Journal of Synagogue Music

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LOOKING BACK/LOOKING FORWARD

מסתכלים אחורה/מסתכלים קדימה

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AND MORE!

Journal of Synagogue Music

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IN MEMORIAM

Our cover design by JSM Associate Editor Rav/Hazzan David Sislen illustrates the "looking back/looking forward" theme of this issue: At the top of the page, a passage from Salamone Rossi's Ein Keloheinu *(ca. 1622); in the middle, a more recent setting of this same text by Paul Kowarsky* z"l *(remembered in this issue on page 71); at the bottom, a string of zeros and ones, digits representing the technology that will accompany us into the future.*

GREETINGS FROM THE EDITOR

In ancient Roman religion, Janus, who gave his name to the first month of the Gregorian calendar, was celebrated as the god of transitions: gateways, doorways, beginnings and endings. He is depicted with two faces: one looking forward, and one looking backwards. The tradition of making "New Year's resolutions" rewards such introspection, looking back on the failings of the past year, and looking ahead to a time of success and accomplishment.

Our High Holy Day season is also observed with mixed moods. The first of Tishrei arrives without the revelry and parades that characterize the start of January, but the spiritual reflection that marks the Ten Days of Repentance is also mixed with joy. We welcome the opportunity to "clean the slate" and pray for a New Year of more Torah and *mitzvot* along with good health, *parnassah tovah*, and the love of family and dear friends.

The publication of this *Journal*, like all those of the recent past, coincides with the start of the new Jewish year. Unlike most other issues, though, this one, Volume 50, is taking advantage of its "round number" milestone to focus on looking backwards as a steppingstone to approaching the future. You will find several articles focused on the recurring question of how to balance congregational singing with the twin goals of preserving cantorial tradition and creating a meaningful spiritual experience for the *kahal* and for those who lead it in prayer. We have reprinted articles by Dr. Michael Isaacson and by Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller to remind us of the issues at stake, and to refresh our memories regarding the wise counsel they offer to help achieve those aims. An offering by Rabbi Margaret Wenig coincidentally offers reflection on the congregation's obligation to bless its cantorial leaders in their holy work, while another reprinted article by Diane Cover and Saul Wachs speaks to the role of beauty in facilitating our entry into the realm of the holy.

In many quarters, this past year has featured a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Reform movement's ordination of women as cantors. To mark that milestone, we are also reprinting Cantor Arianne Brown's thoughtful consideration of six female "*khazantes*" who made their marks well before women were officially recognized in that role.

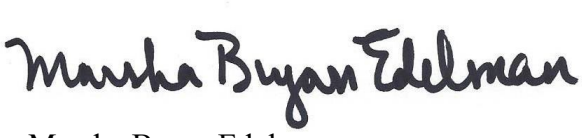
Some recent publications have also stirred this "past/present" reflection. Gilya Gerda Schmidt's biography of Hazzan Mordecai Gustav Heisler offers an appreciation of an early member of the Cantors Assembly, who brought the European sensibilities of his early years to his work serving Pittsburgh's Jewish community for some fifty years. Jeremiah Lockwood's study of "Hasidic Singers and Cantorial Revival in the Digital Era" describes the discovery and reenactment of the "Golden Age of *Hazzanut*" by a new and unlikely community of acolytes.

Unfortunately, this issue of the Journal also continues the tradition of remembering colleagues who have gone to their eternal reward during the past year. While we mourn the passing of Sholom Kalib, Jack Kessler, Paul Kowarsky, Beny Maissner, Aaron Marcus and Barry Ulrych, we celebrate the lives they lived and take inspiration from their good works. In

particular, our *Neginah L'Ma'aseh* section includes a lovely setting of the priestly blessing, "Blessing of the Children," by Hazzan Kalib.

This edition of *Neginah L'Ma'aseh* also includes music for a new *piyyut* by Zechariah Haber, *z'l.* Haber was a sergeant in the reserves of the Israel Defense Forces, and was killed in action in January 2024. His passing inspired the musical setting for his new text, *Minhah Hadashah,* and in so doing, encourages us to reflect upon all of our losses since October 7, 2023.

As we look forward, we pray that the year ahead will be blessed with peace.



Marsha Bryan Edelman

Not by might of voice, not by strength of talent alone, but by the sense of awe and fear, by contribution and the sense of inadequacy, will a cantor succeed in leading others to prayer.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, from "The Vocation of the Cantor"

OF TEXTS AND TUNES

Popular Music in the Synagogue: A New Look at an Old Issue

By Marsha Bryan Edelman

Shabbat Shirah, corresponding to *Parashat Beshallah*, is observed in many congregations with special musical services. A high moment for the cantor (second only to the *Yamim Nora'im*), the occasion is variously marked with "themed" services, choral performances (of both new and classic compositions), enhanced instrumentation and the like. Often lost amidst the hoopla, however, is a thoughtful examination of the inspiration for this ritual: the Torah portion's account of the Israelites' successful escape from Egypt, the miraculous splitting of the Re[e]d Sea, and the spontaneous chanting of *Shirat HaYam*, the first recorded instance of "congregational" singing in Jewish history. Though chanted from the Torah only twice annually among congregations that do a full reading rather than a triennial one (*Parashat Beshallah* and the seventh day of Passover), the moment, and this text, is so pivotal that it has become part of traditional daily services. But what did it sound like?

We are told that the Hebrews merited redemption from slavery because, despite the challenges of their situation, they managed to maintain their Israelite identities, but it is unlikely that there was a traditional "Avinu family melody" that infused their culture. Moses, who led the singing, had been raised in Pharoah's palace, and must have been surrounded by the best that Egyptian music had to offer. *Shirat HaYam* must have sounded like an Egyptian song, establishing a precedent for all Jewish music to follow: Jewish music has always sounded like the music of the majority culture in which it is immersed.

Is there a difference between "sounding like the majority culture" and wholesale appropriation of "foreign" melodies? Yes, but that distinction has not always been observed. The Hasidic practice of *khap'n a nig'n* (taking/appropriating a melody) is well known, but certainly not the only – or even the first example. There is evidence that, as early as the Temple era, some of the psalms were sung to the tunes of well-known secular melodies of the day, foreshadowing the popular contemporary practice of contrafaction (using a pre-existing melody for a new or different text): "upon [or "to the tune of"] *HaGitit,*" Ps.8, 81 and 84; "*Ayelet HaShahar*," Ps. 22; "*Shoshanim,*" Ps. 45, 69 and 80; "*Mahalat*," and "*Mahalat Le'anot*" Ps. 53 and 88; "*Yonat Elem Rehokim*," Ps. 56; "*Al Tashhet*," Ps. 57, 58, 59 and 75.) Of course, none of these melodies has survived, but there is another interesting observation to be made regarding these psalms: none of them is used in regular worship services.

This is not to suggest that there are no "traditional" melodies that have been influenced (or taken completely) from "foreign" sources. There is strong evidence that many of our most venerated melodies, including the so-called *MiSinai* tunes that infuse the High Holy Day liturgy, have their roots in secular, or even Christian, music of the Middle Ages. Solomon Sulzer (1804-1890) and Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894), who "re-invented" Jewish liturgy in the nineteenth century, took their musical inspiration from models like Franz Schubert (1797-1828) and Felix Mendelssohn (1808-1847). Much more recently, Debbie Friedman (1951-2011) took her inspiration from American folksong.

Yet even admitting these "foreign" influences, all of this music, ancient and modern, shares one important quality: it serves its text and the "weight" of the liturgical occasion on which it is sung. Times change, musical tastes change, and today's congregations want, most of all, to participate in their services. Congregational singing, pioneered at the shores of the Re[e]d Sea, is once again the dominant musical component of our services. How do we choose the music for our congregations to sing?

Many observers of the American Jewish synagogue note the emergence of congregational singing as a mid-twentieth century innovation, driven largely by the post-WWII return of young soldiers who had "saved the world from Fascism" and now wanted more agency in their religious life. Congregational singing, especially in the Conservative synagogue, actually had earlier roots, promoted by Conservative icons like Mathilde Schechter (1857-1924, wife of Jewish Theological Seminary Chancellor Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schechter) and Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983, later the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, but then a student at JTS) who both advocated for congregational singing as a tool to increase interest and participation among young adult worshipers. Unison adaptations of melodies by Sulzer, Lewandowski, Samuel Naumbourg (1817-1881) and Julius Mombach (1813-1880) formed the core of their earliest songster; later, melodies by brothers Israel (1879-1967) and Samuel (1891-1978) Goldfarb were included in the services, and in classes in "Traditional (aka "Congregational") Melodies" taught to JTS rabbinical students by Israel Goldfarb from 1920-1940.[1]

What is noteworthy about these early efforts in congregational singing is the source of the music chosen, all from revered composers of Jewish music, or, in the case of the Goldfarb brothers, new melodies imbued with a sense of the reverence and decorum that were the goal of these services. The publication by the Cantors Assembly in 1974, of volumes of *Zamru Lo* for Friday Night, Shabbat Morning and Festival services, edited by Moshe Nathanson, continued that practice, with a wider variety of composers represented, but a consistent embrace of *nusah* and accessible music. The most recent, "Next Generation" iterations of *Zamru Lo*, edited by Jeffrey Shiovitz and published in 2004, representing new composers as well as favorite "traditional" melodies, include chords, reflecting the contemporary trend to accompany most services, and a variety of livelier tunes, but still maintain a healthy respect for the texts.

And this brings us to the key questions in making choices regarding congregational singing: If communion and communication with God is the ultimate goal of our services, what do our musical choices say about achieving those goals? A recent thread on Hazzanet asked for nominations of melodies from the 1960's, '70's or '80's that could be adapted to liturgical texts. The question itself was surprising. The fact that there was a ready stream of answers was troubling; those answers were varied, but equally disquieting: *Ahavat Olam* to the Beach Boys' "Little Surfer Girl," or alternatively, to the theme song from *Phantom of the Opera*; *Hashkivenu* to the Beach Boys' "Don't Worry, Baby;" *Lecha Dodi* to "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." *Adon Olam* can be sung to virtually any melody. What do we gain by singing it to tunes from *Hamilton* ("I'll be Back") or *Wicked* ("Popular") ? Yes, by the end of a typical Shabbat morning service there is more thought being given to what will be served at *Kiddush* than to the lofty text of our closing hymn, but is it really appropriate to evoke laughter from the congregation?

[1] For more on the roots of congregational singing, see "The Development of Congregational Song in the American Conservative Synagogue: 1900-1955 by Geoffrey Goldberg (*Journal of Synagogue Music*, Vol. 44 No. 1, September 2019) pp. 35-88.

Some might agree that familiar secular melodies with no connection to Jewish tradition might be better saved for the *Purimspiel*, but what about Jewish or Israeli tunes? Are those more "Kosher?" Perhaps, yet even those pose problems. Is the juxtaposition of *Mimkomo* (*Musaf Kedushah*) with "*Erev Shel Shoshanim*" justified by their shared use of the word "*ahavah*?" Is it appropriate to bless the congregation with the now-famous melody for blessing the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces? Is the iconic *Acheinu* melody that has been added to our prayers since October 7, 2023 a suitable tune for blessing the new month?

Throughout our history there have been those who have objected to congregational singing on the grounds that the congregation that participates in such activity is more interested in singing than in praying. There are countless examples of worthy tunes – traditional and modern - that discount this concern. Let's raise the bar on congregational melodies, in hopes of educating our congregations and elevating our prayers.

Marsha Bryan Edelman is the Editor of the Journal of Synagogue Music

To sing means to sense and to affirm that the spirit is real and that its glory is present. In singing we perceive what is otherwise beyond perceiving Song, and particularly liturgical song, is not only an act of expression but also a way of bringing down the spirit from heaven to earth.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Music on the Balanced Bimah[1]

By Michael Isaacson

I take on this topic not as an ideologist for any one exclusive stylistic musical menu for Jewish worship, but simply as one composer who, having contributed both easy songs and more considered synagogue compositions to the repertoire, speaks on behalf of four types of musicians whose work and message need to be considered and heard.

First, I speak on behalf of those who believe in a philosophy of balance in worship music; a balance of style, content, and diversity for all congregants. Second, I stand for a cadre of distinguished composers who have, in the past, created a notable body of synagogue music that is lamentably being overlooked in our worship today: works for trained cantors and choirs that are accompanied by instruments other than the guitar and vocal forces other than unison singing. Third, I represent those who are presently composing choral settings and *hazzanut.* And finally, I'm here for the generation of younger, highly talented composers who have all but given up composing for a genre which, at the present, they perceive to be frivolous and unreceptive to their craft as seriously trained musicians.

In fact, for the past three years I've been contributing a column on today's precise topic to a periodical called *The American Rabbi*. I address and discuss Jewish musical ideas for rabbis who hold so much influence in shaping our worship music. My column is called *The Balanced Bimah*. Simply put, the column advocates balance as the key to how we best receive and use information and, in this afternoon's context, how we can best employ and appreciate both the literary and the musical aspects of an optimally effective Jewish worship experience.

Consider this: Our minds have both a cognitive function (the left side of the brain if you will) and an emotive function (the right side). When both sides are processing stimuli in balance we understand and feel on an infinitely higher level than if one side is dominant over the other. For example, when listening to a piece of music, what we cognitively know about its text, history, instrumentation, and architecture acts to enrich its sonic allure and heighten its overall emotional impact upon us. An elevated synagogue *bimah* and its pulpit leaders may be similarly understood as the right and left sides of our Jewish worship consciousness. The left side of the *bimah*, the rabbi, guides our cognitive understanding through words, while the right side of the *bimah*, the cantor, stimulates our emotions through music. When they are in confluent balance sharing the *bimah* equally, we are the fortunate beneficiaries of an extraordinary worship experience. This gets even more delicate when you consider that each rabbi has a left-sided Maimonidean rationality and a right-sided Shneur Zalman folksiness and each cantor has a left sided *nushaot* aspect along with a right sided *nigun* propensity. Each one and all four have to be in balance as well. However, if there's too much music and not enough rabbinic readings and commentary on the *bimah,* it is as unbalanced as if there is no music at all. If all we hear is one

[1] This essay is excerpted from the Keynote Address presented at a panel discussion, "Pushing the Limits: Tensions Between Text and Music in the American Synagogue" as part of a conference held at the Jewish Theological Seminary in November, 2003 to celebrate the creation of the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music. First published in the *Journal of Synagogue* Music, Vol. 30 No. 1, 2005, Isaacson's remarks continue to resonate. -- MBE

kind of music like guitar strumming and unison singing, the service is as unbalanced as if even the finest *hazzan* and choir precluded any congregational singing.

All styles of well-crafted synagogue music are welcome and necessary on a balanced *bimah*; the key phrase, however, must always be inclusive balance. Equally disproportionate is a service that presents musical or literary ideas that are too accessible or "popular." Judaism is a great religion that has sustained us because it has given us great spiritual ideas that were not always immediately accessible; as a result our people were challenged to grow, think, feel and act—*na'aseh v'nishma;* to do and to listen—and we were all elevated in the process. Today it seems that any thoughtful, contemplative silence during the service for any musical or literary concept that needs more than a nanosecond to fully comprehend is suspect and labeled as "heady or too intellectual." How the mighty idea has fallen.

Our worship services need to return and dramatically regain a sense of musical balance and heightened textual and poetic interest for all members of our congregations, for all worshippers of every age in every stage of their lives. Consequently, the solution is not a menu of divisional boutique services exclusively for specialized factions like singles, seniors, youth, women, or gay congregants. A devotional service should be about bringing us together in worshipping one God, not separating or categorizing different worshippers. This fractionalization policy affirms that our differences are greater than our commonalities. It treats Judaism as demographics not people-hood. We must return to the durable idea of *Am Ehad, Lev Ehad* – one people, one congregation.

The contemporary worship service, while engagingly eclectic, must be inclusive for all. When we discard this notion, we unmindfully forget history, we trivialize the present and we diminish hope for an elevated spiritual future as one unified people. I suspect that the Sephardic community over many years, in its adherence to one synagogue for all, has learned this lesson far better than the Ashkenazim. As in so many other areas of our lives today, ignorance is our common enemy and education is always our strongest ally. But it goes further than that. Not only must ignorance be identified, but effective education must also be focused and lavished upon those who influence and design our Jewish communal tastes. After almost forty years of presenting music and teaching at cantorial conventions, I now realize that I was literally preaching to the choir. Cantors knew something about their musical heritage and were not going about re-designing the synagogue service in 2000 by discarding a legacy of over 150 years of sacred music. Cantors weren't the pulpit leaders needing our guidance and instruction. Their *bimah* partners, the younger rabbis, however, our new leaders, are the clergy who more appropriately deserve and require effective music education, a sense of music history and an enlightened cultural direction. Rabbis, while well trained in talking, urgently need instruction and first-hand experiences in music listening to learn about the wealth of worthy sacred music that presently exists before they go about running a wholesale cultural clearance sale. I don't think our rabbis set out to be cultural ax men or ax women. If you ask any rabbi. he or she will profess a profound love of Jewish music; and I believe them. It is not their *n'shamah* that is in need of repair; it is their musical lack of knowledge, their absence of music historical perspective, and their dearth of personal listening experience. When it comes to understanding our *yerushah*, our legacy of Jewish music, most rabbis are like those limited souls who, when invited to an elaborate smorgasbord, eschew the gourmet delicacies laid out before them because they've only munched on hot dogs and s'mores over a campfire.

Is it any surprise? Rabbis have been given too little musical education as children; they probably don't play an instrument other than the guitar (if one at all), and are given no serious, substantive, cumulative, Jewish music education. They probably have never sung in a legitimate choir, they rarely attend classical music concerts, and most of their first-hand Jewish musical orientation and information comes from the few weeks when they attend Jewish summer camps. Is it any wonder that rabbis believe that camp songs make up the sum total of the Jewish musical universe? Yet, these are the leaders, not the cantors and music directors, whom we now entrust with our present and future musical content, values and decisions. Clearly rabbis should not be singled out as the only cultural culprits; they are most ably encouraged and abetted by the budget watchers on our temple boards … but for quite another reason than esthetic preference. A cantor, choir and organist are simply more expensive to financially sustain than a song leader with a guitar. It is much cheaper to buy into a "cross-over," homogenized, folksy sound than a more professional, comprehensive Jewish sacred music program.

Today it seems serious *hazzanut*, trained choirs and instrumental music are relegated mainly to the real moneymaker services, the High Holidays. Is profit on expenditure to be the primary criterion for our Jewish cultural goals now and in the future? Feeling the pressure of rising costs and dwindling congregations, board members seek a band-aid remedy by touting the new, in vogue, "Jewishness" of continuous congregational singing. They encourage their rabbis: "Let's get Friday Night Live or the BJ service and they'll surely cure our congregational problems." While these events are well attended by mostly young singles as inexpensive meet and greet dates and Friday Evening pre-pub hopping warm-ups, I challenge anyone here to report that temple membership or financial support of any substance has significantly increased by those singles (nor their bill-paying parents) attending these cocktail parties disguised as services. As a matter of fact, these events, perceived as "freebies" by the young singles, are, ironically, more expensive for their struggling parents' generation to regularly produce than elevated Shabbat musical services. Furthermore, I can guarantee you that the components of these "cross-over" musical "raves," predicated on an *au courant* timeliness, will become outdated even faster than what they have prematurely replaced. You might think "Michael Isaacson's got it all wrong! In the synagogue of 2000 we don't want to stay quiet and passively listen to a five- minute vocal performance by some *hazzan* or choir - we want to participate!" You know, it's funny but I never hear rabbis saying: "Instead of the congregation sitting down, becoming quiet and thoughtfully listening to me deliver a forty-five minute sermon, let's save some time and money and get a lay leader up on the *bimah* and the entire congregation can all participate in an enthusiastic free for all about what they think the *parasha* is about!" I don't see rabbis abdicating their professional homiletic and pedagogical mission, but I do observe them asking the cantors to abdicate their musical calling in favor of a lesser one. Again, why should we be surprised? Rabbis and temple boards are People of the Book not People of the Score. When it comes to words; rabbis understand the spiritual importance of periodic congregational silence and thoughtful listening in contrast to continual congregational speaking. In regards to words, rabbis comprehend that our services must include active listening, reflection, and learning. What our rabbis, in this generation particularly, have yet to be effectively taught and fully appreciate is the value of a congregation's periodic silent attention to sacred musical enrichment as well.

So, how do we regain a balance between the spoken word and a thoughtful, mature appreciation of the best sacred musical settings of our liturgy? I would suggest that it is not the existing musical settings that are musty and need replacing so much as it is the sub-standard

performances that they receive by inadequately trained singers and soloists with too little rehearsal time. When you hear magnificent performances of our best compositions, the music clearly shines through. From time to time, we, unfortunately, hear a less than dynamic rabbinic sermon diminish the brilliance of a weekly Torah portion, but we don't throw out the Torah. In more capable hands, or with greater preparation time, the same truth will shine with inspired, insightful light. It is the same with *hazzanut* and choral synagogue music; we must learn to distinguish the skill of the musical messenger from the intrinsic value of the musical message. So, the first step in musically balancing the *bimah* is enlightening rabbis, temple boards and congregations to the great legacy of our existing Jewish music through the very best performances of it both live and on recordings. Rabbis and congregations need to actively listen, not just mindlessly hear, they need to learn the *midrash* of this music before they discount, dismiss, and discard it.

Balance, balance, balance shalt thou pursue, both in life and in worship. When we achieve a balanced *bimah* we also affirm God's gift of musical awareness. Our congregations are diverse, polyglot assemblies that need diverse tastes satisfied by the best elevation of both the spoken word and synagogue music of all styles and all periods. Simplistic, juvenile liturgy and adolescent camp music demeans our religious maturity as a people. But before we can offer the widest menu, we must educate our leaders about the profound jewels that lie before them. Do we throw out rabbinic *midrash* because it's more than a few years old? Why are we doing this to our musical *midrash,* our synagogue music? We need to regain and rededicate the temple for all Jews of every age at every stage in their lives. Balanced, intelligent, creative eclecticism is the most effective way to attract the widest cross-section of our community back into one unified service. Undoubtedly, the service has to sparkle. Our rabbis have to be better and more knowledgeable and our cantors, singers and instrumentalists must be first-rate as well.

There has never been a viable alternative to quality control in business, art, or in effective worship. But let us always remember that quick fixes fall into disrepair just as quickly. When we achieve a balance in content by educating our leaders, when we balance and treasure the classics along with encouraging the innovative, and when we balance the more lofty, less immediate idea with the "fast-food" accessible bonbon, we will ultimately realize the success of a truly balanced *bimah*.

Let me close with an anecdote that will add a finer perspective to the still bigger cultural dilemma. When I was first starting out in Los Angeles as a motion picture composer I was assigned a symphonic orchestra to perform my dramatic scores each week for the first of television's mini-series, "Rich Man Poor Man." Then some years later, because of economics, I was asked to cut down the orchestra from a 30-member string section to 15 live players and include a string synthesizer to give the illusion of a robust, full string section. Still later I was asked to replace all the live string players with two string synthesizers and winds and brass emulators. After a few more years, new, younger producers who were never brought up on the beauty of a live string section would ask me "Can you give me a score with that real string synthesizer sound?" My friends, that's how the myopia and hyperbole of culture drags us all down. First it is temporary economics, and then it becomes economics with aesthetic rationalization, and finally with lack of memory and ignorance the trivial substitute is hyped as an equally elevated concept. But, the truth is, it is not, and in the process of fooling ourselves into thinking it is, our cultural thresholds are inevitably and consistently lowered. Somewhere we

must stand up and observe, “The Emperor has no clothes!” Will our cultural values as Jews resist this all too slippery slope and be renewed by the enlightened possibilities of the Milken Archive? Or will this recorded repository merely serve as an aural museum of the great and majestic musical treasures that we once possessed and held dear in the not so distant past? *Shuvu b’nei adam* – I pray that we, as a people, once again regain our equilibrium and return to a balanced *bimah* of unified worship that inspires us through the greatness of both words and music. *Shuvu b’nei adam* – Only then, when this synchronistically balanced *bimah* once again advocates higher standards over mere expedience, and the poetic over the sound bite, will we be re-elevated and be re-empowered to go up, grow up, and ascend the Mountain of the Lord. *Kein y’hi ratzon*, may this elevation return in our lifetime.

