto you, my son!
Were it not for the angel,
You would have been slaughtered
There on the Mount?

Isaac:

Yes, mother.
Yes, I would have died.

Sarai:

No.
No!
No!!!
Woe.
Woe!
Woe!!!

Sarai cries three cries corresponding to the three blasts of the shofar and three wails corresponding to the three ululations of the shofar. Then she faints, overtaken by her strong emotion. This instrumental interlude retakes the sound of SHEVARIM in its most dramatic version. Then calming down and fading away. We hear first signs of the TEKIAH GEDOLAH, a sound of hope. Sarai is taken care of by Hagar.

Hagar:

Take heart, my sister,
For thankfully Isaac is saved
And safely back with us
As well is Ishmael.

Sarai:

I am aware of our good fortune,
And therefore try to make my peace
With Isaac's fate
And with my husband Abraham.

This man of God is lost
Without a sacrifice,
He needs well the emptiness of self
For his celestial communion.

You and I are different.
In every breath we draw
And then let out
We'll sense divine compassion.

We worship heaven
In the birth of our children,
In a moment of laughter
And in the hours of grief.

We see eternity
Not in the many sands
Along the edges of the seas,
But in a single grain of grit.

Each morning we say thanks
For the gift of
Our blemished souls and selves,
And celebrate another day.

Ishmael:

Righteousness and justice
Are the foundation of God's throne.
Happy are we
Who walk in the light of great mercy.

Isaac:

We shall rejoice all day
And to praise divine favor
Take up the ram's horn
And make a jubilant sound:

Hagar and Sarai (Duet):

As fruit trees in the forest
So will be both our sons.
For winter has passed,
The rain is over and gone.

Sarai and Hagar together with Isaac and Ismael (Quartet):

The time of singing has come,
Of singing praise to our God
With pleasant voices
In perfect harmony.

Epilogue

*Eliezer und Rebekah have traveled on.
They meet Isaac, who leads Rebekah in his mother's tent.
Isaac and Rebekah sing a love song that reminds us of Sarai and Abram.
Characters: Eliezer, Rebekah, Isaac (as a man).*

Eliezer:

My daughter, we are close now,
To your future husband's camp
For he dwells here, in the South,
Near the well of Lahairoi.

Rebekah:

Help me light off my camel,
Eliezer, and tell me

What man is this who walks
There in the field to meet us?

Eliezer:

It is my master, Isaac.

Rebekah:

Quick, man of Damascus,
Hand me my veil
That I might guard
My countenance.

Eliezer:

My master, we've come home
From a long and arduous journey.
I've brought your bride, Rebekah,
Her beauty yet to be unveiled.

Isaac:

Here, take some water, travelers.
Rebekah, still your thirst,
And wash your face,
Your hands, your feet.
Then I will lead you
Into my mother Sarai's tent
And take you as my wife.
I will love you greatly
And myself be comforted
After my mother's death.
A dough again will rise,
A light burn bright and steady.
The entrance to our tent be crowned
By heavenly clouds.

Rebekah and Isaac

Isaac:

You move my heart,
Sister and spouse,
With one gaze of your eyes,
One link of your necklet.

Rebekah:

I am yours, beloved,
And your desire is toward me.
You kiss my mouth
With kisses sweeter than wine.

Isaac:

Many waters
Will not quench this love
Nor rivers flood it.
I am yours and you are mine.

Rebekah:

As a fruit tree in the forest
So is my beloved among sons.

Isaac:

As a rose among thorns
So is my beloved among daughters.

Rebekah and Isaac (Duet)

Our tent is strong as cedar
And our bed is soft and green.
Our love is strong as death,
Its fervor a great flame.

