

# Bard College Conservatory of Music

## The Graduate Vocal Arts Program

presents

### Joseph Rumshinsky's *Khantshe in Amerike*

Thursday, May 14, 2026 at 7 pm  
László Z. Bitó '60 Conservatory Building

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The Graduate Vocal Arts Program in collaboration with the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research presents a performance of the music of *Khantshe in Amerike*, a 1912 operetta with music by Joseph Rumshinsky and lyrics by Isidore Lillian.

Premiered in New York City, *Khantshe in Amerike* was subsequently performed around the world. The show was a turning point in Rumshinsky's output, noted for having put "American rhythm" on the Yiddish stage for the first time, according to Yiddish theater historian Zalmen Zylbercweig (1894-1972). *Khantshe* was also a star vehicle which marked a pivotal moment in the career of singer, actor, and impresario Bessie Thomashefsky – grandmother of the late Michael Tilson Thomas, whose efforts at preserving this music were enhanced by scholar Ronald Robboy, without whose invaluable support we could not present tonight's program.

*Khantshe in Amerike* is a musical comedy whose action revolves around an independent minded young woman named Khantshe, who dresses as a man and becomes the chauffeur for the wealthy Rubin Goldhendler. The show uses humor to address serious topics including love, gender, and women's suffrage in turn-of-the-century America.

#### CAST, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Narrator	Jacob Altrock	Ensemble	Liz Boyle Daphne Buan Gyuri Kim Emlin Munch Evan Nelson Gimena Sánchez Rivera Leonor Vasconcelos
Zelda-Zlate	Louisa Gundeck		
Motl Motlson	Evan McMahon		
Khantshe	Laura Stanell		
Suzy	Stella Luan	Piano	Hyuna Shin
Sammy	Evan Katsefes		
Policeman	Shane Hall		

## SYNOPSIS

### ACT I

Khantshe's parents open the first scene. Motl, who lives off his daughter's earnings, bickers with Zelda-Zlate about the relative worth of men and women ("A man, a vayb"). Khantshe works in a paper box factory owned by Mr. Goldhendler, who had known her father in the Old Country where both were poor. Khantshe rebels against demeaning treatment by the factory foreman. She quits her job, dumps a pot of glue on the foreman's head, and leads a group of young women out on strike with the slogan "Long live women's rights" ("Vu iz Khantshe?"). She sends the women back to picket, but decides that she doesn't want to work anymore and will marry her fiancé Isidore, instead.

Isidore (a non-singing role) has just been promoted from box factory bookkeeper to Goldhendler's private secretary. His head having been turned by Goldhendler's daughter (and by her father's wealth), Isidore tells Khantshe that it would not be fair for him, a poor man, to marry her because he has nothing to offer. He breaks off their engagement. The factory women come to announce the success of their strike, but Khantshe is intent upon revenge.

### ACT II

Sammy the box factory elevator boy has also been advanced to the Goldhendler residence. He had previously declined the promotion because he wanted to remain at the factory with Khantshe, with whom he was in love. But now that she has left, he has no reason to remain.

Meanwhile, a new chauffeur has been hired: Khantshe, cross-dressing as a man! All of the Goldhendler women fall in love with "the chauffeur" (he has no other name) as Sammy, Suzy (the Goldhendler's maid), and the chauffeur all get to know each other better ("Kishef").

### ACT III

The Goldhendler family goes riding in their car, driven by the chauffeur ("Oytomobil"). Suzy, like all the other women, is sweet on the chauffeur, to Sammy's chagrin. Sammy, who alone intuits the chauffeur's true identity, wishes he had a chance with her (or him?) ("Ikh hob").

A women's suffrage rally has been scheduled. Khantshe, back in women's clothes, is the main speaker. The demonstrators, all dressed as suffragettes, march off stage, down the aisle, and out of the theater ("Suffragette Parade")

### ACT IV

The act opens in the seaside resort town of Long Branch, New Jersey, with the chorus singing about the pleasures of summer ("Akh, vi sheyn!"). Sammy and Suzy have a comic duet at the seashore ("Shvim!"). Isidore pleads with the nameless chauffeur not to trifle with the Goldhendler daughter's affections. The chauffeur, in return, lectures Isidore about trifling with the affections of a working girl (i.e., Khantshe herself). Still dressed as the chauffeur, Khantshe sings her title song ("Khantshe"). She leaves to change clothes, and Suzy comes upon an "unknown woman" in the chauffeur's room. Khantshe reveals herself and is reconciled with Isidore. Khantshe and her parents are reunited. Sammy and Suzy have also become a couple, consistent with the theater convention of the servant-class couple being comical foils for the main protagonists.