Born in Brooklyn, NY and schooled at Hunter College (BS Music Ed.), Brooklyn College (MA Composition), Juilliard (Keyboard studies with John Mehegan) and The Eastman School of Music (Ph.D. in Composition), Michael Isaacson, while earning his living as a teacher, professor, film composer, orchestrator, conductor and album producer, has conducted and recorded with many orchestras in the U.S., Europe and Israel. After creating a dynamic collection of new American Jewish camping settings for summer worship for NFTY (the Reform movement’s National Foundation of Temple Youth) he quickly began accepting commissions for original synagogue works from temples and synagogues throughout America. He also composed and produced performances of over 1000 compositions for orchestra, chamber music, solo instruments, choir and vocal soli. He composed and recorded the largest synagogue sacred service commission entitled L'Ma’asei V'reisheet. *It was collectively commissioned by 43 synagogues throughout North America in honor of the Millennium in 2000 when it was simultaneously premiered on* Shabbat Shirah. *He also conceived the notion of the Milken Recorded Archive and produced the first 13 CDs of American Jewish music for the Milken Archive, which now numbers over fifty albums. For his lifetime musical and educational achievements, in 2017 he was awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters* Honoris Causa *from Hebrew Union College. Semi-retired in Boynton Beach, FL, he has just completed his sixth book and fourth novel entitled "Renaissance Man." Cantor Arianne Brown and he are in the process of recording a new album of twenty of his original Jewish holiday songs accompanied by either piano or guitar entitled* A Good Year. *Dr. Isaacson may be contacted at* eggcream18@gmail.com.

Religious music is an attempt to convey that which is within our reach but beyond our grasp.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Cantor's Spiritual Challenge: Defining "Agency" In Prayer

By Benjie Ellen Schiller

It is not proving easy, in a spiritual sense, for *sh'lihei tsibbur* to lead congregational singing in today's synagogue. The problem lies not in the lack of enthusiasm or interest of the congregation. In fact, our congregants appreciate the importance of music in prayer more than ever before. They are actively involved in the service and singing enthusiastically. There is, however, a lack of inspiration coming from *us*, the cantorial leaders. We are finding ourselves singing/chanting the same pieces, week in and week out, with the same expression for every service.

We come to our profession with hopes of bringing *kavvanah*, spiritual intention to prayer. We come to our congregations knowing that the music and texts of our tradition, when sung from the heart, have the power to bring holiness and wholeness to a broken world. But in the midst of today's liturgical styles we cantors seem to have only limited opportunities to bring that expression to the service. So much of today's synagogue music is sung by the entire congregation. The cantor of today functions, to a great extent, as a leader of community singing. The prayers are largely a group rendering, necessitating particular styles of repertoire, a diminished solo role for the cantor, and limited avenues for particular kinds of cantorial expression.

Clearly, our congregants need to hear and to sing the familiar music they know and love. We *sh'lihei tsibbur* understand and appreciate the idea that singing the familiar tunes and chants is *prayer itself* for those who regularly come to our services. Contrary to our own experience as leaders, the congregation finds the routine of the musical liturgy renewing and spiritually sustaining. (And so it has been for as long as prayer has existed.)

The problem, as I see it, is that we professionals are becoming spiritually disenfranchised from the congregations we lead. What congregants see as an ambiance of stability, rootedness and comfort, cantors view as a limited venue for expressivity and prayerfulness. Sameness, we are finding, can lead to dullness. We risk our own prayers becoming rote and devoid of inspiration. Our language of prayer has consisted of a musical repertoire rich in an array of cantorial styles. We yearn for the inspiration such a complex repertoire provides us. Yet the congregation's need to sing the familiar tunes limits our possibilities for varying the repertoire and developing a balance of expression and style in the music. We lose our interest musically, and in the process, lose our interest spiritually.

Perhaps some of the challenge resides within us, the leaders. When we lead the congregation in the same music for the hundredth time it is hard for us not to become set in our ways of expression. Whether it be a folk song, a simple chant, or Sulzer and Lewandowski, one should render the prayer with conviction. The focus should be *how* one sings to God. We understand the language of interpretation and expressivity in our solo or choral repertoire. In contrast, to be quite honest, a hundred people singing the same unison melody every week is about as graceful and heartfelt as a herd of elephants marching all at once. How can we leaders prevent the deadening of a prayer when its musical rendition bores us to tears? How can one derive meaning from music that becomes tiresome?

I know what you're thinking. It's that same old tired tune. How can I find meaning or inspiration when the music simply becomes *too* familiar? How about spontaneity in prayer, some sense of the unexpected? We long for subtlety and fluidity in the music, a variation of tempi and dynamics. Is such expression possible when all sing together?

The truth is that we all desire genuine, heart-filled expression. It is a misconception that the people we serve want to sing the liturgy exactly the same way every time they pray. They might think that's what they want, but I beg to differ. They know dullness and monotony when they hear it. They feel as unmoved as their leaders when prayer has no spark of life.

Perhaps the sameness or the routine need not necessarily lead to dullness. I propose we not go into cruise control the minute we hear/play the introduction of a familiar piece and begin to sing the first notes. Our expression need not be identical to what it was the week before. Each day is new; each prayer offers a new opportunity for reaching further. The innate capacity for expressivity lies within each of us, from the professional musician to those who cannot carry a tune. It takes compassionate, sensitive leadership to enable the entire congregation to sing with tenderness, intensity, or playfulness. Such emotion can be modeled and taught. The challenge lies mostly in our attitude, both musically and psychologically. Consider the following:

1. **We must re-examine the way we measure excellence in the music of our service.** In the performance world, musical excellence involves the rehearsed performance of a solo or ensemble performed by professionals and usually involving complex music. The goals are technical proficiency, artistic mastery and interpretive expressivity. In the prayer world, musical excellence require sincerity in one's expression, a clear connection to the text, musical mastery and communication that moves others to pray.
2. **To take the simple and make it holy requires compassion and patience.** The singing of music that invites participation is a prayerful and sometimes cathartic experience for others. Our job is to find ways to create such moments within each musical style we offer.
3. **The usage of participatory music in the synagogue need not negate the usage of all other cantorial music.** Since when has the singing of one musical style preempted the singing of other styles?
4. **Many creative possibilities exist for growth and change in your service.** The key is balance. Think holistically about the flow of the service in its entirety. When changes are presented sensitively, miracles are possible.
5. **Artistry in prayer comes from one's intention as much as from one's performance.** When a leader merely "gets through" a prayer, saving the real expression for other pieces, what is the message that is conveyed? Our goal is to uncover the prayer within *all* of the music, whatever the musical style.
6. **Spontaneity is not a lost art.** Variation is a given in the interpretation of both cantorial and folk music. Why not enliven and vary the ways we render such pieces? Is there only one accompaniment and one tempo for *Oseh Shalom*? Try to experiment with tempi, dynamics, etc., so as to render more expressively those

works with no set arrangement. Prepare the accompanist — or choir, in a traditional synagogue — with several arrangements of a given piece. Trust your instincts. Respond to the mood of the congregation in the service. Be ready to choose the arrangement of the piece that best expresses that prayer, at that moment. Your accompanist or choir leader needs only a cue and a page turn to follow you.

7. **Remember that the piece is still meant for the congregation to sing.** Strive for expression that enriches the piece without overwhelming the inherent character and shape of the melody. The goal is not to confuse the congregation.

8. **Use the choir as plants.** Teach the melody of a new piece to the choir at a rehearsal before the service. Spread out the choir members among the congregation. Empower them to be leaders to support the congregation's learning of new repertoire. (Merri Arian, Professor of Practice in Liturgical Arts and Music Education at the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music of HUC, suggests the choir not sing a full arrangement with harmony until the congregation has mastered the piece. When the congregation can comfortably carry the melody on its own, the choir may add the new harmony.)

9. **Be present and attuned.** Strive for *tsimtsum* to empower the congregation to sing with confidence. (Hold back and listen at every possible opportunity.) Try to receive as well as give. Our congregants can become a heavenly choir if we let them.

The sacred enterprise in which we are engaged demands our attention to prayerfulness, whatever its musical language. We will continue to strive for a healthy balance of musical styles; this is our mandate. But let us remember that God's presence resides not only in the music we love but also in the melodies we struggle with. May we bring openness and understanding to these challenges, ever striving to sing the songs of our people with renewed vigor and sacred intention.

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The *Khazntes*-The Life Stories of Sophie Kurtzer, Bas Sheva, Sheindele the Khaznte, Perele Feig, Goldie Malavsky, and Fraydele Oysher

By Arianne Brown

Introduction

Long before women could even dream of becoming cantors, long before the cantorial schools of any denomination even considered accepting women, long before women's voices were heard on a *bimah*, there were a few special women who challenged the confines of tradition and dared to dream.

Jewish tradition silenced the voices of many women — women who may have been able to use their voices within the parameters of Judaism to sing to God, to inspire others and to uplift the spirits of their people. Due to social confines and issues of *kol ishah* — the rabbinic notion that a woman's voice can be seductive and thus should not be heard — women were not encouraged to sing in public. Young Jewish boys learned how to *daven* and read Torah. They were encouraged to use their voices to express their religious feelings. Young girls did not receive the same encouragement or education. They often learned Yiddish folk songs from their mothers and were familiar with the prayer services and Sabbath-table *zemirot* that they heard frequently, yet they remained quiet. One has only to walk into one of many synagogues today in which there is separate seating to observe the phenomenon of fervent prayer on the men's side in the form of lively singing, and equally fervent prayer on the women's side — escaping from closed lips that barely make a sound. Both types of prayer can be valid and beautiful. What happens, however, when the silent plea is not enough and a woman needs to express herself through singing?

There is no proper term to describe the women who will be discussed in this article. They were not cantors, for they were not formally allowed to lead congregations in prayer, yet their heartfelt renditions of prayers undoubtedly caused their audiences to experience emotion and to pray. Many of them were called *khazntes*. The Yiddish feminine ending for the Hebrew term *hazzan* (cantor) literally refers to a cantor's wife. Yet when used in conjunction with these women's names, it was understood to mean a female cantor or a woman who sang cantorial music.

What caused these six women to rise to fame in a field occupied only by men? Surely there had to have been other women who attempted to sing *hazzanut*. What was it about these six women that allowed them to break through the barrier of gender associated with cantorial music?

There are four common denominators among the six *khazntes*. The first is their immersion in a world of Jewish culture and *hazzanut*. Each of the six women came from a musical family. Sophie Kurtzer's father and husband were both cantors. Bernice Kanefsky (Bas Sheva) and Goldie Malavsky were daughters of cantors as well. Jean Gornish (Sheindele) was from a musically talented family. Both she and Goldie Malavsky had their first singing

experiences around the Shabbat table. Both women's brothers describe the wonderful harmonies their families would create around the Shabbat table as neighbors came and sat by the windows to listen. Perele's father was a lay *ba'al tefillah*, and her brother was a synagogue choir director. Fraydele Oysher was a descendant of seven generations of cantors and the sister of the famous cantor Moishe Oysher (1907-1958). Each of these women was deeply immersed from her earliest days in a world of *hazzanut.*

The second common denominator among these women is their vocal talent. While there were other women who attempted to sing cantorial music, these women had the talent required to perform it successfully. Furthermore, they shared similar vocal qualities. The *khazntes* all sang in a low chest register. They listened to recordings of famous cantors and tried to imitate them, pushing their alto voices as low as they could possibly go. Sophie and Sheindele sang in contralto keys with a quality that could cause confusion about whether the singer was male or female. Perele Feig, whose voice actually sounded like that of a man, was the *khaznte* who remained closest to the male cantors. Goldie Malavsky sounded like a boy alto. Bas Sheva's and Fraydele's voices were clearly female, though they almost never made use of their head register and instead carried their low chest register as high as possible. Most people were not ready to accept women singing *hazzanut*, even outside the context of the synagogue. However, if the women sounded like men, there might have been an aspect of psychological comfort that allowed greater acceptance than would have been the case with the soprano voice.

The third common characteristic among these women is their possession of strong personalities and progressive attitudes. They all had to advocate for themselves in order to advance their careers. They were famous because they were novelty acts. Yet, had they been male, they would not have had to fight for their right to sing *hazzanut*. Perele Feig was able to seek fame as a singer of *hazzanut* while living among traditional Jews and maintaining her Orthodox lifestyle. Sheindele, as a teenager, bypassed her parents' strong feelings against her singing *hazzanut* while not availing herself of opportunities to become a popular singer. Singing songs was insufficient; only *hazzanut* satisfied her soul. Fraydele moved away from her parents at the age of fifteen and came to New York to pursue a singing career. Because there were no Yiddish shows that featured a *khaznte* in the lead role, she had Yiddish playwrights and songwriters create shows for her, providing her with the opportunity to sing *hazzanut* on the Yiddish stage.

Finally, each of these six women had a deep love and passion for *hazzanut*. This love steered their hearts and their lives in an unusual direction. Their contributions to the world of Jewish music are immeasurable, for they created deep impressions upon all who heard them and certainly caused many people to think about the role of women's voices in Jewish music. The *khazntes*' prayers were not silent; rather, they were broadcast, recorded, and preserved for future generations. Their stories and their voices deserve to be heard.

Lady Cantor Madam Sophie Kurtzer (1896-1974)

> To begin listening to this recording without prior knowledge of who is performing can be an unsettling experience. The voice is uncanny; it is not quite feminine, nor is it masculine. The image that comes to mind is that of an unusually robust boy alto on the verge of a voice change. It is a sound apparently cultivated through direct imitation of cantors.[1]

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* of April 25, 1921 tells an interesting story involving Sophie Kurtzer. The headline reads: "Concert Fund, Manager Flit, Crowd Riots — Artists, Unpaid, Refuse to Give Program." The article tells of a concert about to begin when it was suddenly discovered that the concert's promoter had walked away with the concert proceeds. Upon hearing the news, the artists — Sophie Kurtzer, advertised as "the only woman cantor in the world," and Piastor Borissoff, a Russian violinist — refused to perform until they were paid what they had been promised, despite the two thousand people who were crowded into Carmen's Hall.

The crowd clamored for the concert to start. After some pleading, the artists agreed to perform part of their program. Despite Sophie Kurtzer's singing of "a number of Hebrew hymns" and Borissoff 's violin playing, some audience members still felt they had not received their money's worth. The story ends with a police search for the culprit.

We learn several things from this incident. First of all, Sophie Kurtzer, along with one other performer, was able to attract two thousand people to the concert. Although she was only twenty-four years old at the time, and had not yet released her recordings, she must have already made a name for herself. How she accomplished this is a mystery. There is no evidence of Sophie singing on the radio, and even if she had, no national radio network existed at the time.

While the amount of discovered information about Sophie Kurtzer is not great, her voice has been preserved on three modern recordings. The first is called *Di Eybike Mame*: Women in Yiddish Theater and Popular Song, 1905 — 1929, released in 2003 by Wergo Records. Listed as "Lady Cantor Madam Sophie Kurtzer (*Adesser Khaznte*, Cantor from Odessa)," Sophie's *Kiddush* for Shabbat evening is included in this compilation. The same piece is included in a CD entitled *Mysteries of the Sabbath — Classic Cantorial Recordings:1907-1947* produced by Henry Sapoznik and Richard Nevins on the Yazoo label in 1994. Sophie is the only woman included among cantorial masters such as Yossele Rosenblatt, Gershon Sirota, Zavel Kwartin and David Roitman. The last of the three modern recordings that include Sophie Kurtzer 's *Kiddush* is a new 2005 release by Tara Music entitled *Great Cantorial Singers: Masterpieces of the Synagogue*, which also features the voices of Bas Sheva, Sheindele, Perele Feig, and Fraydele Oysher.

It is not apparent whether or not Sophie Kurtzer was aware of how monumental her recordings were. While the other *khazntes* sought fame continually, Sophie did not pursue singing in the later years of her life. Perhaps the greatest impact she made during her lifetime was on her niece, Bernice Kanefsky, who would later rise to fame as "Bas Sheva."

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[1] Weiss, Samuel, liner notes to *Mysteries of the Sabbath* (Yazoo, 1994).

Bas Sheva — Soul of a People (1925-1960)

> Just a few years ago the entire musical world was saddened by the untimely death of Bas Sheva, the lovely young Pennsylvania-born singer whose magnificent voice had electrified theater and concert audiences across the country. The daughter of a cantor and concert singer, she sang the ancient Hebraic chants with a remarkable degree of authenticity and emotional expression, though as a woman, she was ineligible for the cantorial calling herself. This re-issue of her original Capitol album contains six prayers as they might have been sung in some little East European synagogue, or its counterpart in one of the great American cities where immigrant Jews settled." [2]

Bas Sheva became the lead singer in her husband Al Hausman's band, and together they performed at weddings and became popular in the "Borscht Belt" circuit of Catskills resort hotels: Youngs Gap, Gilberts, Pines, the Concord, and many others. The general layout of a Catskills hotel show would consist of a singer who performed a forty-five minute set, followed by a comedian who entertained for an hour.

Example 1. Publicity photo of Bas Sheva at the outset of her career.

Stylistically, Bas Sheva was a Catskills pop singer, molded in the style of Judy Garland, who had something extra special. Example 1 shows a publicity photo of Bas Sheva at the outset of her career. She would sing popular songs including “Rock a Bye Your Baby With a Dixie Melody” and “Flying Purple People Eater.” In the middle of her set, the lights would dim, a drum roll was heard, and Bas Sheva would put on a lace head covering before singing a big cantorial number. This unique versatility was what set her apart from other female singers.

The audiences reacted most strongly to Bas Sheva's singing of *hazzanut*. Only ten years had passed since the end of World War II, and many a Holocaust survivor in the Catskills crowds broke out in tears at Bas Sheva's cantorial renditions. It is reported that the comedians could not get a laugh out of the audience after Bas Sheva sang!

Mark Hausman, the only child of Bas Sheva and Al Hausman, has childhood memories of his parents renting a bungalow in the Catskills. Summertime was especially prosperous for the

[2] Liner notes to *Soul of a People*.

Hausmans, with Bas Sheva and Al being sought after by hundreds of hotels and bungalow colonies.[3]

Newspaper ads and reviews found in the *Miami Herald, New York Times, Los Angeles Times*, and even the *Christian Science Monitor* provide us with a tableau of highlights from Bas Sheva's career.

She appeared in a 1949 film called *Catskill Honeymoon* that was made as an advertisement for the Youngs Gap Hotel. The video of it, still available for purchase from the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University, features a variety of acts in a Catskill revue show, starring popular singers, actors and comedians. Bas Sheva is introduced as "a female cantor — a *khaznte*." She appears in a big fancy white dress with sparkling earrings and a lace *kippah*. A beautiful girl with dark hair and complete command of the stage, Bas Sheva sings Israel Schorr's famous *Sheyiboneh Beis HaMikdosh* with a deep, rich tone. She uses chest voice, and the cantorial *dreydlekh* (stylistic vocal turns in Eastern European *hazzanut*.) flow effortlessly from her mouth. Yet, her voice has a definite feminine quality to it. The second piece she sings is the tenor aria "*Vesti La Giubba*" from Ruggiero Leoncavallo's opera, *I Pagliacci*. It is easy to understand how Bas Sheva's audiences would have been completely captivated by her beauty, rich voice, command of the stage, and unusual repertoire.

In 1954 she came out with a solo album, *The Soul of a People*, for Capitol Records. On it, she sings the standard *Sheyiboneh Beis HaMikdosh* by Schorr, *R'tseh* by Aryeh Leib Schlossberg and *Habeit* by Israel Alter (a composition that her father had previously recorded). *Zorei'a Ts'dokos, Mi She-Osoh Nissim* and *Sim Sholom* — also included — appear to be original arrangements of standard cantorial material. In a review of this album, Hazzan Samuel Weiss describes Bas Sheva's voice as having the "bedrock of a cabaret singer" as opposed to the classical training of today's female cantors.[4] Newspaper reports list 70,000 copies of her album as having been sold throughout the United States and Europe.[5]

Bas Sheva's greatest fame came from her appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. While performing in a variety show at Miami's Mount Sinai Hospital, her talent was discovered by Ed Sullivan himself, the master of ceremonies for that night's benefit program. Little did he know that his invitation to Bas Sheva to perform on his show would cause so much controversy.

After she appeared on the Ed Sullivan show for the first time in 1956 with her standard *Sheyiboneh Beis haMikdosh*, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis wrote a letter strongly objecting to a woman singing liturgical texts on national television. Interestingly enough, they also opposed the fact that she had sung these texts without a head covering! They discouraged Ed Sullivan from having Bas Sheva on his show again. However, her fame was growing, and Sullivan looked beyond the angry letters and invited Bas Sheva back for another appearance in 1957. While she had appeared in the beginning of the lineup for her first appearance, her second performance

[3] Personal interview with Mark Hausman, 2005.
[4] Weiss, Samuel, posting to Jewish-Music@Shammash mailing list, March 5, 2001
[5] "Bas Sheva to Entertain Donor Guests," Home News of Springfield Jewish Home for the Aged, November, 1956.

shows her in the featured spot — the act just before the closing number. This was an obvious tribute to her popularity and effectiveness.

The angry letters continued after Bas Sheva's second performance, and not only from the Orthodox Union. The minutes of the Executive Council of the Cantors Assembly, taken at a meeting held at the Jewish Theological Seminary on February 25, 1957, show an entire section of the meeting devoted to discussing Bas Sheva's appearance on the Ed Sullivan show. It is reported that Hazzan Charles Bloch, the Cantors Assembly representative on the National Jewish Music Council, publicly objected to Bas Sheva's singing on the Ed Sullivan show as a representative of Jewish music in celebration of Jewish Music Month. Her performance was found objectionable. In reply, a representative of the Jewish Welfare Board accepted responsibility for her endorsement and "admitted that he was in error and assured the Council that such mistakes will not be repeated."

Hazzan Samuel Rosenbaum, then president of the Cantors Assembly, wired a telegram to Ed Sullivan on the Assembly's behalf, objecting to Bas Sheva's performance of liturgical music on his variety program. A letter was also sent to Cantor Louis Lippitz, honorary president of the Jewish Ministers Cantors Association who had also officially endorsed "Miss Sheva," urging him to think twice before giving such "unworthy and undeserving" endorsements.

Bas Sheva's sister, Gail Taksel, remembers that although Ed Sullivan was very fond of Bas Sheva's talent, he did not want the pressure of the rabbinical and cantorial authorities of New York. Bas Sheva offered to sing other music, but Mr. Sullivan was only interested in her for her unique singing of Jewish music. Therefore, she was no longer invited to appear on his show.

An interesting diversion in Bas Sheva's career came about when Les Baxter, a bandleader/composer of "lounge" or "bachelor pad" music in the 1940s and 1950s, discovered her. Baxter heard the depth and visceral quality of Bas Sheva's voice and was inspired to write *The Passion* for her — a piece in six movements with full symphony orchestra and choir. The music is almost completely wordless, comprised of hums, groans, and grunts. It was extremely *risqué* for its time. The piece contains a movement called "lust" and another depicting a child rape scene. Baxter was reportedly taken to court for federal pornography charges on account of it. According to Mark Hausman, comparing this piece to the *hazzanut* that his mother sang is like comparing "the sacred and the profane." It shows a totally different side of Bas Sheva.[6]

Most of her publicity came in the form of advertisements and reviews of the film (now a video) *Catskill Honeymoon* and of several touring Catskills revue-type shows, such as “Borscht Capades” and “Farfel Follies.” Praise for Bas Sheva abounds in these ads. "Miss Bas Sheva, the daughter of a New York cantor, brings a singing style of a quality that has attracted favorable operatic notice." [7] Headlines in the *Los Angeles Times* on October 21, 1952 read “Farfel Follies

[6] Personal Interview with Mark Hausman, 2005.
[7] *Musical Alps, Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1950.

Boasts Notable Song Headliner," referring to Bas Sheva, who "made a notable impression with her renditions of traditional Hebraic melodies that were powerful in their dramatic effect."[8]

Praise for Bas Sheva's unique and powerful voice abounds, yet one review, written by Bob Ellis in a Miami newspaper in 1951, really says it all:

> Those who continually look for reason for castigating — and I have discovered that writing a column and doing a radio program makes one a good target for such time wasting — have had a field day tossing barbs in my direction for my not mentioning Bas Sheva, who is currently making her first cabaret appearance at Copa City. It is a matter of record, however, that space in this column today has been deliberately reserved for my comments on a woman who possesses one of the rarest talents I feel that I have been privileged to witness and hear. Bas Sheva came on the great Copa City stage and electrified an audience which doesn't "electrify" easily.
>
> Around me people sat stunned with the impact of her first song — "I'm Gonna Live Till I Die." Who is she? What did the M.C. say her name was? Sensational! Great! were some of the superlatives and comments. She next offered "Where Can I Go" — a song brought back from abroad by Leo Fuld, who was given the song by a Polish displaced person who had written it while in a concentration camp. The rare artistry of this woman who sang this song with a passion and fervor never heard on a night club floor, was beginning to hit the Copa audience with full impact. I glanced around and saw that people had stopped eating — and were watching and listening and were experiencing that chill that goes up and down one's spine when greatness is being witnessed.
>
> Next came the surprise of my life in the entertainment field. Bas Sheva had announced that she would now sing "*Vesti La Giubba*," the great tenor aria from *I Pagliacci*. "Who is this woman who dares defy tradition and sing an aria only our greatest tenors have dared tackle,' thought I. My mind quietly dwelled on the possibility of hearing Gigli, the great Italian tenor, approach with the same quiet dignity an announcement that he would now sing the "Bell Song" from *Lakme*. I chuckled and waited — waited for what I was sure would be a novelty version, or burlesque version, of the aria. I reached over for a sip of coffee — and as I did so I heard a clear *bel canto* voice — a voice that might well have been Gigli himself. In clear, superb Italian, the lyrics poured forth — "I am but a clown, my heart is broken, the world is but a play — and every person therein but an actor." I did not look up on the stage again, for fear that the illusion might be broken - for in my mind's eye I recaptured the poignancy of the clown on the stage — singing, though his heart is broken. The aria finished, a glance to the stage and she was still there — Bas Sheva. I found it almost impossible to believe.
>
> The audience roared approval, and Bas Sheva came back. This time placing on her head the cantorial cap, or *yarmulke*, to sing like I have never heard singing before."*Sheyiboneh Beis Hamikdos*h" was Miss Sheva's next offering. The chant of the people for some two thousand years. The cry of the people whose temple had been ruthlessly defiled. Music and words depicting the endless strife, pathos and determination to rebuild their house of worship, and a place for themselves in the world! The actual engagement and presentation of Bas Sheva in a cabaret is, to my way of thinking, an act worthy of particular commendation. [9]

[8] Schallert, Edwin. "Farfel Follies Boasts Notable Song Headliner," Los Angeles Times: October 21, 1952
[9] Ellis, Bob. *Greater Miami After Dark, AM – Miami Beach*, March 23, 1951.

I found only one review of her work that was less than glowing. *Bagels and Yox* of 1958, an American-Yiddish Revue in which bagels were tossed into the aisles during the opening number, was not particularly well received by Melvin Maddocks of the *Christian Science Monitor*. From him we learn that Bas Sheva's role in the show was to sing one cantorial selection, two traditional hymns, and one modern patriotic Israeli ballad. He notes that Bas Sheva's voice has a range of more than three-and-a-half octaves, and says that her manner was spectacular, but that she sounded hoarse under the extreme demands she placed on her voice.[10]

The demands that Bas Sheva placed upon herself as a performer grew to be too much for her health. Even after she gave birth to Mark in 1953, Bas Sheva and Al continued to tour, bringing their son along together with a nursemaid. Despite the insulin injections that she gave herself daily, her health was affected and she began to lose her vision. Her doctors advised giving up show business, saying that all of the traveling and performing was too stressful. For Bas Sheva, singing was her life and giving it up was not a possibility.

In an effort to accommodate her doctors' concerns, Bas Sheva and Al decided to take a luxury liner to Puerto Rico, where she had been engaged to perform. Rather than fly, they would enjoy a free cruise together, made possible by a few performances on board. Never having been on a ship before, Bas Sheva suffered terrible seasickness and went to the ship's doctor for medication. The doctor on board did not take her medical history correctly. The medicine he gave her for her seasickness reacted with her insulin injections and instantly killed her. The date was February 11, 1960. At the age of 34, Bas Sheva was buried in Woodbridge, New Jersey.

Sheindele di Khaznte (1915-1981)

Robed woman sings Hebrew church music

> Shattering the ancient traditions of the synagogue, a woman donned satin robes of bridal white and sang Hebrew liturgical music to a large audience at Orchestra Hall yesterday afternoon. She prefers to be known as "Sheindele the *Khazente*" — *khazente* being the feminine form of the Hebrew term for cantor — but actually she is an American girl, Jean Gornish of Philadelphia. Only an expert in the highly specialized field of Jewish music could properly evaluate Sheindele's treatment of the ancient prayers and chants. Conventional critical standards are of little purpose here... Judged from the purely vocal aspect, Sheindele often appears to be imitating the male tenor voice, and there is actually very little of normal vocalization in her presentation. But there is an unmistakable air of artistry in the precision and exactness and in the sometimes throbbing emotionalism with which her songs are projected. Probably the main gauge of her ability was the response of the audience, and this was frequently stormy, often breaking out in unrestrained applause before the chanteuse — if that be the proper term — had even reached the end of a number.[11]

[10] Maddocks, Melvin, "American Yiddish Review Presented at the Shubert, " *Christian Science Monitor*, November 26, 1957

[11] Goldberg, Albert. "Robed Woman Sings Hebrew Church Music," *Chicago Daily Tribune*: December 25, 1944.

Born Jean Gornish, Sheindele's fame would spread far beyond her hometown of Philadelphia. Almost all of the articles about Sheindele show her performing in a Jewish context. A frequently used biography even makes the claim that after high school, she had many offers to perform in bands and at "swanky night clubs," but she had made up her mind to become a "woman cantor." There are only a few instances, early in her career, in which Jean sang in a non-Jewish context. At age eighteen she sang for the Halloween and New Year's Eve parties at the Lamb Tavern Inn, performing under the name of "Jean Walker — Slick Song Bird."[12] One cannot help but wonder what her parents would have thought of that! It is very possible that she used this stage name to avoid word getting back to them and to the Jewish community.

In 1936 we see Jean being referred to as a *khaznte*. The Yiddish ad for the Bukier Beneficial Association advertises *di yiddishe khaznte — ir vet zikher hanoeh hobn fun ihre khazonishe nigunim* (the Jewish *khaznte* — you will surely enjoy her cantorial melodies). In addition, she is billed several times as *di barimte odesser khaznte mis dzhin gornish* (the famous *khaznte* from Odessa - Miss Jean Gornish). Knowing, as we do, that she was from Philadelphia, we can assume that this had to be a publicity stunt.

By 1937 Jean was appearing regularly on radio stations WRAX and WPEN. "Jean Gornish, alto" is listed as being a part of the premiere talk show *This is the Land* with key speaker Rabbi Edward Israel, Chairman of the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis' Committee on Social Justice. [13] She was also a featured singer on the *Planters Hi-Hat Peanut Oil* radio show on WSBC.

Mary Bernstein, a classical singer who was a contemporary of Sheindele's on the *Planters Peanut Oil* show, explains that Sheindele had the freedom to choose her own new material each week, and that various singers would sing the Planters theme song together. Some of these singers, including both Mary and Sheindele, would also perform revue shows of duets and solos in the Catskills, in Atlantic City and all around Philadelphia. While Mary and Sheindele never developed a close personal friendship, Mary remembers Sheindele as a nice, generous person who was ‘in a league of her own with her cantorial music. ' [14]

In 1938, when Jean was twenty-two years old, we see a real shift in her billing. Instead of "Jean Gornish the alto," she became "Sheindele the *Khaznte* — the world's only woman cantor." [15] Sheindele performed for many organizations in the Philadelphia area, listed as "the famous girl cantor," and *di zisse khenevdike zingerin* (the sweet, lovely singer). At this point she had achieved enough fame for news of her bout with appendicitis and her recovery from it to be written about in the newspaper! [16]

The 1940s represented the height of Sheindele's career. Whereas printed programs from the previous decade describe Sheindele performing with folk singers and comedians, during the

[12] Idem.
[13] Sheindele's Archives at the Philadelphia Jewish Archive Center.
[14] Personal Interview with Mary Bernstein, 2005
[15] Sheindele's Archives at the National Museum of American Jewish History.
[16] Sheindele's Archives at the Philadelphia Jewish Archive Center.

1940s she was more likely to share a recital or radio program with a cantor. Programs show her appearing with Cantors Shlomo Goldenberg, Jacob Barkin, Peretz Lemkof and Zavel Kwartin, and she was usually the featured entertainment, rather than the opening act. Sheindele produced and sponsored gala shows of her own in which she invited both secular and Jewish performers to raise money for various charities. Advertisements were taken out in program books by family and friends. She had many fans and supporters. There is even evidence of a "Khaznte's fan club!"[17]

As news of the "lovely lady cantor" spread further, so did Sheindele's appearances. She performed in Washington DC, in Milwaukee, and in a monumental event at Chicago's Orchestra Hall — in 1944 — under the Harry Zelzer Concert Management. She gave recitals for every holiday, including Hanukkah, Purim, Shavuot and even Mother's Day. Example 2 shows Sheindele's personal transcription of Jacob Rapaport's *Brokhoh fun Hallel*, the cantor's benediction prior to leading the recitation of Psalms 113-118. [18]

There were some performances that blur the line between Sheindele as a performer and Sheindele as a cantor. While she certainly could not lead services in a synagogue, the Passover *seder* was a unique opportunity in which she was allowed more freedom. Throughout the years, programs show Sheindele appearing alongside other cantors leading *sedarim* in Atlantic City hotels. Eventually, Sheindele was able to lead the *seder* on her own. In an undated clipping, Hotel Jenoff advertises: "Sheindele will officiate with her own choir at the Passover *sedarim*."[19] Sheindele assisted several cantors in leading High Holiday services that took place in hotels, and at times served as a choir director and soloist. She was once the featured soloist at Philadelphia's Metropolitan Opera House with Hazzan Peretz Lemkof officiating. Furthermore, there are several examples of Sheindele actually conducting services, though the type of service is unclear. In 1945, she "conducted services" for the Pennsylvania Army and Navy Service Committee. Later clippings show that she led services at a hospital. Her niece, Maida Averbach, claims that she did lead some actual Shabbat services. Though she could not officiate in a synagogue, it is significant that Sheindele did lead services in some capacity.

Sheindele's archives show fewer programs from the 1950s. When asked about this gap in her singing career, Maida explains that Sheindele had problems with arthritis and also developed a nodule on her vocal cords at one point and had to limit her singing. She was able to recover and her fame certainly did not diminish, for several of her key performances took place in the early 1960s.

Sheindele began appearing more frequently on the Yiddish stage, including the Park Theater in Chicago and the Folksbiene in New York City. She was always featured as a solo musical performer and did not appear in any of the dramatic skits.

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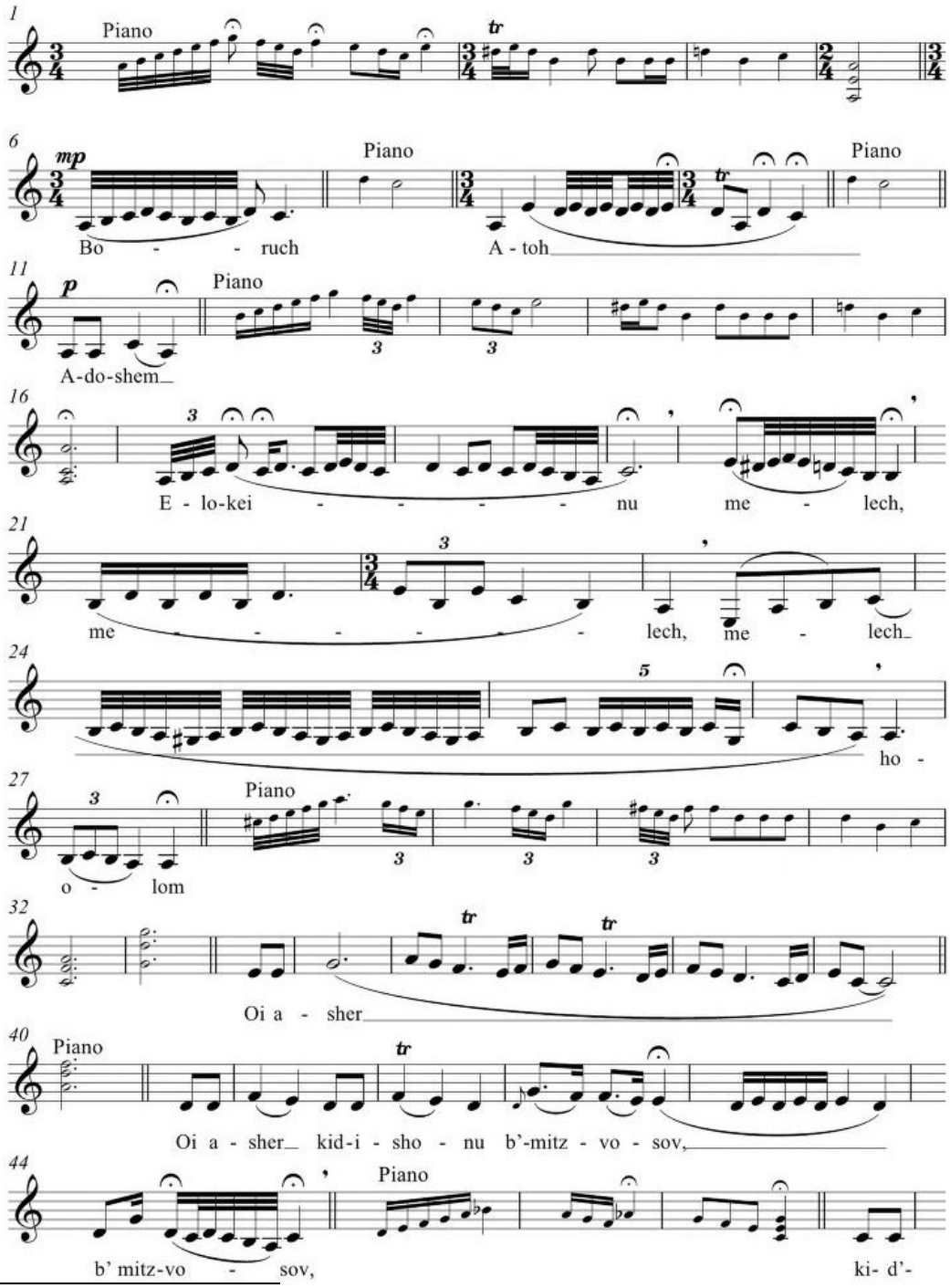
[17] Sheindele's Archives at the National Museum of American Jewish History.

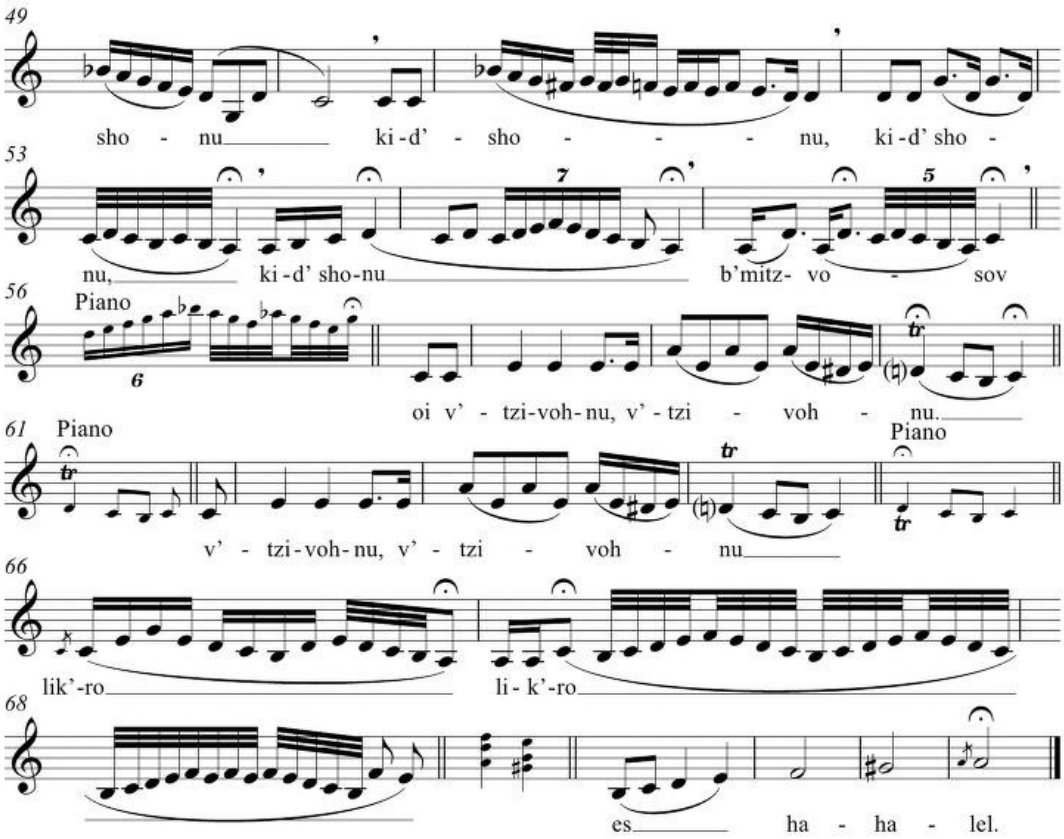
[18] Her notation follows Cantor Mordechai Hershman's recording of Rapaport's composition, complete with brief instrumental riffs between sections (Philadelphia: Gratz College Library), Rare Books Collection of the Music Department.

[19] Sheindele's Archives at the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center.

On May 1, 1960, "Cantor Sheindele" took part in a major cantorial concert in Carnegie Hall, starring Cantors David Kusevitsky, Bela Hershkowitz, Zvee Aroni and fellow *khaznte* Perele Feig. Performances at various synagogues and organizations continued throughout the 1960s. When Sheindele left her regular radio broadcast on the *Planters Hi-Hat Peanut Oil* show, WSBC radio station called upon all "lovers of liturgical music" to arrange a farewell banquet and concert in her honor.[20]



[20] Sheindele's Archives at the National Museum of American Jewish History.



Example 2. Sheindele's personal transcription of Jacob Rapaport's *Brokhoh fun Hallel*, after Mordechai Hershman's recording.

Sheindele's singing career slowed down considerably as the 1970s approached. Her later years were spent in Tenafly, New Jersey, where she worked at an office job in a hospital and, as always, spent time with her family.

Examining pictures of Sheindele, one might guess that she was a serious, quiet, studious type of woman. Her family says quite the opposite! Sheindele brought life with her wherever she went. She was a comedian! She liked jokes, loved to have fun, and always made everyone laugh at the dinner table. Her niece remembers her driving to Atlantic City wearing funny glasses with a mustache and a big nose just to get a laugh. Her brother Sidney calls her a "live wire," claiming that she made every *simkhe* (Yiddish: celebratory occasion) a real *simḥah*. She would take over as mistress of ceremonies — entertaining, singing and telling jokes. She would lead their family's *sedarim* and would breathe life into the *Haggadah*, dramatically acting out the parable of the four sons and encouraging everyone to sing and harmonize the *seder* songs with her.[21]

Sheindele loved having family come to her house. Her nephew Marvin remembers visiting Sheindele on Sundays in the summer and going swimming in her pool. Sheindele's sister Honey says that it breaks her heart to remember the end of her sister's life. Sheindele suffered from lung cancer, which eventually caused her death in April of 1981 at the age of sixty-six. Honey remained by her side until the end.[22]

[21] Personal Interviews with Honey Levin, Maida Averbach, and Sidney Gornish, 2005.
[22] Personal Interviews with Marvin Gornish and Honey Levin, 2005.

Soon after Sheindele's passing her sister, Sylvia Silver, donated much of Sheindele's materials to the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center and to the National Museum of American Jewish History, both located in Philadelphia. There are albums full of her publicity material, concert programs, newspaper ads, sheet music, a notebook of Sheindele's compositions, full size posters from her performances, and various objects including her High Holiday prayerbook cover and cantorial robe.

Perele Feig — Hungarian *Khaznte* (1910-1987)

> Dressed in cantorial costume, Perele Feig created a deep impression. Her voice is unusually rich and warm, with sombre qualities in low register and upper tenor tones of striking timbre. Besides having mastered the cantorial tradition, Miss Feig is an impressive singer by concert standards. There were many rewarding moments during her singing of cantorial and folk song groups. She uses her warm, powerful voice with the conscience of any artist and it was often times a source of wonder how she maintained such a clarity of line when singing so fervently. She is an artist whose resources of movement, gesture, facial mobility and dramatic instinct are uncommonly compelling. [23]

Perele's career began rather late in life, after she married Jack Schwartz, whom she had met through a family friend, and gave birth to their only child, a daughter named Renee. While vacationing in the Catskills, Perele was walking around humming to herself, as she always did. The owner of the Avon Lodge, Meyer Artkin, overheard her voice and told her that she had tremendous talent and really should do something with it. Perele had been reared in a community where women were not encouraged to sing solo, let alone sing *hazzanut,* and Atkin's simple encouragement was enough to get her started.

Once she was heard, it was inevitable that her career would take off quickly. Between the 1950s and 1970s, she performed on a radio program over New York's station WEVD, first on a Saturday night segment, and later on Sunday. Perele was accompanied by composer Abraham Ellstein and sponsored by Shapiro's Wine. She would usually sing her theme, the refrain from Joshua Samuel Weisser's *R'tseh Asirosom*, one full cantorial number, and one Yiddish folk song. Because she had to sing new pieces every week, Perele developed a vast repertoire. Her daughter Renee remembers that although her mother constantly performed her favorites, she was always learning new material. Contemporaries of Perele's who sang on the Jewish radio stations claim that Perele tried everything, and was not afraid to interpret any of the masters' pieces.[24]

Hazzanim Solomon and Jacob Mendelson, whose parents were close friends of the Feig family, remember Perele's singing of *Tiher Rabi Yishmoel*, a recitative that was more closely identified with the cantor who wrote it — Zavel Kwartin, — than any other. They claim that note for note, Perele sounded exactly like Kwartin. Jack Mendelson once played her recording of this piece for Israel Goldstein, then dean of the Hebrew Union College's School of Sacred Music, and

[23] Maley, S. Roy, in The Winnipeg Tribune.
[24] Personal Interviews with Renee Rotker, Barry Serota of Musique International, and Elizabeth Grossman, colleague of Perele Feig, 2005.

even he thought that it was Kwartin singing! Sol Mendelson is of the opinion that Kwartin's pieces worked so well in Perele's voice because his music stayed primarily in a middle register, with occasional upper-octave leaps. She never attempted singing material that required a sustained high register, such as that of Moshe Koussevitsky, Perele's trademark pieces were Kwartin's *Teka BeShofar Godol* and *UveYom Simhaskhem,* which she would sing successively. The *Teka* opens with a famous *dreydl* which she nailed perfectly each and every time. According to Sol, Perele could sing every *dreydl* and *krekhts* ever written![25]

Perele was well known on the cantorial concert circuit. She sang in all of the Catskills hotels, appeared regularly in St. Louis, and even had invitations to sing in South Africa, which she never accepted. Other concert venues included the Histadruth of New York and New Jersey, the Breakers Hotel in Atlantic City, the Young Israel Synagogues of New York and Boston, Brith Achim of Philadelphia, the Marmaros Federation of New York and Cleveland, Ocean Parkway Jewish Center of Brooklyn, Beth Tzedec of Toronto, the Heights Temple of Cleveland, Ohio, and Congregation Tifereth Judah of Revere, Massachusetts.[26]

Perele's typical concert consisted of mostly cantorial pieces combined with a few Yiddish folk songs. She appeared at prestigious venues such as New York's Town Hall and even Carnegie Hall, in a concert sponsored by WEVD and featuring Cantors David Kusevitsky, Zvee Aroni and Sheindele *di Khaznte.*

Perele also appeared on the Yiddish stage, although she did not perform there as a dramatic actress. During a typical evening a movie would be shown, followed by a vaudeville comedy act, followed by a singer. Perele performed with all the famous actors of the time, including Henrietta Jacobson, Molly Picon and Menashe Skulnik. She made several recordings on the Reena label, and like the other *khazntes*, entertained at weddings singing the familiar *ViMalei* by Brody[27] and Carrie Jacobs' "I Love You Truly."[28]

A Hanukkah concert program from 1955, in which "*Khazente* Perele Feig" performed as the guest artist with the Jewish Community Choir and Orchestra of Winnipeg, is typical. In her first set she performed *Oshamnu Mikol Am, Modim Anahnu Lokh, VeHu Rahum Yekhaper Ovon and Sholesh S'eudes*. Her second set included *Tiher Rabi Yishmoel, Rozo DeShabbos, Birkhas Kohanim* and *Nigndl.*[29] Many of these same selections can be heard on a recent recording of the *Khazntes, Great Cantorial Singers—Masterpieces of the Synagogue,* released in 2005 by Tara Music.

[25] Personal Interviews with Solomon and Jacob Mendelson, 2005.
[26] Brochures from the Jewish Lecture Center Bureau, Feig Family Collection.
[27] Editor's note: Brody was the name of the town where the actual composer, Marcus Strelisker (1806-1857) lived.
[28] Personal Interview with Renee Rotker, 2005.
[29] Hanukkah Concert Program, Jewish Musical Club of Winnipeg, Dec. 11, 1955. Feig Family Collection.

Goldie Malavsky - The Malavsky Family Singers (1923-1995)

> So Papa came to us and said, "Children, since New York has accepted you, we're going to Israel, and we have to see how Israel should accept us." In 1952, they made a trip for us to Israel. It was a beautiful experience. We made two, three concerts a day. We worked so hard, we all lost weight! They had all generations of Israelis come see us. They loved us so much... especially Goldie. They kept saying, "Goldie Malavsky, stay here, and Golda Meir should go home." They fell in love with her. They used to follow us around the streets saying "*G'veret* Goldie." It was just beautiful.[30]

Goldie was born in Philadelphia on October 29, 1923, and she was the child who first started singing with her father Samuel at the young age of four. Hazzan Malavsky would take her on tour with him to sing in concerts and in services. By the age of six, Goldie had her own radio program. She would sing a new piece each week, and her father would accompany her on piano.

An advertisement in the *Washington Post* dated December 31, 1936 publicizes a service and concert at the Jewish Community Center in which Samuel Malavsky would be assisted by "his talented eleven-year-old daughter, Goldele, who sings folk songs and chants in cantor style." Goldie's boyish alto voice was perfect for the solos a young boy would typically sing, and so Samuel taught Goldie these solos and traveled with her, astounding many audiences with the unique abilities of his young daughter.

As young women living in California, Goldie and her older sister Gittie joined together to form a duo called "the Marlin Sisters." Wanting to draw on their diverse musical abilities, they sang country, pop, and Yiddish songs. An offer to sing on a WMGM radio program starring Harry Hirschfield brought them to New York with their father. Gittie remembers the long train ride. It was Christmas Eve, and soldiers were traveling in the same car. She relates:

> My father got really upset that the boys were making eyes at the girls... so in the middle of the night he said, "The only thing you can do to keep the boys quiet is to sing." So we sang all the Christmas carols... to help the boys quiet down and go to sleep.[31]

The Malavsky Family Singers came into being around the Shabbat dinner table. It was there that they would spend hours singing *zemirot*, harmonizing with each other, and learning new pieces that Samuel composed. The children improvised natural harmonies and created a sound so impressive that it would attract the neighbors to come listen outside the open windows. During World War II the family received their first offer to sing the High Holiday services together, in San Francisco. This group performance was so successful that Samuel decided the family should move to New York where they would have more opportunities to capitalize on their collective talent.

In New York, the Malavsky family gained fame and recognition. They traveled frequently, singing in concerts, leading services, and appearing on the radio. They were a unique

[30] Malavsky Sisters' Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1998.
[31] Malavsky Sisters' Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1998.

phenomenon and were sought after in cities all over the United States and in Canada. As they drove thousands of miles in order to perform, the children would sing to prevent themselves from fighting in the car! The cities where they enjoyed their biggest successes were Montreal, Quebec and Schenectady, New York.[32]

Despite all the accolades, the Malavskys also attracted a great deal of opposition. They usually had to *daven* in special High Holiday services set up in hotels because the girls were not allowed to sing in Orthodox synagogues. Even in these hotel services they encountered many problems. Samuel Malavsky, however, viewed his daughters as children who loved to sing, and felt that they deserved to be heard. Goldie's sister, Ruth Malavsky, believes that her father would have been more famous and less controversial had he gone out on his own, but she adds that his family meant everything to him.[33]

> The biggest trouble we had was with rabbis who had nothing better to do. They found somewhere in the Talmud that you shouldn't hear a woman's voice. They wouldn't let us into the *shuls*, and so we sang in hotels. And the rabbis who wouldn't let us into their *shuls* used to come and buy tickets to hear us.

Hazzan Malavsky taught his daughters along with his sons because, he said, "I thought it was an example to show children that it was possible to be American — and to sing in Hebrew, too."[34] He was appalled by the hypocrisy of many rabbis and by the way they mistreated his daughters. His frustration led him to publish a study in a Canadian newspaper about synagogue choirs that included girls disguised as boys in order to achieve a certain vocal sound.[35]

To the girls, rabbinic opposition felt like personal attacks. They had spent their entire lives learning to *daven*, learning prayers and compositions for Shabbat and every holiday, and some people wanted to forbid them from doing what they were raised to do, simply because they were girls. The Malavsky sisters remember an incident in which young Hasidim in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn threw a stink bomb into the *shul* where the Malavsky family was singing. It was their mother, Harriet, who came to the rescue and restored order in the service.

The Malavsky family appeared throughout the Catskill Mountains' Borscht Circuit hotels. They were frequent guests at the Concord and Grossinger's and always led the Passover *sedarim* at one of the hotels. Their concert programs were very diverse. They would all come out onto stage wearing cantorial robes, prayer shawls, and skullcaps. *Mi She-Osoh Nissim* was the family's favorite song, and they used it as their opening number. This was followed by three or four additional liturgical pieces. Hazzan Samuel would then speak a bit. He had a wonderful rapport with his audiences. The family would then leave the stage, and Avreml, the oldest son, would deliver a few jokes. Apparently, he was so handsome that "all the women in the audience loved him." Following the comedy act, Gittie and Goldie would come back on stage, now in nice

[32] Malavsky Sisters' Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1998.
[33] Personal Interview with Ruth and Gittie Malavksy, 2005.
[34] Gardner, Sandra. *New Jerseyans, New York Times*, June 10, 1984.
[35] Personal Interview with Rabbi Morton Malavsky, 2005.

dresses, to perform as the Marlin Sisters. Finally, the rest of the family would return to conclude with a few group numbers.

The Malavsky sisters all confirm that their father did not often sing solos without his choir, but that he would take the *khazonishe* parts of the liturgical numbers, and that they accompanied him by singing chords and harmonizing on the responses. Goldie would take the famous "boy alto" solos. She garnered fame for some of these solos - namely, her *Kevakoros* and *Havein Yakir Li*. Ruthie joined Goldie in the alto section, Avreml and Morty were both baritones, and Menucha and Gittie sang soprano. Often, an alto solo taken by Goldie would lead into a soprano/alto duet. Gittie and Menucha, who both possessed lovely soprano voices, would alternate on the soprano solos. According to Gittie, if one squeezed the other's hand, that was a signal that she would take the high note. It was true teamwork![36]

The Malavsky family made many recordings, reportedly more than any other Jewish family ensemble in the world.[37] Their earliest recordings were put out on the Disk and Banner labels. Under the Tikva Records label, the Malavskys released *The Passover Festival*, produced by Allen B. Jacobs in 1959, *Cantorial Masterworks* and *Songs My Mother Sang to Me*. Other recordings include *The Malavsky Family Sings Yiddish, Passover Seder Service, Hebrew Folk Songs, Pearls of Liturgical Masterpieces, Sabbath with the Malavsky Family, High Holiday Selections by the Malavsky Family, Holiday Prayers* and *Favorites of Cantors,* which contains an *Av Harahamim* cantorial solo sung by Goldie. Besides the more secular recordings that Goldie and Gittie made as the Marlin Sisters, Goldie also released several cantorial singles.[38] An advertisement from Metro Music Company lists Goldie Malavsky separately from Samuel Malavsky and Choir and offers a special on three ten-inch records — *Yehi Rotson, Zokhreinu LeHayim*, and *Ikh Benk Aheym* — for the price of $3.98.

The Malavsky children also worked in Yiddish Theater. This meant performances on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons, and although Samuel and Harriet would not attend these performances, they let their children make their own decisions regarding religious observance and performing. Goldie and Gittie were regulars at the Clinton Street Theater. It was through the theater that they really learned how to speak Yiddish.

Beginning in 1952, Samuel Malavsky set up tours in Israel for his family. As stated, the group was beloved there, receiving greater acceptance from Israel's religious community than from the one in America.[39]

The Malavsky family's performances slowed down as, one by one, the children married. Their spouses and in-laws did not want them to travel anymore, and it became more difficult to get the family together. The Malavsky name is still known and respected in the United States and

[36] The Malavsky Sisters' Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1998.
[37] The Malavsky Family Story video, Israel Music, c. 1976.
[38] The Malavsky Sisters' Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1998.
[39] The Malavsky Sisters Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1998.

in Israel. Many of Samuel Malavsky's hazzanic settings - in the style of his mentor, Josef Rosenblatt — have become well known throughout the world, some of them attaining the status of synagogue standards. The Israeli army choir regularly sings his stirring melodies for *Havein Yakir Li* and *Kevakoro*s. Goldie's daughter once visited the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem. Upon learning of her presence, the cantor decided on the spot to do an entire Malavsky service with his male choir. The Malavsky family story never really ends, for they have kept Hazzan Samuel Malavsky 's music alive by passing it on to their children and grandchildren, who continue to bear the legacy of the Malavsky Family Singers.

Fraydele Oysher - *Oy Iz Dos a Fraydele*! (1913-2003)

> Blessed with a magnificent voice and always surrounded by an aura of religious music, Fraydele Oysher's rise in the Yiddish Theatre was meteoric, and soon she went on to become the foremost singing star of that genre... The name Fraydele Oysher has become synonymous with musical excitement. Be it liturgical chant, a theatre song, or a typical Yiddish folk song, the listeners have the feeling that they are hearing it for the first time. She has the unique gift of making each song she sings sound as if it were written expressly for Fraydele Oysher. [40]

Fraydele was eight years old when her family emigrated to America and settled in Philadelphia. Soon after their arrival, Zelig and Lillie Oysher discovered their daughter's singing talent. They were extremely excited by what they heard and began to find public arenas in which Fraydele could sing. She joined Mikhl Gelbart's choir at the Workmans' Circle, but that did not last long. Mikhl told her that her voice was too identifiable and could not blend in with the group. Instead, Mikhl chose to work with Fraydele privately on singing Yiddish folk songs.

Fraydele was soon singing her folk songs on the major Jewish radio stations in Philadelphia: WCAU; WFAN; and WREX. The first song Fraydele sang in public was Secunda's *A Mameh Iz Di Beste Fraynd* (A Mother is the Best Friend). Her first job was a performance for the Roumanian Hebrew Beneficial Association. Fraydele sang alongside her father in his synagogue choir, often joining him in duets and trios.

Meanwhile, Fraydele's older brother Moishe was rapidly making a name for himself, landing roles in the Yiddish Theater at the age of sixteen. Following his idol, Boris Tomashefsky, Moishe moved to New York to pursue a theatrical career. When Fraydele turned fifteen, Moishe brought her to New York to sing in a theatrical performance. Fraydele, who adored her brother and wanted to imitate everything that he did, decided that New York was the place for her, and she never returned to Philadelphia.[41]

In a video interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, Fraydele remembers some of her early performances. She sang at Brooklyn's Amphion Theatre alongside Sheindele the *Khaznte* and was paid the non-union scale of eighteen dollars. In the 1930s

[40] Civic Playhouse program notes.
[41] Oysher / Sternberg Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, May 31, 1995.

Fraydele busied herself by singing three radio shows a day. Stations WLTH, WEVD and WMCA each hired her for fifty-minute segments. Jan Peerce — already a big star — was paid $7.50 in those Depression years, and Fraydele received $5. She was sponsored by Margareten Matzos, and at Passover time, would receive more matzah than could possibly be eaten!

In 1935 Fraydele married Harold Sternberg, who would become her lifelong partner and musical collaborator. Harold was a son of the legendary Yossel Bass of Bessarabia. As a boy soprano, Yossel was "stolen" — at first by Cantor Zeydl Rovner and later by Cantor Nisi Belzer — to sing in their choirs and read Torah for them. As an adult, the soprano turned bass performed as a cantor throughout Europe with his talented family as his choir.

His son Harold was born in Odessa, and met Moishe Oysher — a boy alto at the time — while the two of them sang in his father's choir. Yossel Bass came to America in 1923, followed by Harold in 1927 and Harold's mother in 1929. Although Harold could have become a cantor like his father, he chose the theater. He distinguished himself as a fine *basso profundo* and performed in Gershwin musicals, in Kurt Weill's 1935 pageant *The Eternal Road*, and enjoyed a career in the Metropolitan Opera Chorus for forty years. He also served as a coach to Fraydele, who did not read music and learned everything by ear. Harold had a talent for languages and was recognized as the first singer to memorize three hundred operas![42]

In 1936, when Moishe Oysher could not earn a living wage through theater work, Harold's older brother Shammai convinced him that *hazzanut* was the way to go. According to Fraydele, Moishe's "heart was in the theater, while his soul was in the synagogue," and his life presented him with constant struggles between the two. His first experience officiating at the Roumanishe Shul in Manhattan's Lower East Side was met with shouts of *an aktyor zol davnen in a shul* (the very thought of an actor davening in a synagogue!). Despite the opposition, Moishe came to be known in both the world of theater and the synagogue world as one of the greatest.

Throughout their lives, Fraydele, Moishe and Harold remained very close. Fraydele lovingly described her brother as "my hero, my friend, my everything."[43]

Fraydele's career brought her to communities all over the United States, Canada and South America. She took the world of Yiddish Theater by storm with her talent, her unique cantorial abilities, and her amazing energy and personality. She became widely famous even before her brother because she was doing something so unusual for a woman.

In theater, Fraydele specialized in playing a *yeshivah* boy who, only in the last scene of the play, would reveal that she was in fact a woman. In Fraydele's own words, "I was cute, I was flat and I was a terrific piece of work." [44] Many Yiddish plays were written for her: *Fraydeles Khaseneh* (Fraydele's Wedding) by Louis Freiman; *Dos Khelemer Khazndl* (The Cantor of Chelm) and *Dem Khazns Tokhter* (The Cantor's Daughter) by Morris Nestor; *Nebekh a Yesoymele* (Poor Orphan) by Yaakov Bergrin; *Goldene Meydele* (Golden Girl, later known as *A*

[42] Michaels, Marilyn, liner notes to *The Oysher Heritage* (MEW Productions, 2005).
[43] Oysher/Sternberg Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1995.
[44] Interview with *The Daily News*, 1996.

Khazndl Oyf Shabes and *A Khazndl Oyf Yontif*) by Avraham Blum; *A Khazn Kimt in Shtot* (A Cantor Comes to Town); *Freydele iz nit keyn Meydele* (Freydele is not a Girl); and *Mazl Tov Fraydele*.

Besides the *yeshivah* boy role, Fraydele often played the daughter or wife of a cantor. The fact that Fraydele could sing a cantorial number on stage set her apart, and in every play, she had the opportunity to sing cantorial pieces. A review of *Fraydele's Khasene* states:

> *Veynik Yidishe piesn hobn azelkhefayne, tsikhtike un lirishe muzikalishe numern vi di komedye "Freydeles Khasene" un in zingen iz takeh faran dos beste fun Freydele... iber hoypt tsu khazonish, vos zi hot fun dos ongezungen on a shiur, un gezungen vi an emeseh khaznte oder vi a khazn, punkt vi zi volt baym omud geshtanen*.[45]
>
> (Few Yiddish plays have such fine, neat and lyrical musical numbers as the comedy *Fraydele's Wedding*, and in singing, it is really Fraydele's best, mainly in *hazzanut,* of which she sang a tremendous amount, and sang like a true *khaznte*, or like a *hazzan*, just as if she were at the prayer stand.)

Fraydele's archives, now housed in YIVO, contain programs from performances throughout her life. In 1936 Fraydele and Harold took their first trip south of the border, visiting Buenos Aires and Cuba. In Buenos Aires, Fraydele played the role of young Yitzkhok in Avraham Goldfaden's *Akeydes Yitzkhok* and also performed in Boris Tomashefsky's play *Bar Mitsveh*. When she saw the poverty of the Jews in Cuba, Fraydele decided to give her concert *gratis,* to an extremely appreciative audience.

In 1945 Fraydele was performing in the moderately successful show, *The Little Queen*, in Chicago. Hearing that her father had taken ill, she wanted to go home. Mary Martin, who happened to be playing in the show next door, convinced Fraydele that if she wanted to be a true performer, she should not leave. She stayed, and throughout her life, never left a show. She even went on stage pregnant. Here is Seymour Rechtzeit, in an interview about the play *The Khazente*, by Joseph Rumshinksy:

When Fraydele Oysher appeared in that show she was dressed in the garb of a young male *hazzan*. This also concealed the fact that she was quite pregnant. In the midst of one of her cantorial selections she had gone into labor pains and was compelled to announce that "The *hazzan* is about to give birth!" [46]

In 1947 Fraydele performed for the Bessarabian Society of Baltimore. Her first Canadian appearance took place in 1948 at the Mt. Royal Theatre in Montreal. Undated programs show New York appearances in the Amphion Theatre, Lyric Theatre, Playhouse Theatre, Erlanger Theatre and the Bronx Art Theater, in *Der Khelemer Khazndl*. A concert program from Town Hall lists Fraydele among other famous performers such as Molly Picon, Zvi Scooler, Miriam Kressyn, Seymour Rechtzeit, Hazzan Moshe Stern, Hazzan Charles Bloch, and comedian Jackie Mason.

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[45] Rozhansky, in *Lexicon of the Yiddish Theatre*, 1969.
[46] Komansky, Samuel, *The Jewish Week — American Examiner*: Oct. 12, 1980.

Out of town engagements included performances in: Worcester, Massachusetts; the Philadelphia Yiddish Art Theatre; Miami Beach, Florida; Congregation Ahavas Israel of Grand Rapids, Michigan (where she is advertised as "the greatest living American *khaznte*"); California at the Civic Playhouse (in *A Khazndl Oyf Shabbes*); and Chicago's Civic Theatre and Douglass Park Theatre. Fraydele was particularly close with Oscar Ostroff, director of the Douglass Park Theatre. Their partnership led to many successful Chicago engagements, and Fraydele's archives contain many of Ostroff 's warm letters to her. Fraydele had the opportunity to sing in South Africa during the Apartheid era, but she refused to sing in a concert where the audience would be segregated. Because the concert bureau would not make provisions for blacks to attend, Fraydele refused to perform.

Fraydele and Harold both worked with all the well-known Jewish musicians of the time. According to them, Alexander Olshanetsky had "soul and fire" as a conductor. Joseph Rumshinksy had "easy hands." Sholom Secunda, however, was the best conductor. He "felt the pulse of a singer," could transpose on the spot, and had a folkloristic streak. Fraydele and Harold loved Hazzan Yossele Rosenblatt — "a sweet, dear man and a great musician." [47] Fraydele's archives show that she and Harold also socialized with Molly Picon and were even invited to her eighty-fifth birthday celebration!

Fraydele had a regular radio program, but because Harold felt that recordings might cause people to stop listening to her radio segments and attending her performances, Fraydele did not record many pieces professionally. In the late 1940s she recorded four sides on ten-inch 78 rpms for the Banner records label. Abraham Ellstein accompanied Fraydele's *Eilu Devorim* by Jacob Rapoport, *Ribono Shel Olam* for *Sefiroh* by Harold Sternberg, *Oshamnu Mikol Om* by David Roitman and *Havein Yakir Li* and *Sh'ma Yisroel* by Yossele Rosenblatt. In 1960, *Songs My Brother Moishe Sang* was released on Tikva Records by Fraydele and her daughter Marilyn Michaels, followed by the album *Yiddishe Neshomeh* on Menorah Records.[48]

When asked why she did not appear in any films, Fraydele related that she was supposed to make a film of *The Cantor's Daughter* right before the Second World War, but fighting broke out and changed the plans. After the war, the audience for Yiddish films had diminished and very few were being made. When she was finally approached to do a film, she was pregnant and could not participate. Harold, who acted as Fraydele's personal composer and coach, must have thought that Fraydele needed to be in a film, for in her archives is a scene-by-scene description of Harold's idea of a suitable storyline for her. The title is *Oy Iz Dos A Freydele*, and the plot is typical: Right before *Selihot* services, the cantor is involved in an accident. The congregation and choir, already in place for the service, panics — until Fraydele, the cantor's daughter — enters disguised as a boy. All goes well until Jack, her love interest / agent, calls in reporters. The congregants are opposed to the reporters in the synagogue and do not understand what is happening. Fraydele takes off her disguise and says that she can no longer pretend, she is not in fact a *hazzan*; she is Fraydele, the *hazzan*'s daughter. There is an uproar in the synagogue. How

[47] Oysher / Sternberg Interview with the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 1995.
[48] Personal Interview with Barry Serota, 2005.

could this girl have the nerve to stand on the *bimah* and *daven* as if she were a *hazzan*? The rabbi takes pity and asks that God be merciful to the girl for her sin. Fraydele leaves the synagogue. Due to the publicity, she has risen to fame. She becomes successful as a radio singer and performer and all ends well between Fraydele and Jack.[49]

Harold's film idea was never brought to fruition. The structure of the story, however, shows all the typical elements of the plays written specifically for Fraydele: the opportunity to sing *hazzanut*; fooling everyone into thinking she was a boy and then revealing her true self; and the pursuit of fame and of a love interest.

Conclusion and Evolution

Who was the first woman cantor? Each of the *khazntes* claimed that distinction. Sophie was certainly the earliest to record, in 1924, and she presumably had to have made a name for herself before then. Fraydele, born in 1913, also began her career in the 1920s when she sang on the radio as a child. Bas Sheva and Goldie, both born in the early 1920s, sang with their fathers when they were as young as four years old. Sheindele may have been the first to actually lead services, in the 1940s.

These six were not the only women who attempted to sing cantorial music, but they were the ones who became famous for doing so. As early as the 1930s we find references to Betty Simanoff singing "cantorial things" on the radio.[50] Liviya Taychil appeared twice weekly on WHOM under the pseudonym *Di Odesser Khaznte*, and Ms. Sabina Kurtzweil performed on WCNW as *Di Berliner Khaznte*.[51] Radio logs even contain a listing for "Goldie Mae Stiner — the world's only colored lady cantor."[52] In the 1940s, Bobby Miller sang under choral conductor Oscar Julius at Temple Beth El, an Orthodox Mecca of *hazzanut* in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn. She disguised herself as a boy in order to sing with the all-male choir for the High Holidays. Members of that choir recount how Bobby would bind her chest, put her hair up into her hat, and sing alongside the men for many High Holiday seasons until her charade was discovered.[53] Another popular female singer of Jewish music, Mimi Sloan, occasionally included a liturgical piece in her repertoire.[54]

When Betty Robbins became the first woman cantor to occupy a Reform pulpit in 1955, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York did not yet officially admit women into its School of Sacred Music.[55] It wasn't until twenty years later that the first Reform woman cantor was invested by that institution. [56] The Conservative Jewish Theological

[49] Fraydele's Archives at YIVO.
[50] *Der Tog*, October, 1928.
[51] Kelman, Ari, *Station Identification: The Culture of Yiddish Radio in New York*: New York University, 2003.
[52] Personal Interview with Henry Sapoznik, 2005.
[53] Personal Interview with Barry Serota, 2005.
[54] Personal Interviews with Mimi Sloan, 2005.
[55] "Woman Named Cantor in New York," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1955.
[56] "The New Cantor," *Reform Judaism*: Winter 2003.

Seminary's Cantors Institute, now the H.L. Miller Cantorial School, first granted women the diploma of *Hazzan* in 1987. [57] It was not until 1991 that women were admitted into the Cantors Assembly. [58]

These decisions to admit women into the cantorate were brought about by societal changes. The movement away from the male clergy model as dictated by tradition was a natural occurrence in an increasingly egalitarian society. Today, the women who graduate from cantorial programs in accredited institutions of higher Jewish learning are free to sing sacred music as women, not in imitation of men, in any octave they choose. For these reasons there is no direct relation between the *khazntes'* careers and the formal recognition of women cantors in the liberal branches of American Judaism.

However, it is clear from the *khazntes'* reviews and advertisements that their singing caused many people to take notice and to think about the issue of women cantors. Their audiences evidently marveled at the sound they produced — a sound that was molded as a direct imitation of male cantors. From an entertainment perspective, the *khazntes* were novelty acts. From a religious perspective, the fact that these women were singing liturgical texts in the style of *hazzanut* — whether on the stage or on the *bimah* — challenged certain sensibilities.

Who was the first woman cantor? They were all firsts — Sophie, Bas Sheva, Sheindele, Perele, Goldie, and Fraydele. Each one of these women's voices was the first woman's voice that many people heard singing *hazzanut* on the radio. Each of these women's faces was the first woman's face that many observed on the *bimah* of a synagogue. Each of these women's performances caused many minds to entertain the thought of women as cantors for the very first time.

Long before women could even dream of the actuality of becoming cantors, long before cantorial schools of any denomination even considered accepting women, long before women's voices were heard on a *bimah*, there were a few special women who challenged the strictures of tradition and dared to dream.

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[57] *Cantors Assembly 50 Years Jubilee Journal*, 1998, p. 368.
[58] Ibid. pp. 370-371.

IYYUN BIT'FILLAH

Does Your Community Pray For Its *Hazzan*? An Address to *Hazzanim*

By Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig[1]

"*Eloheinu v'Elohei avoteinu, g*rant power of expression to the one commissioned to serve as our messenger, to stand and offer fervent prayers to You.[2]

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, הֱיֵה עִם פִּיפִיּוֹת שְׁלוּחֵי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, הָעוֹמְדִים לְבַקֵּשׁ תְּפִלָּה וְתַחֲנוּנִים מִלְּפָנֶיךָ עַל עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.

So begins a long petition to be recited by the congregation in support of its cantor. As our messengers, you bear a heavy responsibility. We can feel the weight we've placed on your shoulders when we listen to you chant *Hin'ni* and *Ohila la'el*. Hearing your humble prayer, every congregation should be moved to pray for you! Thus, though *Mahzor Lev Shalem* omits some non-mandatory prayers, it does include the first half of this petition:

Our God and God of our ancestors,	אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,
be with the [mouths of the] messengers	הֱיֵה עִם פִּיפִיּוֹת שְׁלוּחֵי
of Your people Israel,	עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,
as they stand	הָעוֹמְדִים
praying for the ability to plead before You	לְבַקֵּשׁ תְּפִלָּה וְתַחֲנוּנִים מִלְּפָנֶיךָ
on our behalf.	עַל עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.
Teach them what to say,	הוֹרֵם מַה שֶּׁיֹּאמְרוּ,
inspire them in their speech,	הָבֵינֵם מַה שֶּׁיְּדַבְּרוּ,
respond to their requests,	הַשִּׁיבֵם מַה שֶּׁיִּשְׁאָלוּ,
instruct them how to properly glorify You.	יַדְּעֵם הֵיךְ יְפָאֲרוּ.
May they walk in the light of Your presence,	בְּאוֹר פָּנֶיךָ יְהַלֵּכוּן,
And bend their knees to You.	בֶּרֶךְ לְךָ יִכְרְעוּן,
May Your people be blessed	עַמְּךָ בְּפִיהֶם יְבָרְכוּן,
through the words of their mouths,	וּמְבֹרָכוֹת פִּיךָ כֻּלָּם יִתְבָּרְכוּן.
and may all find the blessings of Your mouth.[3]	
May [these messengers] bring Your people [nearer] to You,	עַמְּךָ לְפָנֶיךָ יַעֲבִירוּן,
May they pass [many days] among them.	וְהֵם בַּתָּוֶךְ יַעֲבֹרוּן.
The eyes of Your people hang on them	עֵינֵי עַמְּךָ בָּם תְּלוּיוֹת,
while their own eyes await You.	וְעֵינֵיהֶם לְךָ מְיַחֲלוֹת.

[1] Inspired by the practicum on *Malkhuyot* presented by Margo Wagner, a cantorial student at the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, November, 2024

[2] Translation based upon *High Holiday Prayer Book, Machzor Hashalem L'Rosh Hashanah V'Yom Kippur*, translated and annotated by Philip Birnbaum, J Levine/Millenium, 2005, (380).

[3] Translation: *Mahzor Lev Shalem*, pp. 153 and 325. In this *mahzor* the petition ends here.

As they approach the holy ark with trepidation to put anger and enmity to rest, and as Your people surround them like a wall, may You, from above, gaze upon them with compassion.	גָּשִׁים מוּל אֲרוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּאֵימָה, לְשַׁכֵּךְ כַּעַס וְחֵמָה, וְעַמְּךָ מַסְבִּיבִים אוֹתָם כַּחוֹמָה, וְאַתָּה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם תַּשְׁגִּיחַ אוֹתָם לְרַחֲמָה.
Towards You they lift an eye heavenward, a heart, [filled with longing] pouring out like water, before You. From on high, may You hear [them].	עַיִן נוֹשְׂאִים לְךָ לַשָּׁמַיִם, לֵב שׁוֹפְכִים נָכְחֶךָ כַּמָּיִם, וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁמַע מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם.
Please do not allow their tongues to falter, may their words not ensnare them. (Trans.: Koren[4])	שֶׁלֹּא יִכָּשְׁלוּ בְלָשׁוֹנָם, וְלֹא יִנָּקְשׁוּ בְשִׂפְוָתָם,
May they not be ashamed of their congregation, their support, and may their congregation not be ashamed of them. (Trans.: Koren)	וּלֹא יֵבוֹשׁוּ בְמַשְׁעֲנָם, וְלֹא יִכָּלְמוּ בָם שְׁאוֹנָם,
May nought come from their lips that does not please You for Your gracious deeds, … they are gracious deeds and Your compassion is [indeed] compassion. As we have known…: You will be gracious to whom You will be gracious, You show compassion to whom You show compassion,	וְאַל יֹאמַר...פִּיהֶם דָּבָר שֶׁלֹּא כִרְצוֹנֶךָ. כִּי חֲנוּנֶיךָ, הֶמָּה חֲנוּנִים, וּמְרֻחֲמֶיךָ הֶמָּה מְרֻחָמִים. כְּמוֹ שֶׁיָּדַעְנוּ, אֶת אֲשֶׁר תָּחֹן יוּחָן, וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר תְּרַחֵם יְרֻחָם,
As it is written in Your Torah: I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and show compassion to whom I will show compassion.	כַּכָּתוּב בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ: וְחַנֹּתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם.
And it is said: May those who await You not be ashamed of me… May those who seek You out not be humiliated through me (Trans. Koren)	וְנֶאֱמַר: אַל יֵבוֹשׁוּ בִי קוֶיךָ... אַל יִכָּלְמוּ בִי מְבַקְשֶׁיךָ, אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Not every non-mandatory prayer in *Mahzor Lev Shalem* is actually recited, however. Some are skipped. Does your congregation recite *Heye im pifiyot*? Does your congregation pray for its *sh'liah tzibur*? Do most of your congregants even know that our liturgy includes a congregational prayer for the cantor? Perhaps not, for this is a rare text.

The vast majority of our communal prayers consist of descriptions of God and praise for God: *Aleinu l'shabeiah laAdon hakol lateit gedulah l'yotzeir b'reishit*. Second most common are prayers for ourselves as part of broad anonymous groups: *Zokhreinu l'hayim*, *Hashiveinu Adonai*

[4] *The Koren Rosh Hashanah Mahzor: Translation and Commentary by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*, Koren Publishers, Jerusalem, 2011, (596-8)

eilekha, *S'lah lanu, Sh'ma koleinu.* Less common are prayers for a named group of which we are a part*:Mi shebeirakh avoteinu hu yevarekh et kol hakahal hakadosh hazeh.* Sometimes we pray for a group of which we may or may not be a part: *Aheinu kol beit yisrael hanetunim b'tzarah.* With much less variety our scripted liturgy has us pray for ourselves as individuals (albeit generic, anonymous individuals): *Pithu li sha'arei tzedek, P'tah libi b'toratekha*, *Elohai n'tzor l'shoni meira*,*...kabel t'filati kit'filat zakein v'ragil*, *Adonai s'fatai tiftah ufi yagid t'hilatekha*, *Yihyu l'ratzon imrei fi v'hegyon libi l'fanekha.* There are times when we pray for others as individuals, e.g.when we offer a *mi shebeirakh* for one who has received an honor, or for one who is sick, when we respond to a person who has just *bentched gomel*, when we bless a child on Shabbat, when we pray that God comfort a mourner, or when we ask that God remember the soul of our beloved, when we wish someone *Y'varekhekha Adonai v'yishmerekha*, or when we pray for an infant, *k'shem shenikhnas labrit kein yikaneis l'torah, l'hupah, ul'ma'asim tovim.*

Often we pray for our teachers, *Al rabbanan v'al talmideihon,* among whom we can certainly count cantors, too. *Kaddish D'Rabbanan* is recited daily in some congregations. Yet only twice a year do we pray for you *as hazzanim*. So, in the context of our liturgy as a whole, this prayer for the *hazzan* is a nearly hidden gem, worthy of our attention and recitation.

This rare petition makes explicit two of the *hazzan*'s tasks: First:

עַמְּךָ לְפָנֶיךָ
יַעֲבִירוּן

that you will cause to pass, transport, lead, move *amkha*

לְפָנֶיךָ

closer to God. Might this include closer to hope, closer to faith in ultimate justice, closer to a sense of purpose, closer to a sense of self-worth, closer to a feeling of humility, of gratitude?
And, second:

עַמְּךָ יְבָרְכוּן

that you will bless *amkha*

בְּפִיהֶם

with your mouths, with the words and notes you sing. Might this mean: bless us with joy, with freedom to mourn, with experiences of awe and of exaltation, with a sense of connection to a past and to a living community, bless us with a deeper, more complex, richer life of the spirit?

The prayer also makes explicit some of the *hazzan*'s needs: that God

הוֹרֵם
מַה שֶּׁיֹּאמְרוּ,

teach *sh'liḥim* what to say in your *iyyunim*, in your own compositions, in your original *piyyutim*. And teach *sh'liḥim*, through study – what words already on the page have to say to a particular community at a particular time.

And:

הֲבִינֵם
מַה שֶּׁיְּדַבֵּרוּ

grant *sh'liḥim binah*, insight, *mah shey'daberu* what emotions and meanings might lie behind the printed words and also behind the words that *y'daberu*, that congregants might be saying.

The prayer, in its second half omitted in *Maḥzor Lev Shalem*, also acknowledges some of the challenges *sh'liḥei tzibbur* face. Thus we pray: Do not allow

לְשׁוֹנָם
יִכָּשְׁלוּ

their tongues to falter or

שִׂנְוֵנָם
יִנָּקְשׁוּ

their words to ensnare them. For cantors need time for careful study, time for theological wrestling with the words, time to practice to avoid stumbling over them, time to make the words your own that they do not hold you back but truly allow you to transport others through them.

This second half of the prayer makes explicit, too, the congregation's dependence upon the *sh'liḥim:*

עֵינֵי עַמְּךָ

the eyes of your people

תְּלוּיוֹת בָּם

hang on you. Yes, congregants' eyes are on you, noticing everything about you: your body language, your posture, your gestures, your facial expressions, your clothing, and your behavior on and off the *bimah.* Just as the eyes of children hang on us observing everything about us (more than we'd like to acknowledge), the eyes of *amkha* hang on you because you matter to us. We need you.

All that is explicit in the text of the congregation's prayer for you. There's an implicit message too. And that implicit message may be equally important. For the very idea that *a* congregation should pray for its cantors implies that the success of your work relies in part on the support you receive from the congregation. I think of the support that some congregations

offer their *hazzan* by humming.[5] Humming is one way for a congregation to add support as the cantor

גָּשִׁים מוּל אֲרוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ

approaches the ark

בְּאֵימָה, with trepedation

לֵב שׁוֹפְכִים כַּמַּיִם pouring out your hearts like water.

Humming is surely *one* form of support. Praying for the *sh'lihei tzibbur*

מַסְבִּיבִים אוֹתָם כַּחוֹמָה

surrounding them [with the community's prayers] like a protective wall, surely is another. Imagine if every congregation supported its *hazzan* with prayer. When rabbis study the *mahzor* with congregants, if they point to *Heye im pifiot*, perhaps a congregant will say: "Hey, we should be praying for our cantor!" And they'll compose a version of this prayer in English for the congregation to recite next Rosh Hashanah.

Prayer alone, however, is often not enough. We don't merely pray that God heal the sick. We have to provide the ill with the care they need for their bodies and their minds. We don't merely pray that God comfort mourners. We visit them, feed them, sit by their side.

And, it's not enough merely to pray that children grow up

לְתוֹרָה וּלְחֻפָּה וּלְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים

We have to create and sustain healthy, safe, secure families and communities in which values of *Torah, ahavah, uma'asim tovim* are taught, modeled and reinforced. And, surely it's not enough merely to pray for our country and its leaders.

Congregations should most definitely pray for their *hazzanim*. Prayer, however, is not enough. So I leave you with this question: What do our congregations currently do, and what more could or should they do to support the crucial work of their *sh'lihei tzibbur*, to support your work as cantors?

Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig has been teaching at HUC-JIR since 1985. Though not a musician herself, she has audited a dozen courses taught by Cantors Faith Steinsnyder, Jacob Mendelson, Israel Goldstein z"l*, Azi Schwartz and Dr. Gordon Dale, among others. Along with Hazzan Henry Rosenblum, Wenig leads cantorial students in an exploration of the ways in which diverse musical settings interpret High Holiday prayers. One of her favorite tasks is helping fourth-year students prepare the liturgy and* iyyunim *for their High Holiday practica.*

[5] Cantor Jacob Mendelson is renowned for teaching his congregations and his students at JTS and HUC to hum in support of the *hazzan*.

Yofi u-k'dushah: The Role of the Aesthetic in the Realm of the Holy

By Diane Ruth Cover and Saul Philip Wachs

This article reflects an ongoing conversation between us. Saul's background is in music, while Diane is an artist and a calligrapher. The dialogue began one day on our honeymoon, while we were strolling down the *Tayelet* (boardwalk) in Tel Aviv one late afternoon. Saul wanted to *daven Minhah* before the sun set, and so he looked around, trying to find an orientation in the direction of Jerusalem. Turning his back on the Mediterranean Sea as the sun began its long descent towards the horizon, he found himself facing — McDonalds! Diane bemusedly alternated her gaze between the magnificent scene playing out before her and Saul, who was intent on completing his davening before the time for *Minhah* had passed. Afterwards, we engaged in a long and animated discussion about the trade-off between facing Jerusalem— a traditional value— and watching one of the great natural phenomena of nature as a backdrop to praising the Almighty.

That dialogue has continued over the years. We continue to discuss the nature of authentic Jewish spirituality and the role of contact with nature and beauty as a form of spirituality which has deep roots in the Hebrew Bible. During the summer of 2005, we spent several days in a farmhouse in Tuscany, one of the most beautiful places on earth, blessed with striking topography and generations-long reverential care for the land. Saul took advantage of the opportunity to *daven* outside each weekday, experiencing a heightened sense of *kavvanah* (devotional intensity)— particularly while preparing to pray— and later, when encountering the liturgical texts which speak of creation and God's gift of the natural world. We both agreed that that experience brought home a way in which *yofi* can stimulate a sense of *k'dushah.*

Beauty

The aesthetic is a bridge which links the tangible world and transcendence. A beautiful landscape, painting or ritual object can cause us to contemplate that which is beyond the tangible. Music and dance or the drama of ritual are capable of evoking thoughts and feelings that move us powerfully. A simple melody produced by the human voice or an instrument can cause the spirit to soar towards heaven, a recited poem can arouse emotion and feeling. Proportion and harmony or a balance of space, color and texture, all conspire to create a particular mood. It may be joyous or tranquil. Brightness and light as well as vivid colors may cause us to feel celebratory, while a soft light and monochromatic colors could instill a thoughtful and contemplative mood.

Different feelings arise when space is delimited by round contours as opposed to sharp angles. Large and uncluttered spaces with high ceilings might inspire in us a sense of monumentality, grandeur and power while small and intimate spaces could induce a feeling of safety and warmth.

Sacred music ideally reflects the moods of liturgical texts that are sung to it. As a case in point, different musical settings of the Friday night prayer *V'shamru* ("The people Israel shall observe the Sabbath through all generations") might highlight its serene grandeur or our people's

covenantal commitment to the Law, each of which is implied by this biblically derived prayer text (Exodus 31:16-17).

Poetry is next-best suited to express the life of the spirit. Like the visual arts, it can show us other ways of seeing and understanding the world. It may express our yearnings and desires. It may reflect that which is obvious or that which is unclear, enigmatic or hidden. Indeed, it provides us with a glimpse of insight which was not evident before but is now refracted in some new, dimly imagined way.

The artist, in a sense, prophesies, in that he or she discovers something new that others might not see or comprehend and shares that revelation which reflects a new vision or potentiality. Moreover, posits John Dewey (1859-1952), through the creation and enjoyment of a work of art, the beholder is led to a refreshed and re-educated vision. Indeed, the aesthetic experience can engender and illuminate new insights which could enrich our lives and move us enough to conceivably change ourselves. [1]

The arts, therefore, are catalysts which orient and illuminate. And it is our imagination which serves as the vehicle for our apprehension. Stimulated by the senses of hearing and sight, the imagination engages in synthesis, abstraction, invention, and integration, leading us to new awareness and understanding. Dewey says that our imagination allows us to adapt to the exigencies and vicissitudes of life and to accommodate to the whole, as we connect to one another in a shared experience.[2]

Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) tells us that art in any form is the most effective way of presenting the numinous. Music, poetry and the visual arts convey the mysterious and the numinous, while evoking awe and wonder along with Divine majesty. [3]

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) teaches that the role of the arts in the worship service is to encourage the congregant to actively participate in the devotional act of co-creation, to empathize with its pageantry through the experience of the poet, expressed by means of words and music. The goal is to unfold one's spirit, to actually transform oneself. The act of prayer, according to Rabbi Soloveitchik, is a creative attempt to fill the void of chaos with beautiful reality. During prayer, through imagination, one renews and recreates oneself.[4] Moreover, God expects us to be creative— as God is creative. In sum, the act of prayer is a co-creative partnership with the Almighty, in which we feel the mystery of the cosmos. That, in turn, fosters within us halakhic sensibilities.[5]

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[1] Cited in James Alfred Martin, Jr., *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1990:113.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 116
[3] *Ibid*., p. 73
[4] J.B. Soloveitchik*, Halakhic Man*, translated by Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society), 1983:106.
[5] J.B. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart*, Shalom Charney, ed. (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House for Toras HoRav Foundation), 2003:55.

Holiness

In Soloveitchik's view, beauty (*yofi*) accompanies creation in the process of bringing holiness (*k'dushah*) into the world. Only by coming in contact with the beautiful and exalted may one even hope to apprehend God. In fact, he says "the apprehension of beauty elevates the mind, cleanses the spirit, and, at least for a moment, elevates the heart." [6]

Paradoxically, this encounter with the majesty of nature through prayer can produce two contrasting feelings. On the one hand, we are reminded of our smallness, our cosmic insignificance in contrast to the majesty of God. It is not an accident that, like Chapter One of Genesis, the *b'rakhot* that speak of creation — *Yotseir or* ("Creator of Light"), *Ha-ma'ariv aravim* ("Bringer of Evenings"), *Hazan et hakol* ("Who Nourishes All")— are texts in which only God acts; we humans remain silent and passive observers who receive God's grace.[7] On the other hand, viewing the beauty of nature through the prism of prayer can enhance one's sense of dignity for, as far as we know, only we human beings have both the capacity to appreciate aesthetics and a need to do so.[8]

Furthermore, Rabbi Soloveitchik elucidates, "man feels overcome by the impact of beauty. However, he is not crushed by it. On the contrary, he recovers a sense of worthiness and dignity."

Humans express their joy and pride in being uniquely able to acknowledge beauty, through a *b'rakhah* recited in response to natural beauty: ברוך אתה ה אלהינו מלך העולם שככה לו בעולמו ("Blessed are You our God, Sovereign of the Universe Who has [created] such things in Your world"). [9] This *b'rakhah* acknowledges the poverty of language in trying to express the mystery and beauty of wonder. Others, too, have noted the same limitation of language. Elaine Scarry observes that beauty is breathtaking; it transfixes us, stops us in our tracks and makes the heart beat faster, virtually demanding a sense of reverence.[10] Surely we have all reacted with a similar sense of wonder — even exaltation — to the experience of seeing a colorful rainbow, a sudden bolt of lightning or the snow-capped peak of a high mountain.

A Place of Worship

The *Mishkan* (Wilderness Tabernacle) was a work of splendor, gold and light, the detailed descriptions of which (Exodus chapters 35-38) reflect the love manifested by those involved and their passionate desire to build a fitting sanctuary to honor God and to house the Divine words. Indeed, they must have understood that music, color, stones, jewels, and gold play on our sensibilities and are indirect stimuli to moods of devotion and contrition which lead to the sublime.

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[6] *Ibid*., p. 59

[7] See on this, Saul P. Wachs, "Some Reflections on Two Genres of *Berakhah*" *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Vol. 22, nos. 1-2, July/December 1992.

[8] God's awareness of this human capacity is reflected in Genesis 2:9.

[9] The translation is by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Fourth Edition* (London: Collins), 2006. *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Rabbi Jules Harlow, ed., New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1985), translates the *b'rakhah*:"...Who has such beauty in His world."

[10] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1999.

The Divine message was that human beings are capable of creating beauty — with a spiritual purpose. The splendid *Mishkan* and the *Batei mikdash* (both Jerusalem Temples) were signposts, evocative of the heavenly, which brought our ancestors closer to God. In referring to the synagogue as a *mikdash m'at* ("Temple-in-miniature"), the rabbis of the Talmud were teaching us that each synagogue has a potential to perform the same function.[11] Like its biblical antecedents, it can serve as a bridge between the mundane concrete world and the realm of the ineffable. Beautiful prayer spaces which glow with color and light, rich woods and fabrics play on our sensibilities and can inspire us to a greater awareness of the Divine. Since the ritual of the synagogue retains elements of worship in the *Mishkan* and *Batei mikdash*, this *Mikdash m'at* can express the same human yearning for closeness to God. The use of visual, verbal, and auditory vehicles are important media for reaching this goal, each helping us to express this yearning: The light of the *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Flame) and the brightness of the *Menorah* (seven-branched candelabra) — direct links to the *Mishkan* and the *Batei mikdash*— strengthen our sense of lineage and remind us that we are links in the chain of Jewish continuity.[12]

The *Shofar* (ram's horn) sounding, the chanting and singing, the poetry and narrative of the prayers, the choreography and pageantry of Torah processionals, all create moments of beauty when we sense the Divine. Visually, we adorn the *Sefer* (Torah scroll) with colorful fabric mantles, silver crowns and finials. We place it in the *Aron ha-kodesh*, whose *parokhet* (curtain) is often artistically embroidered. Moreover, the worshipper is moved by the pageantry of the Torah service, wherein the Torah is likened to a monarch, bejeweled and dressed in regal splendor. Indeed, this beauty can evoke feelings of closeness to God. (It is significant that the liturgy recited when the Torah is taken from the *Aron ha-kodesh* and when it is returned, speak more of God than of the Torah itself). [13]

The aesthetic sense is stimulated through contact with the natural world, the sound and meaning of words, music, dance, drama, and visual arts. In worship, one experiences a sense of mystery. One senses the ineffable during these moments while in visual contact with an environment of mystery and beauty. In such an environment one can feel a sense of community while singing together and yearning for the Divine. John Dewey claims that aesthetic and religious intensity can engender an experience of exquisite clarity and intelligibility which introduces us to a deeper reality of the world. It gives us feelings of belonging and takes us beyond ourselves, to find ourselves.[14] When the worshipper emerges from the experience of worship more appreciative and reflective, with more awareness of others and concern for justice for all humankind, he or she feels morally uplifted.

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[11] The term *mikdash m'at* originates in Ezekiel 11:16— where God refers to Himself as being a "diminished sanctuary" for His beleaguered people — but after the Second Temple's destruction was applied by the rabbis to the synagogue; BT *Megillah* 29b.

[12] *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, Steven Fine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1996: 24ff. On the function of ritual in engendering and strengthening three kinds of roots, i.e., a sense of lineage, a sense of peerage, and a sense of linkage, see Joseph J. Schwab, "The Religiously Oriented School in the United States: A Memorandum on Policy," *Conservative Judaism*, vol. viii, no. 3, Spring 1964:7-8.

[13] Because the *Sefer torah* is the primary source of *k'dushah* in a synagogue, it is not surprising that it became the focus for artistic gifts of generations throughout history.

[14] Martin, p. 117

And in so reaching God— writes Rabbi Soloveitchik— through prayer that is aesthetically inspiring, people can realize an ecstatic relationship with the Divine, that is unattainable through gestures limited to the merely cognitive and ethical.[15] The worshiper who is truly committed seeks to empathize with God through the imagery of the liturgical poet. The committed worshipper asks, "what are the implications of this text for my life right now, for my family and my community?" This can be daunting, as one may encounter strong feelings during the service.

Much of the dysfunctional behavior in contemporary synagogues masks an attempt to flee from engagement with the liturgy.[16] In many cases this reluctance could well reflect a fear of the feelings that might emerge as a result of engagement with *k'dushah*. According to Moshe Halbertal, the single most important characteristic of *k'dushah* is that it cannot be manipulated.[17] We cannot control it, and that can be overwhelming and frightening.

Yet we are also drawn to this very engagement. We know that there is a dimension to reality beyond that which is tangible but we are pre-determined to view that dimension from the outside. לא יראוני אדם וחי ("No human may see Me and live"). And even as we are frightened of it, we nevertheless yearn for contact with that which points to *k'dushah*.[18]

Modernity has brought with it its own distinctive challenges to spirituality. If they engage at all, moderns are limited in their ability to do so imaginatively. The scientific spirit of the age and the emphasis on critical and literal inquiry rather than metaphorical reading create barriers to the celebration and contemplation of the sublime and the mysterious. The latter represent the very essence of an artistically realized religious experience.[19]

Literalness is the chief enemy of the religious spirit. Poetry shows us other ways of seeing and understanding a world in which the human spirit may live.[20] Any of the arts— when integrated through our imagination— can evoke a grander vision than the literal understanding of cognition alone might provide.

A "Surrogate of the Congregation in Prayer"

The challenge that every *sh'liah tsibbur* faces is to help worshipers overcome their fear of drawing nearer to the Divine. Instead, anyone who has been delegated by the community to lead public prayer must do all within their power to enable congregants to enter the

[15] J.B. Soloveichik, *Worship of the Heart*, p. 59.

[16] Samuel Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction*, 1976. For a complementary approach, see Jeremy Schoenfield, *Undercurrents of Jewish Prayer* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), 2007.

[17] Moshe Halbertal, "*Al k'dushah u-g'vulot ha-yitsug ha-amanuti v'ha-l'shoni," Borders of Sanctity in Art, Society and Jewish Thought*, Emily D. Bilski & Avigdor Shina, eds. (Jerusalem: Keren Edy), 2003.

[18] The classic work on this is Rudolph Otto, *The Holy— On the Irrational in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (first published in German, 1917). Otto uses the encounter of Moses with God at the burning bush (Exodus chapter 3) as paradigmatic of this ambivalence. Another example is found in the behavior of the Israelites at Mount Sinai (compare Exodus 20:12-13 and 21:16).

[19] Rudolph Otto, cited in Martin, p. 73.

[20] George Santayana, cited in Martin, p. 107

realm of the holy. In this task, the *hazzan*[21] is called upon to become a musical artist whose palette consists of Judaism's multi-colored prayer modes and whose brush is loaded with words of the received liturgy.

It is noteworthy that, while the Torah places an absolute ban upon any effort to depict God visually (a ban which was not accepted by Christianity but is accepted by Islam), it does not limit our ability to "visualize" God in words. The artist, poet or musician brings to light what others cannot see and may be led to see through the aesthetic experience. Through envisioning what has never been seen before, the artist creates anew. In religious terms, the artist is not only priest but also prophet, says Alfred Whitehead. [22]

The artist of vocalized language can bring words to life through musical interpretation. That is a core mission of a *hazzan*, who reveals new understandings of the liturgical text. The music of the synagogue is logogenic; its words are central. Abraham Joshua Heschel taught that a *hazzan* who is worthy of his/her calling shows respect for the dignity of words. If the prayer chant is effective in tone-painting its underlying words, two things result: there is an experience of beauty; and the building of a bridge to the transcendent. And here is where the challenge lies, because we live in a world where words are often debased. To defend against this vulgarization, we have developed a kind of semantic aphasia: we tune out most commercial announcements, so much so that we may forget to tune back in when hearing or uttering words of prayer.

Somehow, a *hazzan* must lead the congregation in such an artful and arresting way that they break through this semantic aphasia. Only then can the assemblage collectively begin to engage with the liturgy. Making that connection will require *kavvanah* — focus, intention and sincerity — on the part of every participant.

Indeed, for the aesthetic to play any role in the realm of the holy, awareness and perception are required. To behold the transcendent once the aesthetic element has played its part, we need to recapture the openness of early childhood. Very young children still retain the wide-eyed innocence to see and respond to the world around them. They sense its wonder and majesty before they are trained not to perceive its wholeness: its beauty and holiness all wrapped together.

To compensate for our loss of youthful innocence, we adults have been given a liturgy that links *yofi* and *k'dushah*. Performance is the key. Facilitated by a gifted, knowledgeable and committed *sh'liah tsibbur*, prayer acts as a bridge between the mundane and the eternal. The element of *yofi* enters through the visual adornment of prayer spaces, the sacred music and the inspiring rendition of liturgy. Experiencing aesthetic beauty leads to an otherworldly uplift of spirit, a feeling of contact with *k'dushah,* that imparts a deeper meaning to our lives.

Aided by all of the above, worshippers are primed to engage in a creative act which is characterized by struggle. They must first grapple with the medieval Hebrew poetry whose words fill the pages of our prayer books (English translations, typically bland and banal, will not

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[21] Hyman l. Sky, *The Development of the Office of* Hazzan *through the Talmudic Period*, unpublished dissertation (Philadelphia: The Dropsie University), 1977, Preface, vii: "The ubiquitous *hazzan* [synagogue supervisor] assumed the function of the *sh'liah tsibbur* so as to deal with a 'canonized' liturgy, after the close of the Talmudic period but before the beginning of the 7th century."

[22] Martin, p. 121.

do it). The sincere 'pray-er' needs help, which the *hazzan* is uniquely equipped to provide. Charged with the task of bringing often obscure written language to life, the *hazzan* will do whatever is necessary in order to make worshipers aware of nuanced meanings woven into the biblically inspired poetic words. When this is done artistically, yet in a way which remains faithful to the text, it allows the congregant to make connections and to explore possible implications for personal, familial and communal life.

Music is uniquely endowed with the capacity to link beauty and holiness. According to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), "music, is the only language which seems to be compatible with the wonder and mystery of being."[23] When one listens to enduring liturgical music, one's soul is lifted to realms of existence which it could not attain through the power of the intellect alone. [24]

Marshaling music, art and poetry in the creation of beauty— to facilitate entry into the realm of the holy— is a worthy and significant task. The privilege of participating in this task is given to each of us who have accepted the role of *sh'liah tsibbur*. Granted, the creation of *yofi* cannot be seen as the ultimate value in Judaism. But it can serve as a portal to *k'dushah*, opening our minds and hearts to an awareness of the numinous.

Diane Ruth Cover, M.S.W.,was a psychiatric Social Worker for many years, and continued in that direction by serving on the clinical faculty at the School of Social Policy of the University of Pennsylvania. She is also an accomplished painter and calligrapher. Saul Philip Wachs, Hazzan, Ph. D., was the Rosaline B. Feinstein Professor of Education and Liturgy and Director of the Doctoral Program in Education at Gratz College; following his recent retirement, a chair in his name has been created at the College. He is a graduate of the College of Jewish Music at the Jewish Theological Seminary and has served as sheliah tsibbur *for the* Yamim Nora'im *at Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline, MA since 1972.* *This essay first appeared in Volume 37 No. 1 (Fall, 2012) of the* Journal of Synagogue Music. *At that time, the writers expressed appreciation to Rabbi Benjamin Segal, and to Professors Jeffrey Tigay, Michael Chernick and Roger Camien, who suggested resources which proved to be invaluable in the preparation of this article.*

[23] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Geroux), 1966: 245.
[24] Avraham Holtz, "Religion and the Arts in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel," *Conservative Judaism*, vol. xxvii, no. 1, Winter 1978:34.

NEGINAH L'MA'ASEH

Minhah Hadashah – A *Piyyut* for Shavu'ot

Yoni and Yonina Tokayer

Zechariah Pesach Haber (1991-2024) had a life-long devotion to the land of Israel. A biologist, his work involved improving the productivity of crops in harsh climatic conditions. He was also a Torah scholar, who thought that Shavu'ot should have a *piyyut* that expressed the holiday's agricultural connections. In 2017 he composed "*Minhah Hadashah*," combining his own poetry with texts gathered from a variety of traditional sources. (You can see the full text below together with a "poetic" translation by Haber's sister-in-law, Devorah Friedman. For a more complete explication of his sources, see https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/571156?lang=bi)

Master Sergeant (res.) Haber was killed in Gaza on January 16, 2024, leaving a widow and three small children. After his passing, Yoni and Nina Tokayer (together, the performing duo "Yonina") composed a melody for his *piyyut*. We include this "New Offering" in hopes that his song, as well as his memory, will be celebrated.

You can watch the video of that performance, which they created to express Zechariah's love of Torah, Israeli agriculture, and his family here: https://youtu.be/AerKplwn-hY?si=xxlxPKtozjl-AiXw).

Blessing of the Children

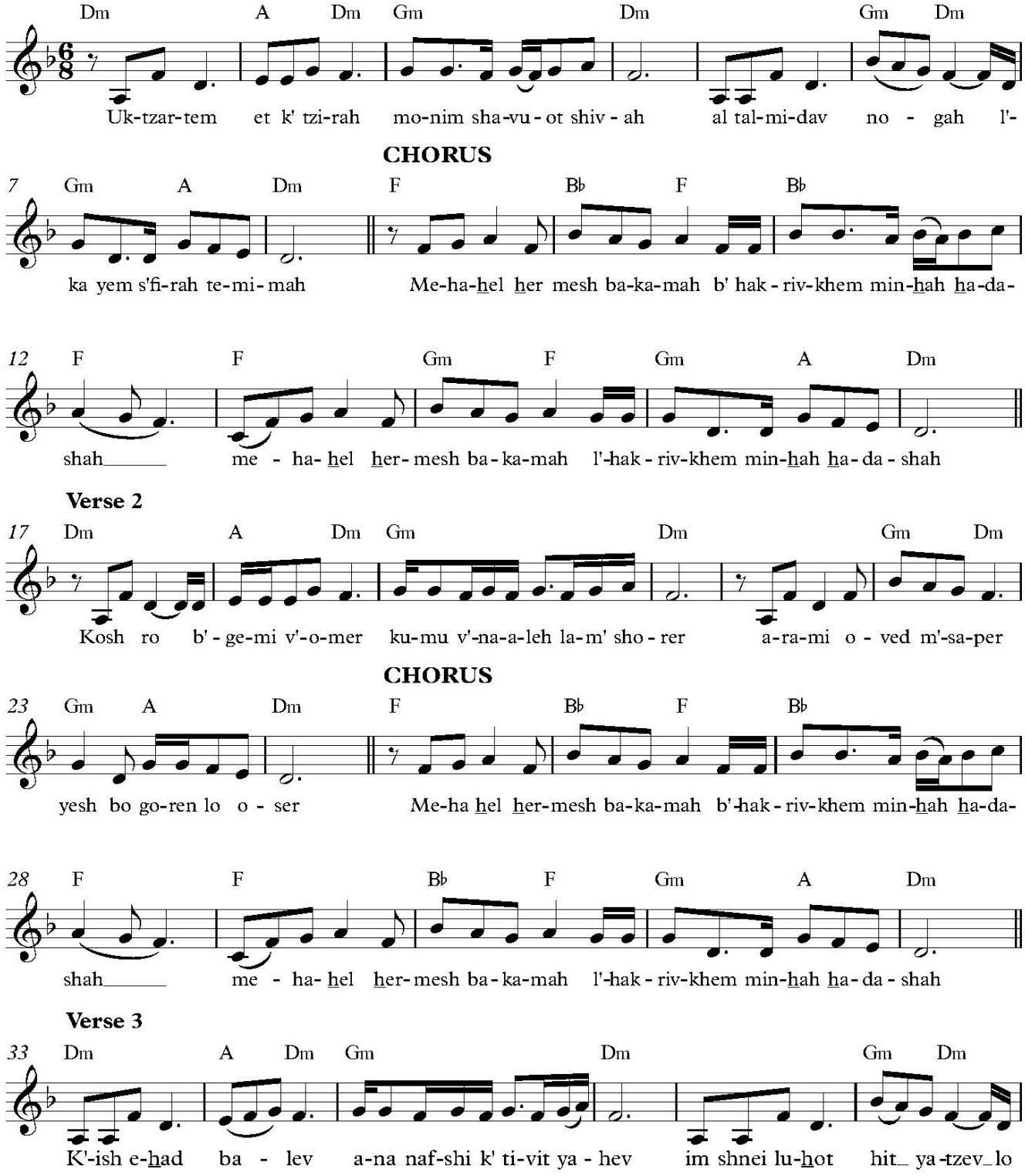
Sholom Kalib

Our colleague Sholom Kalib (1929 – 2025) was by no means a fan of "congregational singing." (See the remembrance of him by Gabriel Wasserman on pps. 62-67). Best known for his encyclopedic collection of traditional Eastern European music, he was also a composer who edited and arranged several volumes of works by Todros Greenberg and Joshua Lind, as well as concert services for Shabbat and *Yamim Nora'im* for cantor, children's choir and orchestra. Many of his synagogue recitatives remained unpublished at the time of his passing earlier this year. We are grateful to Dr. Wasserman for unearthing this lovely setting of the Blessing of the Children, and to Hazzan Kalib's family for allowing us to include it here. You may click anywhere on the first page of the score to hear a beautiful rendition by Hazzan Carl Sayres.

Minhah Hadashah

Zechariah Haber

Yoni and Nina Tokayer



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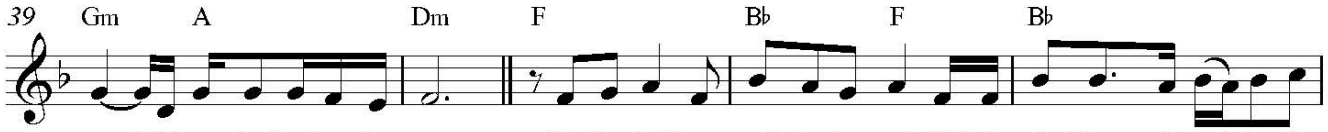
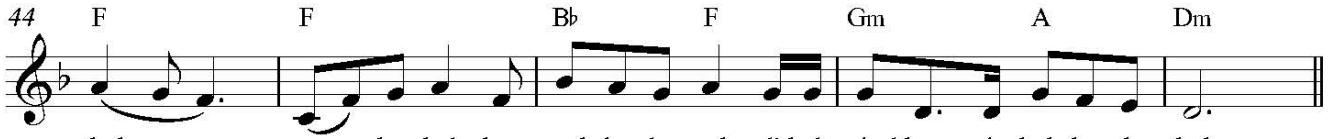
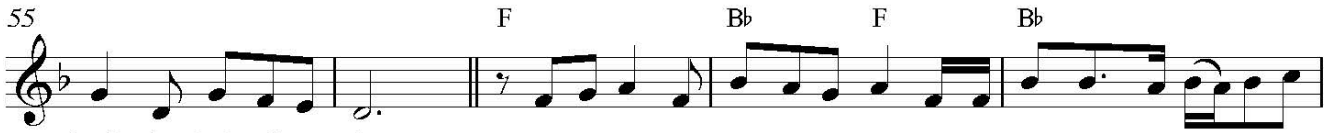
CHORUS

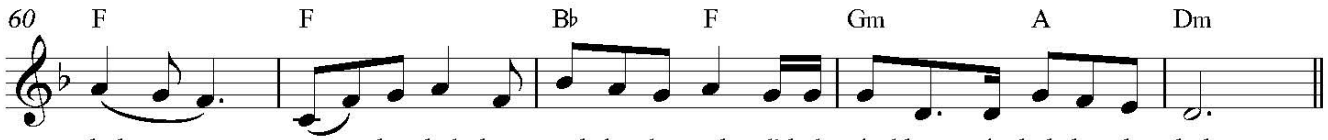




Verse 4

CHORUS





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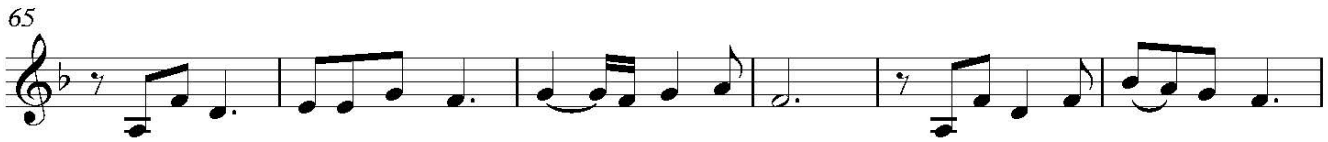

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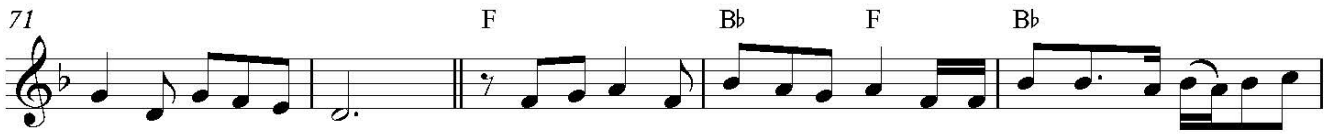
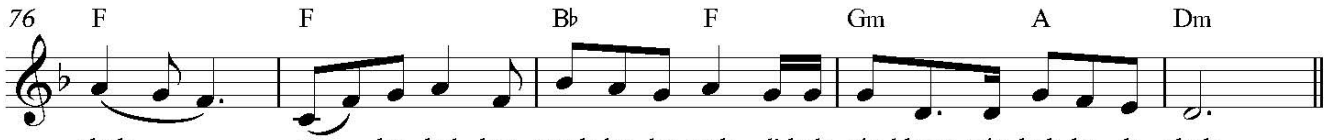
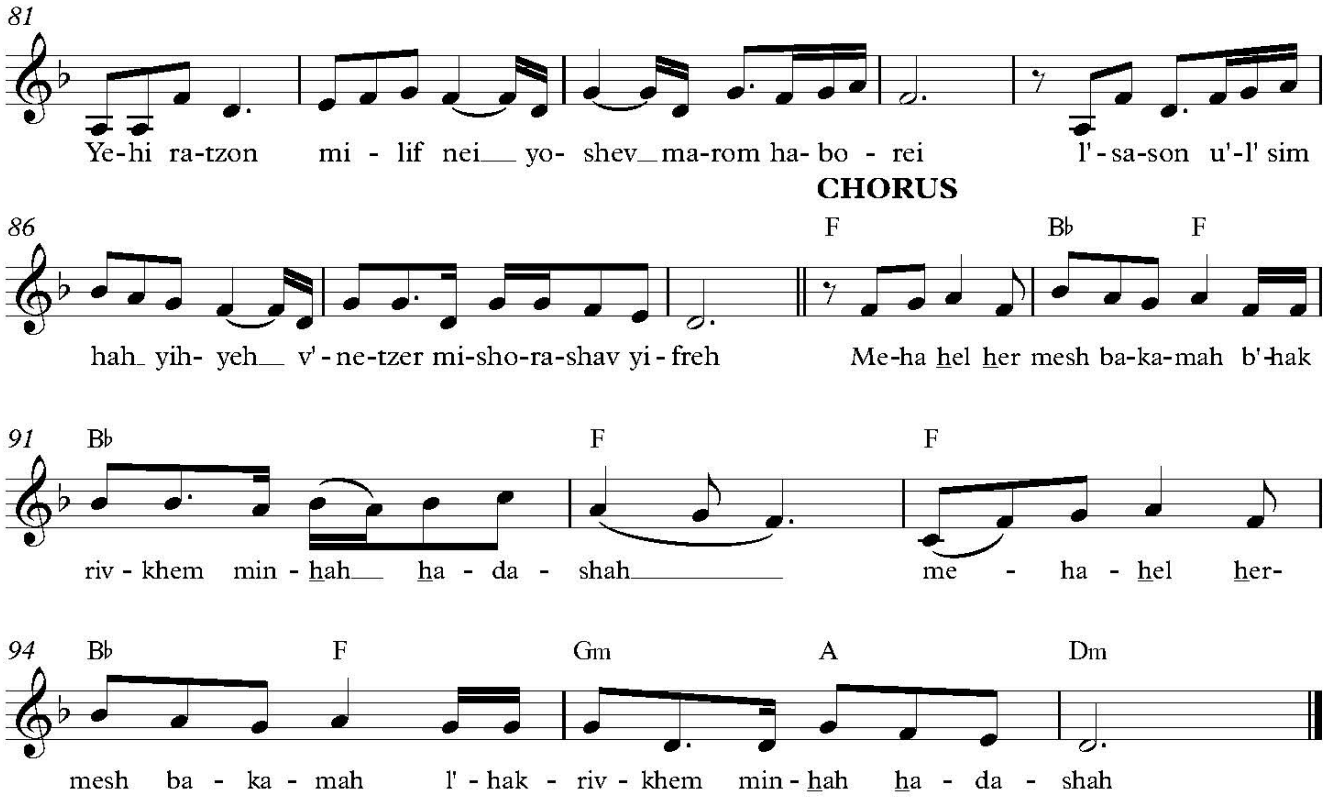




Verse 6

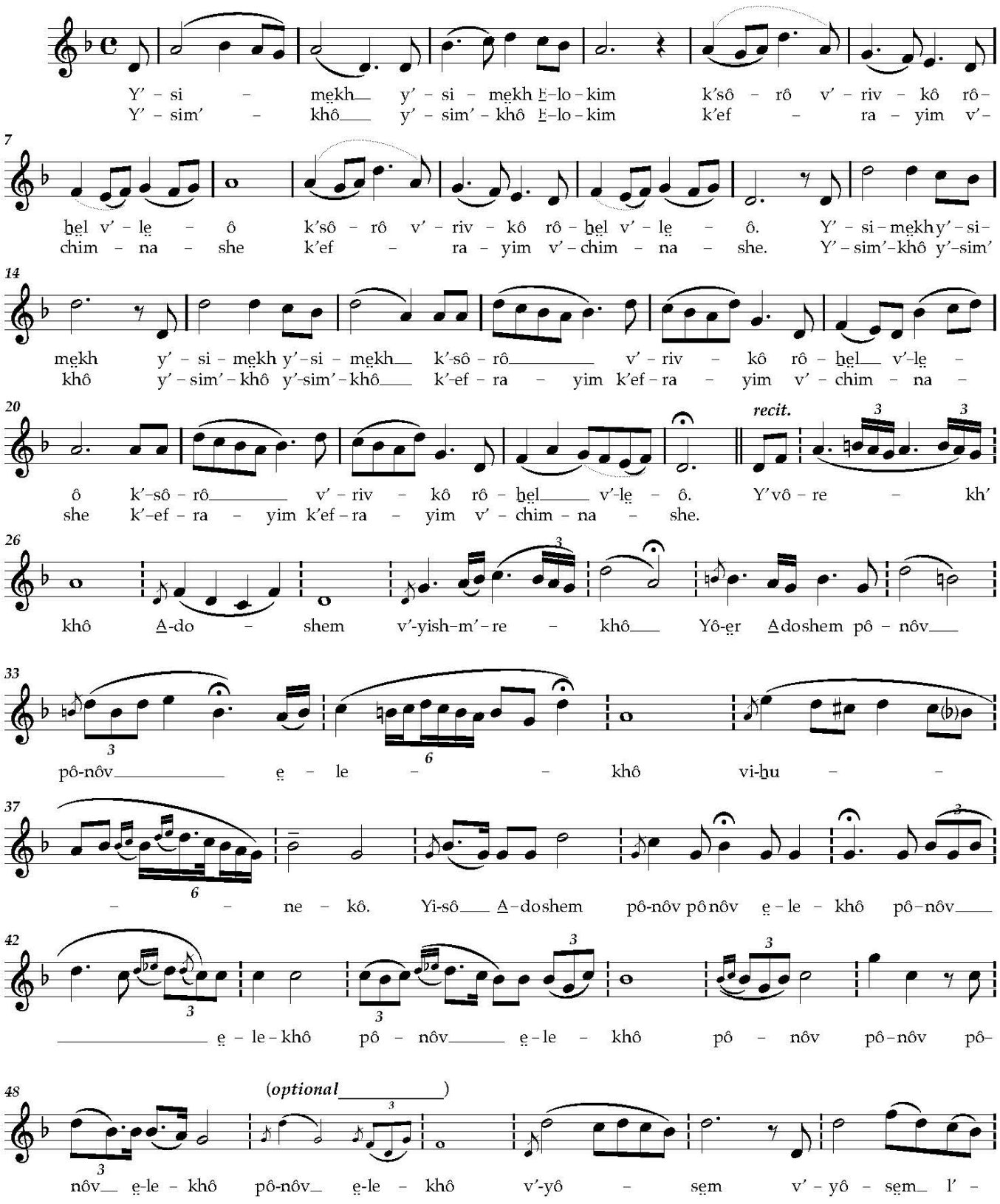

81
Ye-hi ra-tzon mi - lif nei yo- shev ma-rom ha- bo - rei l' - sa-son u'-l' sim
CHORUS
86
F
B♭
F
hah yih- yeh v' - ne-tzer mi-sho-ra-shav yi - freh Me-ha hel her mesh ba-ka-mah b'-hak
91
B♭
F
F
riv - khem min - hah ha - da - shah me - ha - hel her-
94
B♭
F
Gm
A
Dm
mesh ba - ka - mah l' - hak - riv - khem min - hah ha - da - shah

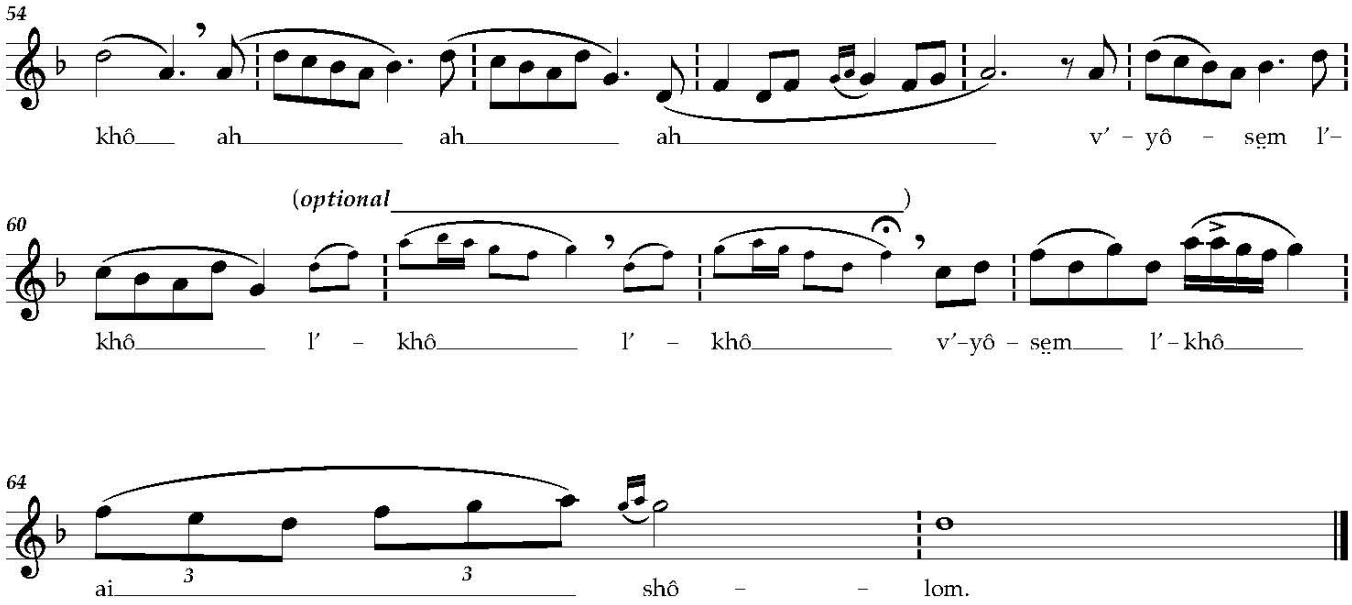
A Poetic Translation of Zechariah Haber's *Minḥah Ḥadashah* (by Devorah Friedman)

The first of your harvest, come reap	וּקְצַרְתֶּם אֶת־קְצִירָהּ
After measuring a full seven weeks	מוֹנִים שַׁבּוּעוֹת שְׁבָעָה
That you may mark your counting complete	עַל תַּלְמִידָיו נוֹגָה
Ending the time that for students we did weep.	לְקַיֵּם סְפִירָה תְּמִימָה
From the time that your harvesting grain has begun	מֵהָחֵל חָרְמֵשׁ בַּקָּמָה
Offer it to God beneath the afternoon sun.	בְּהַקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה
A rope around the first fruits he is tying	קוֹשְׁרוֹ בְּגֶמִי, וְאוֹמַר
Let us go, arise, to where the Levi'im sing	קוּמוּ וְנַעֲלֶה לַמְשׁוֹרֵר
"My father was a fugitive Aramean," recounting	אֲרַמִּי אֹבֵד אָמַסְפֵּר
These *bikkurim* leave the threshing-floor pure and clean	יֵשׁ בּוֹ גֹּרֶן לֹא אוֹסֵר
From the time...	מֵהָחֵל...
To the nation whose heart is as one	כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בַּלֵּב
From God who in giving, his self has given	אָנָא נַפְשִׁי כְּתִיבִית יַהֵב
Another two tablets of transmission	עִם שְׁנֵי־לֻחֹת הִתְיַצֵּב
Learning at their feast, to make up for sleeping.	לוֹמֵד בְּנֶשֶׁף אַחַר הַסֵּב
From the time...	מֵהָחֵל...
God asks of his children dear	בְּבַקָּשָׁה מִכֶּם בָּנִים
When the days of the harvest-judgment appear	עַל פֵּרוֹת מַעֲשִׂים
The true end of Pesa<u>h</u> is near	עִם שְׁבָעָה מוּל שְׁבָעִים
A time of white linens, of joyous atmosphere.	מִקְרָא שִׂמְחָה וּלְבָנִים
From the time...	מֵהָחֵל...
Let all Jews come and attend	יֵרָאֶה כָּל־זְכוּרְךָ
With offerings, of two *ma'ot* to extend	שְׁתֵּי מַעוֹת מָעָה
Which may be offered up to day seven	מְעוּנֹת יִתְקוֹן שְׁבָעָה
In memory of our sacrifices, let our prayers ascend	אִסְרוּ־חַג לַמִּיטָּה
From the time...	מֵהָחֵל...
May it be your will, my Lord	יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶי
Creator enthroned on high, adored	יוֹשֵׁב מְרוֹם-הַבּוֹרֵא
Let joy and gladness be our reward	לְשָׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה יִהְיֶה
And our Messiah be restored	וְנֵצֶר מִשָּׁרָשָׁיו יִפְרֶה
From the time…	מֵהָחֵל...

Blessing of the Children

S. Kalib

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REVIEWS

Hazzan Mordecai Gustav Heiser: An Artist, His Art, and the Cantor Tradition in America by Gilya Gerda Schmidt

Reviewed by Stephen Stein

Hazzan Mordecai Gustav Heiser; An Artist, His Art and the Cantor Tradition in America (University of Tennessee Press, 2024) is clearly a labor of love for its author, Gilya Gerda Schmidt. Dr. Schmidt, professor emerita of religious studies and director emerita of the Judaic studies program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, met Hazzan Heiser in 1986, three years prior to his passing. She worked on this project, off and on, for three decades.

Dr. Schmidt chronicles the life of Hazzan Heiser beginning with his youth in Germany. The book contains several interesting tidbits about Mordecai as a student in Berlin. Aron Friedmann was among his instructors in cantorial school. Heiser also enrolled in the *Hocschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, a progressive non-denoninational Jewish university whose founders included Abraham Geiger. Emil Fackenheim was a classmate; Leo Baeck and Ismar Elbogen were among his instructors.

Mordecai had studied to become a rabbi in addition to serving as *hazzan*, but those plans were thwarted by the Shoah. He endured a brief incarceration at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp but then made the fortunate decision to flee Germany in 1939, notably after having witnessed Kristallnacht. He stayed briefly in England and finally arrived in Pittsburgh where he served Congregation B'nai Israel for almost five decades. During his tenure, Mordecai became one of the most beloved and respected clergymen in the city's Jewish community and beyond, serving both as *hazzan* and *mohel*. The knowledge he acquired as a rabbinical student was evident throughout this career.

The author is a Jew by choice who converted to Judaism after having met Mordecai. Undoubtedly, he touched her soul, both on and off the pulpit, which likely played an instrumental role in her decision to become Jewish. Especially fascinating and impressive is the knowledge she acquired while writing this book relative to the works of Sulzer, Lewandowski, Naumbourg, Dunajewsky and other composers of the 19th century, via the Out-of-Print Classics and Ephros Anthologies, information typically known only to *hazzanim* and synagogue choral conductors.

The repertoire of Hazzan Heiser for each liturgical occasion is documented herein. This material had previously been unknown to Dr. Schmidt. As a result, she spent countless hours in the music library of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem locating the written scores corresponding to the recordings referenced below. Additionally, she notes the important assistance received from Eli Schleiffer, who befriended her.

The book is augmented with audio samples of Hazzan Heiser and his choir, which may be found on YouTube. Professional mixed choir was central to the musical tradition of this once very prominent synagogue. These recordings, while not of professional quality and made late in Mordecai's career, nonetheless, give us a wonderful glimpse into the skills of this master hazzan. While his voice remains strong, one can only imagine what he sounded like in the prime of life. Still, even late in his career, the interpretation of text is exemplary. Worthy of note are the recordings of Mordecai singing with his pre-teen granddaughter; her voice, even in these amateur recordings, is angelic, with perfect intonation.

Mordecai was among the Cantors Assembly's earliest members. He was an ardent Zionist and prolific fundraiser for the CA, the cantorial school at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Zionist Organization of America. He organized and performed in numerous fundraising concerts for all three organizations.

The detail with which Dr. Schmidt penned this book makes it accessible for both Jewish and non-Jewish readers. I recommend this work, along with the accompanying audio files, to all who are interested in the impact of European-trained *hazzanim* on the American cantorate during the second half of the 20th century.

To Hazzan Heiser, we say, *Y'hi zikhro barukh*, and to Gilya Gerda Schmidt we offer a heartfelt, *Yishar kohakhekh*.

Hazzan Stephen Jay Stein was Executive Vice President of the Cantors Assembly from 1998-2023. Additionally, he served Congregation Beth El in Akron, OH from 1980-2015.

It is the task of the cantor to create the liturgical community, to convert a plurality of praying individuals into a unity of worship.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Golden Ages: Hasidic Singers and Cantorial Revival in the Digital Era by Jeremiah Lockwood

Reviewed by Marsha Bryan Edelman

The "Golden Age of *Hazzanut*" is fondly remembered as a time when synagogue music reached an apex as an art form, and when its practitioners were celebrated for their glorious singing, if not always for their piety. The devastation of European Jewry during the Second World War and cultural changes in the liturgical preferences of American congregations in its aftermath led to a dramatic decline in this style of singing. While isolated enclaves have continued to perpetuate the form –including Young Israel Beth El, in Brooklyn's Borough Park, whose long legacy of virtuoso cantors continued through the tenure of Ben-Zion Miller (who passed away last February at the age of 77), and Congregation Sha'ar HaShomayim in Montreal, led by Cantor Gideon Zelermyer – "Golden Age" singing has remained largely an archival heritage memorialized in occasional cantorial concerts and on recordings digitized from their original 78 RPM format produced in the first half of the twentieth century and now available on YouTube and other streaming platforms. This treasure trove of aural history has generated interest in a surprising segment of the Jewish community, the story of which is captured in *Golden Ages: Hasidic Singers and Cantorial Revival in the Digital Era* by Jeremiah Lockwood (Oakland CA, University of California Press, 2024).

Lockwood comes to this study as someone familiar with the cantorial arts; his grandfather, Cantor Jacob Konigsberg, and his cousin, Cantor Zachary Konigsberg, sowed early seeds of interest, which he developed during graduate studies at UCLA and in further contact with Cantor Noah Schall at Yeshiva University, Cantor Robert Kieval, *z'l,* Cantor David Lefkowitz, and through his work as lead researcher for the Cantorial and Synagogue Music Archive project, overseen by Cantor Matthew Austerklein and the Cantors Assembly Foundation (https://archive.cantors.org/). The book, however, follows an unlikely cadre of new devotees of this art: members of Hasidic communities.

The Belz, Bobover, Lubavitch and Satmar communities are known for their separatist orientations, eschewing participation in most modern cultural activities. Their musical preferences lean towards the traditional melodies of their communities, with grudging acceptance of the "Orthodox pop" being produced by fellow *hasidim* like Mordecai Ben-David and Avraham Fried. Liturgical music in Hasidic synagogues tends not to conform to the better-known traditions of Eastern European *nusah*, and in any case, is normally led by lay *ba'alei t'fillah*, rather than by professional *hazzanim*. The accidental discovery of vinyl Golden Age recordings (and more subversive ventures into an internet world generally rejected by the Hasidic community) led these Hasidic singers to invest countless hours mastering recitatives of Sirota, Rosenblatt, Pinchik, Kwartin and others, largely by rote. Lockwood tells an intriguing story, focusing on a small group of Hasidic (and formerly Hasidic) cantorial singers, who find

unique spiritual meaning in this music. As Lockwood quotes one informant, David Reich, "I didn't know what I was craving until I found it."

Lockwood's book, a distillation of his doctoral thesis, necessarily spends a great deal of time explaining the Hasidic community to readers who may be unfamiliar with this isolated community and its musical values. The book is largely an anthropological study about music and musicians, rather than a specifically musical one. Readers of this *Journal* will find much that is familiar, but will no doubt be engaged by the discovery and new popularity of this "old/new" music, and the irony of having this musical style, hitherto associated with Orthodox communities (although not all of the cantors of the "Golden Age" were scrupulous in their observance) be regarded as "counter-cultural" by the mainstream Hasidic community. Some of the most interesting passages in the book are Lockwood's "interludes" in which he breaks down the "fourth wall" that normally keeps a narrator separate from his subjects (although Lockwood does liberally insert himself throughout) and presents more intimate interviews with some of his subjects.

Some readers will likely be bothered by some inconsistencies in the volume. Certain important historical figures are well identified, and their birth and death dates appear whenever they are referenced, while others seem to get less careful treatment. Lockwood understandably uses the Yiddish spelling/pronunciation of several terms used by his informants (e.g. *bal tefile, mariv*) as well as the Yiddish practice of using "kh" to transcribe both "*het*" and "*khaf*" (*nusakh, khazones*). He also takes at face value the complaints of his informants, without providing greater context. So, for example, the Hasidic cantors, who, in order to ply their trade, have been forced to take positions in the few Modern Orthodox synagogues that hire cantors, complain that their congregants are more interested in congregational singing than in a service weighted down by lengthy cantorial recitatives. Lockwood would have done well to point out that this problem is hardly limited to Modern Orthodox synagogues.

Still, the story Lockwood tells is a fascinating one. The fact that Hasidic cantorial singers exist at all is a novel discovery. That they have found spiritual resonance in this classical genre, and are bringing new life and new audiences to this music, is a surprising story of revival.

Marsha Bryan Edelman is editor of the Journal of Synagogue Music.

IN MEMORIUM

Sholom Kalib (1929 – 2025)

Remembered by Gabriel Wasserman

I first met Reb Sholom Kalib, ר' שלום שכנא בן משה, in person on May 4, 2022, the third of Iyyar 5782. Over the next 987 days, we had a close working partnership and friendship, nearly a familial connection, until I buried him on January 15, 2025, the fifteenth of Tevet 5785. We loved each other dearly, because we both cared passionately about the power of the liturgy, and of cantorial performance to bring out the passion of the words of the liturgy.

Reb Sholom was born in Dallas, Texas, on July 24, 1929. At that time, his father was already fifty years old, and had in him liturgical-musical knowledge reaching back deep into the nineteenth century. When I held hands with Reb Sholom, I was linked to nearly 150 years of cantorial tradition; and, since some of Reb Sholom's mentors were even older, to even earlier tradition.

Reb Sholom's father Reb Moshe (Morris) was not himself a cantor, but he came from a cantorial family. Moshe's father Reb Sholom Shachne was a cantor and died under unknown circumstances when Moshe was a year old, but Moshe picked up cantorial training from his much older brothers, who were cantors, including how to read musical notation. But most importantly, Moshe picked up the Fear of Heaven, *yiras shomayim*, from the surrounding environment.

The feeling that God is present and judging the world, listening to the Jews' prayers, that God loves the Jewish people and has chosen them; the awe of standing in God's presence — all this is part of the *yiras shomayim* that Sholom absorbed in his childhood. And he learned how the role of the cantor — the *hazzen* — is to express these feelings to the congregation through expressive performance of the words and the *nusah*, the unwritten musical parameters defining how each part of the service is to be chanted.

"When I was very young, my father would teach me by chanting a line of *t'filoh* and asking me to repeat it back to him. When I would get the notes correct, but chant it without the proper feeling, he would be disappointed, and ask me to do it again, until I could get it right. And when I would finally get it right, with the proper feeling that I was standing in the presence of the Master of the Universe, my father would be so happy."

Sholom's father soon taught him to read musical notation. Sholom excelled at this skill, and soon he was transcribing the recitatives that his father was teaching him. "Because of this," Sholom told me, "I never developed the ability to improvise. I read everything from notes, throughout life. Even on an occasion I would go to *davven* a simple weekday *Minhoh*, I would

do it from notes that I prepared for myself. I'm probably the only person in the world who chants the Hagodoh on seder night from musical notes, which I wrote for myself."

When Sholom was thirteen, in 1942, the family moved to Chicago. For the High Holidays that year, he sang as an alto in the choir of Cantor Abraham Kipper. Kipper was teaching the choir their parts by ear, and Sholom once asked: "I'm sorry, I'm having trouble memorizing that. Could you please show me notes for it." Kipper responded that he had no notes for it, so Sholom said: "How about I simply write down in notation what you just sang?" He did so, and Kipper was impressed that a thirteen-year-old boy could notate music with such accuracy.

Over the course of the following weeks, Kipper kept mentioning a certain Hazzen Todros Greenberg, who lived in Chicago, but had not officiated in over a decade, due to being blind and ill. Greenberg was known as a *zoger*, an improviser cantor, who never sang pre-composed pieces, but rather would say, (Yiddish: *zog*) the words of the prayers by performing improvised elaborations on the words, while repeating words for dramatic emphasis and heavily emoting. Because of Greenberg's style, any "piece" that was improvised by him existed for only a moment, and then was immediately forgotten. He never worked with professional recording studios, and the technology did not yet exist for home recordings. But Kipper had an idea: if we could introduce young Sholom to Cantor Greenberg, he could notate Greenberg's renditions of the prayers, and thus preserve them for posterity.

After the High Holidays and Sukkes were over, Kipper brought Sholom to meet Greenberg in his home. Greenberg told Sholom that he would improvise a rendition of "*Hin'ni Mukhon* and *B'rokhoh* for *S'firas Ho-Omer.*" Greenberg said: "Back in olden times, many decades ago, on the second night of Passover, after the full *Kaddish*, when the moment arrived for the first night of *S'firoh*, there would be a moment of silent expectation, when one could feel the whole congregation in tense anticipation and awe: we are about to begin counting the days of the period of (a) looking forward to Shovuos, the festival of the Giving of the Torah, which is what makes us Jewish, God's special people; (b) deep mystical teachings of the Kabbalah related to this count, which most congregants did not truly understand, but appreciated with reverential awe and mystery; (c) the period of the year that is soaked with Jewish blood, when Rabbi Akivo's students died and a number of massacres occurred during the Crusades. This moment of anticipation, this collective gasp, is experienced no more." Already in 1942, some of the deep congregational feelings of the synagogue were just memories — but Greenberg was able to report this memory to Sholom, and therefore we still know of it today.

Greenberg began to improvise, and Sholom wrote down the rendition, phrase by phrase. At one point, Greenberg wanted to test the accuracy of Sholom's transcriptions, so he asked him, after a particularly elaborate phrase, "Please sing back what you have written." When Sholom sang it back perfectly, Greenberg was so shocked and impressed that he recognized that this special boy would become his long-term amanuensis.

Greenberg also asked to speak to Sholom's parents. "You need to buy a piano, and you need to get piano, music theory, and musical arrangement lessons for your son." Sholom's parents were quite poor because his father, the breadwinner, would not work on Shabbos.

Nonetheless, they managed to scrape together enough money for a second-hand piano. For music lessons, there was a local public school that offered night school, and, specifically, music classes, which included both practical instruction in playing an instrument and theory lessons, including arrangement/counterpoint. During the day, Sholom was in *yeshivah*, and at night he audited these classes. As an auditor, he was not given personal instruction in playing an instrument, but he watched the teacher give piano lessons to the public school students, and thus he picked up the ability to play the piano.

Meanwhile, Sholom was meeting with Greenberg to transcribe his renditions of prayers. In 1943, Cantor Kipper, the one who had brought Sholom to meet Greenberg in the first place, hired Sholom to train and conduct his choir for the High Holidays. Sholom spent the whole summer re-writing the repertoire from unison or two-part arrangements into four-part choral arrangements and working with the choristers. In the late summer, on *Shabbos Mevorkhim Elul* an arrangement by Sholom was first sung publicly in synagogue, his choral arrangement of Greenberg's "*Yism'hu B'malkhus'kho*." Eight decades later, Sholom was still telling me that this occasion was very special in his memory, as the first time his work was performed in the synagogue.

By this point, Sholom was wildly famous on the Chicago cantorial scene. Over the course of the 1940s, he worked with many cantors, including, especially, Joshua Lind. He acquired much information about the *nusah*. He bought precious manuscripts of collections of cantorial recitatives and choral settings of prayers from many cantors. He got to hear and interact with some of the great traveling cantors who came to visit Chicago, including, prominently, Pierre Pinchik. By 1948 he was teaching students, and by 1949 he was hired as a cantor in his own right.

Now Sholom began extensive work composing settings of prayers. Mostly, this was recitatives for his own use; because he was incapable of even the simplest level of improvisation expected by lay prayer-leaders, he planned and wrote out everything in advance, composing settings of the prayers for *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. He also composed choral pieces during this period.

Beginning in the late 1940s, and continuing through the end of the 1960s, Sholom spent time, on and off, working on his academic degrees in music theory, specializing in Schenkerian analysis. This culminated in his Ph.D. dissertation, *Thirteen Essays from The Three Yearbooks "Das Meisterwerk in der Musik" by Heinrich Schenker: An Annotated Translation* (Northwestern University, 1973). He was hired in 1970 as a professor of music theory at Eastern Michigan University, and therefore moved to Detroit, where he also found a cantorial position at a synagogue there.

Over the course of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Sholom saw the entire phenomenon of *yiras shomayim* and *nusah* slowly crumble. The younger generations, born in America, did not share the deep piety of their European-born parents, and also typically had much less Jewish knowledge. They did not know how to pray, *davven*, on their own.

The traditional style had been that the congregation would recite each paragraph on their own, either silently or in a sporadic jumble of voices, and then the cantor would conclude by reciting the last line out loud, whether in simple or more highly elaborated *nusah*; or he would recite more of the text, on various levels of elaboration, either solo or with choral accompaniment. Congregational singing was effectively non-existent. This meant that the cantor and choir could sing highly professional settings of texts, very effectively bringing out the passion in them.

The younger generations, who did not know how to *davven* on their own, did not appreciate the cantorial art, and were bored sitting there while the cantor sang words that they could not understand, in a style that they did not appreciate. In America, congregational singing was introduced, and it gradually took over more and more of the service, until the cantor's role became less significant. Sholom was a passionate opponent of congregational singing throughout his life, and he believed that it was the biggest catalyst for the loss of fervent cantorial prayer, and the enormous body of unwritten knowledge surrounding it.

One Friday evening, in 1971, Sholom was in his new synagogue in Detroit. A congregant served as *sheliah tzibbur* for the Friday *Minhoh* service. The congregant said the words of the prayerbook with no *nusah* at all, no traditional parameters for how he recited the text, and no feeling. Then Sholom took over at the beginning of *Kabbolas Shabbos* for the professional part of the service.

On the way back home, Sholom thought: I am bothered that the congregant recited *minhoh* without any *nusah*, but I am even more bothered that when I looked around the room, I saw that no other congregants were visibly bothered by this. For years, I have been collecting cantorial music on a high level, but what about the expertise on the low level, the level of lay leading of services? That has become forgotten. Someone must do something, quickly, to preserve all this knowledge, the knowledge of *nusah* for weekday services, Sabbath services, holiday services, and special lifecycle event services, on both the lay level and the cantorial level. And because the cantorial level consists of elaboration on the lay level, the two levels are related: one cannot study the advanced without understanding the basic. Someone must do something soon, before all this is lost — and I will need to be that someone.

For the next few years, this remained only a dream, a plan. In 1974, Moshe Kalib died, at age 95. Sholom had never mentioned this project idea to him; "but," he told me, "I believe that he would have been very pleased with it." In 1978, Sholom wrote a proposal for the project, which he published in the *Journal of Synagogue Music* (Volume VIII No. 4). In 1979 he started the fieldwork, travelling around the US, Canada, and Israel, to interview both cantors and educated laymen, almost all born in Europe before World War I or between the World Wars.

Over the 1980s and 1990s, Sholom patiently sat down and transcribed all the interviews, one by one. Then he started work on turning the project into a published series: first he wrote a two-book "Volume I: Introduction," explaining what cantorial art was, the various modes it used, the definition of *nusah,* and, perhaps most significantly, the importance of *yiras shomayim*, fear of heaven, to true praxis of the art. This came out in 2001.

Next, Sholom chose music for "Volume II: The Weekday Services." He started selecting music from the interviews, and from limited published cantorial resources, for each prayer of the weekday services. He took these from his interview books and from the few published cantorial handbooks from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For each liturgical text, he included very simple lay renditions of the *nusah*, followed by more elaborate cantorial renditions, and, when relevant, followed by even more florid recitatives and choral settings. In this way, he shows how the whole art, from simplest to most ornate, is rooted in the *nusah*.

In 2005, Volume II was published, in four books. In 2017, "Volume IIIA: The Sabbath Evening Services" was published, in three books. Sholom continued work on "Volume IIIB: The Sabbath Day Services."

All this time, Sholom was working entirely on his own, without a soul to help him. Then, out of the blue, one day in early April 2022, when he was approaching age 93, Sholom received a phone call from a certain individual in New York, a scholar of *piyyutim*.

I was that scholar of *piyyutim*. Reb Sholom was generous with his time; we spoke for 45 minutes. I made arrangements to meet him in his home in Baltimore a month later.

When I stepped into his house, I understood that I was in the presence not only of greatness — a great scholar of music theory, a great composer of synagogue music, a great researcher of *nusah* — but also in the presence of the last possessor of a tradition going back to the mid-nineteneeth century, and possibly much earlier. A tradition that was largely unknown today, other than in fragmentary form.

At that first meeting, I asked Reb Sholom about his compositions: "Have you composed a setting of this liturgical text? Of that liturgical text?" I also asked him questions about his experiences in the traditional synagogues of the 1940s and 1950s, and his interactions with great cantors of the time. He told me: "In all my years and years of life, you are the first person to ask me these questions. I worked all alone. You ask about my compositions for *Hallel*? Well, I have a number of such choral compositions, and nobody has ever heard them, not even my wife Goldie. You are the first."

A few meetings later, he told me: "I love when you come to visit. It gives me such *hiyus* (liveliness, vitality). But I don't have time to take away from my project to entertain you. My work is important, my time is limited, and I don't have so many years left." I responded: "Reb Sholom, I want to help you work on your project! So the time that I come won't be robbing you of work time; it will be helping your work time."

Reb Sholom was astonished and said: "God must have sent you here. I have no other way to explain it. I worked on this project all alone, for all these years — and now, as my available time is getting more limited, so it is getting harder to work alone, God sent you here to work with me. But I must check with my wife. If Goldie is willing to let you come here regularly, to our home, to work with me, then of course we must proceed." Goldie said that I could come one day every other week.

For the next few years, every other week I would get on a train to Baltimore, spend the day in Reb Sholom's large office in the Kalibs' house, and work with him on "Volume IV: The Three Festivals." We started by organizing sheet music into folders, arranged by liturgical text; this included photocopying his interview books and cutting up the pieces into the relevant folders. Over this time, Sholom shared many, many stories about his personal experience studying with his father, with Greenberg, and with other cantors, and his own work as a cantor, choir director, composer, and arranger. Most especially, he talked about the importance of *yiras shomayim*.

At some point, I started showing my own compositions to Sholom, for texts of *piyyutim*, liturgical poems, which were historically an important part of the liturgy for the Three Festivals. Sholom did not have personal experience with these texts, because already by his era, the synagogues where he had prayed had already dropped their recitation. Nonetheless, he understood their importance, and understood that if and when the Eastern European cantorial tradition is to be brought back to the synagogues in its fullest form, it will need to include *piyyutim*. So, at age 93, he turned to a new project: editing my amateurish musical settings of *piyyutim* into professional-level cantorial recitatives or glorious choral settings, as part of our broader work on The Three Festivals. Many wonderful pieces came out of this collaboration, some of which were far more his than mine.

Over the years, major changes occurred. Reb Sholom had a heart attack, and I stayed with him in the hospital over Shabbos. He did recover from the heart attack, and was able to continue working, but he then began to fade. He and Goldie began to need a part-time aide, and then full-time live-in help. Then Goldie was hospitalized for several months, and Sholom, the devoted husband, visited her every day. After she returned home, both of them were weaker. And finally, Sholom became ill with his final illness, and his soul departed his body in January 2025.

I was privileged to work so closely with the last bearer of this great tradition. As Jewish law bids us to say over the course of the year after the death of a parent or close teacher, *Hareini Kapporas Mishkovo*, I am the atonement for his death.

While other forces in society combine to dull our mind, music endows us with moments in which the sense of the ineffable becomes alive.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Jack Kessler (1944 – 2024)

Remembered by Matthew Austerklein

My teacher, Hazzan Jack Kessler passed away on September 19, 2024.

Since then, I face the hole that he left in the world. I miss his knowing smile, his belief in his students, and his love of tradition.

And I am also faced with a great mystery. As the Talmud writes:

> When Rabbi Meir died, the composers of fables ceased. When Ben Azzai died, diligent students disappeared…When Rabbi Joshua died, goodness ceased from the world…When Rabbi Akiba died, the glory of the Torah ceased…(*Mishnah Sotah*, 9:15)

With Jack's passing, it is hard to measure the degree of what has ceased in this world.

When I graduated from cantorial school, I was already interested in more advanced learning. Hot on the trail of a Doctor of Ministry degree, I found my way to ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, which required its doctoral students (and all of its future clergy) to become a part of the Davennen Leadership Training Program (DLTI). Whether I was going to do the whole program or not, I thought I would give this two-year series of twice-annual retreats a try.

I knew a little of this world from my time living in New York, where I attended and wrote an ethnography of Romemu, a then-startup renewal congregation under the charismatic leadership of Rabbi David Ingber. But at Isabella Freedman Retreat Center in the far-flung farms and forests of Western Connecticut, I found myself deep in the world of neo-Hasidic, new age, and experimental Jewish prayer. Surrounded by Jewish priestesses, yogis, and spiritual seekers, DLTI was at once a thorny obstacle course for my theological rationalism and intellectualism, and also a warm, musical, and open-hearted gathering of people who sincerely wanted to talk to God and feel His presence.

In the devilry and delight of these retreats, I made lifelong friends. I met my wife. And I discovered Jack.

Jack was an enigma. In a sea of alternative spirituality, this was the guy teaching traditional Lithuanian *nusah*, improvisation, and even the occasional bit of Koussevitsky. His classical vocalism and cantorial aesthetic might have seemed out-of-sync with the wild, mystical sprites who inhabited the Connecticut woods. Yet his collaborative spirit, disarmingly jocular

personality, and immense musical talent seamlessly weaved this Old World aesthetic into a New Age fabric.

This was no easy task, but Jack was not your average cantor. The child of European immigrants, Jack was the French-speaking son of a Hungarian rabbi who carried the Old World in his bones. During his twenty-year career in the Conservative pulpit, he also studied composition with Arthur Berger and Harold Shapero at Brandeis, and voice with new music specialist Bethany Beardslee at Harvard. He was steeped in the Western tradition, singing his fair share of opera, oratorio, and new music.

Yet from the heights of his cultured formalism as an Ashkenazi *hazzan* and Western composer (which included some twelve-tone *hazzanut*), Jack was also the irreducibly impish, groovy child of the Joan Baez folk era, the swinging sixties, and the world-altering influence of Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi z"*l*. This was a *nigun*-filled cantor who played backup for Shlomo Carlebach, and who transformed himself into an improvisational, cross-genre artist in klezmer, kirtan, and Middle Eastern music.

All of these sides of Jack came together in his vision for the ALEPH Cantorial School, where he was the director since its founding. Speaking of the role of the cantor, he waxed rhapsodic yet religious:

> "The *hazzan* is much more than a performer of music. We see ourselves as artists, healers, and teachers. Our mission is to be modern-day *kohanim* – opening a channel and creating a container for profound heart-expanding interface with higher consciousness. We do this in the spiritual wilderness of the contemporary era. Jewish life has suffered greatly in the last century, and renewal/rebirth is the challenge. Our tools are the liturgy, the musical tradition, our voices, our imaginations, and our souls."

Jack, a *kohen* himself, understood that the cantorial tradition was the domesticated form of Jewish shamanism. And his ability to unfreeze and re-animate *nusah* for generations of disconnected Jews and future clergy had a singular and enduring impact on the soundscape of the Jewish Renewal movement.

In a world of depth-plunging chest singing, Jack made space for sacred sonorities reaching beyond earth-mother musical mimesis. Not only could godliness be found in the rhythmic chant and the beat of the drum, but in the soaring soprano or the florid fioratura. With Jack, the sound of the cosmos was an infinitely more inclusive and grander place.

Hazzan Jack's impact was not only because of his immense talent and knowledge — it was because he was with the people.

It is difficult, in any tradition, to translate the old world to the new. In the world of Jewish Renewal, Jack encountered all sorts of people, many with difficult Jewish backgrounds, or who might have had an allergy to *hazzanut* from either personal preference or past experience. But Jack — the groovy guy, the jokester, and even the pirate — knew how to be on a level with each person.

Jack's innovations in the realm of *nusah* reflected this desire to bring down the *shefa* of musical flow *bashamayim uva'aretz* — across the vocal range. He wrote *nusah* for the whole year, including special pieces and choral works for his students and colleagues. He created his own liturgical version of kirtan (he called it *korban*), creating responsive phrases in traditional *nusah* that could carry a congregation in traditional chant. And of recent note, he developed a system for chanting the Hebrew scriptures in English with traditional Ashkenazi cantillation ("trope"). He became particularly known for this in recent years, as synagogues across the country utilized his cantillated settings of modern American prophetic texts like The Declaration of Independence and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech.

Jack was a true musical Levite — from the Hebrew root for "to join" or "to accompany." This was also clear from his incredible dedication to his wife and partner, Rabbi Marcia Prager. As he led prayer with her, effortlessly accompanying with jazz chords and sensitive harp-like cascades on his classical guitar, he practiced partnership with flexibility, humility, and a servant heart. He accompanied her devotedly for many decades of marriage, and recently as a caretaker in her bouts with illness. Now that he has been laid to rest, his accompaniment, both spiritual and musical, continues from the spheres above.

I will never forget studying Jack's compositions for the first time. I was immediately impressed by the sophistication and depth of his old-new compositional voice, and I still use a number of his settings to this day. These compositions resonated throughout the Orchard of Torah — from the *peshat* of the notes down to the musical *sod* —the deep secrets that came down to us through the fullness of Jack's incarnate and reincarnate cantorial spirit.

But what I most remember about Jack is his timeless teaching about voice: *"We are the channel, we are not the flow."* While a perfect description of vocal technique, I also think it is a perfect description of the man himself. Meeting him for the first time, one might not assume that this jaunty, joke-cracking hippie would be one of the great cantorial teachers of America.

And that is the point. Jack was only a channel; the flow of musical inspiration that he drew down was truly from another world.

I do not think I will ever fully grasp what has departed the world with Jack's passing. That mystery now forever occupies a home in the hearts of his beloved family, students, and the movement he helped to found. All of us who knew him have been blessed to have gathered so many of his *nekudot tovot* — his good points. As Rebbe Nahman taught, bringing these good points together is the root of composing a melody.

The days go by, the years pass, but the melody always remains.

Jack, time has passed. But you have released into the universe, in us, a shining galaxy of good points. From here on out, we are your melody.

Rest in the Bonds of Life, friend and teacher.

Paul Kowarsky (1942-2025)

Remembered by Marina Shemesh

It is my honor to write in memory of someone I loved deeply and who had such a profound impact on my life: Hazzan Paul Kowarsky. Although I only knew Paul for a relatively short time, meeting him changed me forever.

I first met him in the fall of 1999, when I joined the professional choir of Beth Tzedec Congregation in Toronto. From the very first rehearsal, I was struck by his extraordinary voice, his wit, his intellect, his humor, and his warmth. As an opera singer myself, I admired his flawless technique and the golden tone of his spinto tenor, but what moved me even more was the way he infused every note with spirit and soul. He was not only a brilliant singer and a passionate *hazzan* but also a gifted composer whose music we often sang in choir.

As a newcomer to Canada, I was especially grateful for the kindness and support he extended to me and my family. After hearing me sing solo, he encouraged me to consider a cantorial career. That encouragement changed the course of my life. We began studying together in preparation for my audition for the cantorial school in New York. Paul became my first true mentor in *hazzanut,* opening the door for me to discover the majesty and beauty of synagogue music. For this, I will always carry a debt of gratitude and love. He helped me find not just a profession, but a calling.

Paul Kowarsky's own journey was remarkable. He successfully balanced two distinguished careers: as an internationally acclaimed cantor and later as a respected lawyer and Justice of the Peace. From 1980 until his retirement in 2001, he served as Senior Cantor of Beth Tzedec Congregation, the largest Conservative synagogue in North America. In May 2002, he was appointed a full-time presiding Justice of the Peace by the Government of Ontario, serving faithfully until his retirement in 2017.

Paul was born in South Africa in 1942. His vocal gifts were evident from an early age: at just nine, he became the boy soloist of the Berea Synagogue Choir in Johannesburg, mentored by Hazzan Shlomo Mandel. He later studied with the legendary Hazzan Leib Glantz at the Tel Aviv Cantorial Academy. Upon returning to Johannesburg, he continued studying with Hazzan Mandel while pursuing voice lessons with Francis Russell for over a decade. He also studied music at the University of South Africa.

Alongside his cantorial career, Paul pursued law. He earned a Bachelor of Law degree from the University of South Africa and was admitted as an Attorney of the Supreme Court in 1972. After practicing law for several years, he immigrated to Canada in 1976, where he became *hazzan* of Congregation Beth Ora in Montreal. He later served as *hazzan* of Adath Israel

Congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio (where he also studied at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music), before settling in Toronto. In Canada he studied with Marlena Malas, the renowned vocal coach of Metropolitan Opera singers, and later with Canadian tenor Mark DuBois for 12 years.

He held a Cantorial Qualification Diploma from the Cantors Assembly, a Master Cantor Certificate from the American Foundation for the Advancement of Cantorial Arts and was named an Honorary Fellow of the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

Throughout his cantorial career, Paul was considered one of the foremost *hazzanim* of his generation. The combination of his remarkable voice and his soul-stirring interpretations of liturgy earned him the highest acclaim from his peers. One review described a performance at the 32nd Cantors Assembly Convention in New York this way:

> "Cantor Paul Kowarsky was honored with a standing ovation by the more than 1,200 persons attending…Kowarsky's rendition of *R'tzei* was likened by his peers to an artist creating a masterpiece on canvas. His brilliant cantorial presentation shocked and awed the elite of the cantorial fraternity."

As a concert artist, Paul traveled across the globe, singing to capacity audiences and drawing admiration wherever he performed. Some of his most notable appearances included:

- The *Great Cantors of the World in Concert Yom Ha'atzmaut* program in Cleveland (1985)
- The main concert of the International Cantors Convention at the Jerusalem Theatre (1987)
- Representing the Jewish community at the Multi-Faith Service at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto (1988)
- The Toronto Community Reception in honor of Chaim Herzog, President of Israel (1989)
- A concert series in Los Angeles, *Seven Outstanding Cantors of North America* (1989)

That same year, Paul performed in a concert tour sponsored by the American Society for the Advancement of Cantorial Arts, singing in major cities across the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Romania, including Moscow, Leningrad, Minsk, Odessa, Belgrade, and Bucharest. His concert tours also brought him to London's Logan Hall and to Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition, where he appeared in *The Night of a Lifetime*, celebrating Israel's 50th anniversary.

During his 1999–2000 sabbatical, Paul led services and concerts in Venice, Florence, Geneva, Budapest, Prague, Vilnius, Kaunas, Melbourne, Sydney, and Auckland.

Paul was also a prolific composer. The Toronto Council of *Chazzanim* published two volumes of his works, *Synagogue Music for Cantor and Choir* (1990 and 1995). His compositions reflected a synthesis of Eastern European *hazzanut* with the lyrical, song-like qualities of Hasidic melody. Upon his retirement, he gifted me these volumes, inscribed with words of encouragement that I treasure to this day.

In addition to his publications, Paul released eight CDs and several instructional recordings for synagogue services and the Passover *Seder*. Many of these, along with his writings, reflections, and audio and video recordings, remain accessible at **paulkowarsky.ca**.

When Paul reached the age of mandatory retirement from his legal activity in 2017, he published *The Justice of the Peace in Ontario: Practice and Procedure*, a resource he wrote to guide his newer colleagues.

But beyond all his professional accomplishments, what stood out most about Paul was his humanity. He was generous, funny, deeply caring, and always ready to support others—whether it was a young cantor finding her way or a congregant in need of comfort.

His impact reached far beyond the pulpit. As a concert artist, he brought Jewish music to audiences all over the world—from Jerusalem to London, from Moscow to Sydney. His recordings, compositions, and teachings continue to inspire and bring joy.

Paul Kowarsky passed away peacefully on August 10, 2025, at the age of 83. He leaves behind his devoted wife, Barbara, his five beloved children, and many grandchildren, who were his pride and joy.

For me, and for so many others, Paul was more than a cantor, a lawyer, or a judge. He was a mentor, a colleague, and a friend. His kindness and encouragement changed my life; his music continues to inspire me every day. The sound of his voice, and the warmth of his heart, will live on in all who were fortunate enough to know him.

May his memory always be for a blessing, and may his music and spirit continue to inspire generations to come.

Benjamin Z. Maissner (1944-2025)

Remembered by Penny S. Myers

Cantor Benjamin "Beny" Maissner was born in Israel on May 4, 1944, to parents whose families originated from Germany and Austria. His paternal side hailed from Hanover, and his maternal side from Vienna. Beny described his childhood as *heimische* and deeply loving. Although his family lacked financial stability in the wake of the *Shoah*, he often said he felt "rich" because of the family who helped define his upbringing.

From a young age, Beny's musical talent shone brightly. He sang in choirs, often as a soloist, and began studying the violin. He continued his musical education at the Tel Aviv Music Conservatory and, as he matured, joined the Israeli Opera Chorus. His talent was no coincidence; music ran in his blood. His maternal uncle, Israel Alter, served as the *Oberkantor* of Hannover from 1925 to 1935 and was a significant influence on Beny's musical and spiritual formation. Talk about *yihus!* Until his passing, Beny proudly and faithfully preserved Alter's remarkable legacy.

Another key figure in Beny's life was Hazzan Shlomo Ravitz, under whom Beny learned and with whom he served as a child cantor. Ravitz's mentorship left another indelible mark on him and helped shape his Cantorial path.

At the age of 18, Beny proudly served in the Israel Defense Forces. He often spoke of this time with deep pride, especially his unit's role in establishing Kibbutz Ma'aleh Gilboa near the Jordanian border. If you ever met Beny, chances are you were shown photos from his IDF days, images he shared with joy and enduring pride, no matter how many times one had seen them.

After his service in the IDF, Beny moved to the United States to pursue his passion for sacred music. He enrolled in the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College. His thirst for musical knowledge and excellence led him to further his education at Temple University, where he earned a master's degree in music history, voice, and performance.

During the early years of his cantorial career, Beny served as interim *hazzan* at Beth Sholom Congregation near Philadelphia, PA. It was there that he met his bride Hope, the woman who would become his life partner for over five decades. The two were married in that very same *shul*. Their marriage was a partnership, rooted in love, faith, and shared values. Together, they brought three extraordinary children, Shira, Tal, and Rivke, into the world. Each of their children and grandchildren continue to carry Hope and Beny's legacy of deep Jewish identity. *L'dor vador*.

Beny was always a man on a mission. Whether he was preparing lectures, organizing concerts, recording, composing, or mentoring the next generation of cantors, his days were full. He was a remarkably busy man, not for the sake of being busy, but because he was compelled by passion, purpose, and a profound sense of duty. His mind was always in motion and so too was the work of his *neshamah*. That energy brought into fruition profound gifts to the cantorial and Jewish world.

One of Beny's most meaningful projects was his work to revitalize the European Jewish musical tradition in all its richness and nuance. He devoted himself to preserving and sharing this legacy as a bridge between generations and cultures. A central part of this mission was remastering the historic recordings of his uncle, Cantor Israel Alter, onto CD. Beny generously donated the original recordings along with Alter's scrapbook to the European Center for Jewish Music in Hanover, ensuring they would be safeguarded for posterity.

Beny was an ardent ambassador of healing through music. His efforts towards reconciliation between Jews and German Christians while restoring the Germanic Jewish musical heritage were recognized in the most profound way: he was awarded the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, Germany's highest civilian honor. Beny wore that medal with immense pride, often attaching it to his lapel for concerts and public appearances. I have many photographs of him performing with that treasured symbol close to his heart, a visible reminder of a life devoted to memory, meaning, music and hope.

Beny was a true master of his art. His musical repertoire spanned an extraordinary range from the intricate beauty of Jewish Renaissance and early Hebrew art music to the vibrant and dynamic voices of contemporary Canadian, American, and Israeli composers. His versatility and depth made him a sought-after performer around the world, and he was featured alongside numerous symphony orchestras, bringing the sacred sounds of Jewish tradition to new and diverse audiences.

On February 12, 2009, I was given the difficult task of calling Cantor Beny Maissner with heartbreaking news. His former student and my dear friend Cantor Susan Wehle, *zikhronah livrakhah*, had perished along with 49 others on Continental Airlines Flight 3407, which crashed just miles from the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport.

I remember the conversation vividly:

Me: Cantor Maissner?
Beny: Hello, yes, who is this?
Me: My name is Penny Myers from Buffalo, and I'm phoning you with the unfortunate news that your former student, Susan Wehle, was one of the victims of Flight 3407 that crashed late last night.
Beny: Vhat? I can't hear you, I don't understand... there were Israelis on board too?
Me: Yes.
(Long pause)
Beny: I am very busy, and I don't know if I can come in for the funeral. Vhen is it?
Me: I don't know yet, I was just asked to inform you...
(He cuts me off)

Beny: I don't know vhen I can come… Sveetheart, so vhen are you going to come study vith me?

And that... is how it began.

From that moment on, Beny became more than my mentor, he became my teacher, my guide, and in many ways, a part of my family. What started with a tragic phone call unfolded into years of intense study, Jewish musical exploration, and deep spiritual growth. He didn't just teach me *nusah,* he taught me how to find holiness in breath, intention in silence, and to have courage in my own vulnerability when davening.

Beny had a way with his cantorial students. He was extremely charming, yet he never held back his raw and painfully accurate feedback. One of his frequent comments to me: *"*Sveetheart, repeat that phrase again, this time try to sound less German *shiksa* and more *Hazzanus'diche*" .

Another gem: *"*Sveetheart, stop butchering my *momma loshen".*

He challenged you to reach higher, *daven* from your *kishkes*, and never take the sacred for granted. Sometimes his methods were intense, often unfiltered, but always rooted in a desire to draw out the very best in those he believed in.

For me, as for so many others, Beny was my *rebbe*, a *moreh derekh*. He had a rare ability to hold the old and the new in one hand: to honor our shared musical history with reverence while recognizing and embracing the evolution of contemporary Jewish liturgical music. The lineage he carried, from Alter to Ravitz and from Glantz to Ganchoff now lives on in each of us who were fortunate to have learned from him.

Beny used to say, "Don't just sing the notes that are written, allow *kavannah* to lead the liturgy to be felt." And that's what he did with his life. Every note, every breath, every project and relationship was infused with purpose.

In June of 2020, after 41 remarkable years, Beny retired as Senior Cantor and Music Director of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Canada. His tenure there was not just long—it was transformative. Under his musical leadership, Holy Blossom became a beacon of liturgical excellence, creativity, and spiritual warmth. Generations of congregants were inspired by his voice, his teachings, and his unwavering devotion to Jewish life.

The world feels muted without his voice, but I am comforted that his influence within sanctuaries, recordings, in his students, and in hearts like mine will continue into perpetuity.

Beny inspired me to not only be a better *hazzan,* but to be a better Jew, and for that and more, I am grateful.

May Beny's legacy live through our music, words and deeds.

May the Beny Maissner soundtrack never cease to play for us.

Zikhrono livrakha—may his memory be a blessing.

Aaron Marcus (1942 – 2025)

Remembered by Arielle Reisner

I remember Cantor Aaron Marcus with the same love and affection as he gave to his own family, friends, and of course his cantorate.

After graduating from the Cantor's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1967, he began his career in New Bedford, Mass. He since held pulpits in various cities including Cranston, RI (during which time he also served as music director at Providence Hebrew Day School) Sarasota, FL and Olney, MD. He was the kind of cantor that had a natural talent for *hazzanut* and was able to blend it with his musical and choral training. He loved Jewish music and loved to share it with everyone, from adults to children. He and his dear wife, Shoshana, spent many summers on the faculty of Camp Pembroke, in Pembroke, MA; he conducted choirs of children and adults wherever he went, and also orchestrated major programs on a variety of Jewish holiday and Israel themes. His activities earned him awards from the Cantors Assembly as well as additional local recognition.

In my early days of musical training, Cantor Marcus took me under his wing and taught me the basics of musicianship and Jewish musical styles. His love of Jewish music was infectious and is a large part of my own personal journey to the cantorate. To this day, there are songs that I can only hear in his voice. He had a knack for teaching and was proud of everyone he taught. His calm demeanor and kind teaching style inspired me to continue learning throughout my life. Together with his wife Shoshana, Cantor Marcus taught his children, Michelle, Karen and Danny, to all have a love of Jewish music, tradition and community and passed these values down to their own children, both in the US and Israel.

Yehi zikhro barukh – may his memory serve as a blessing to all who were touched by his spirit.

Barry Ulrych (1949-1925)

Remembered by Marsha Bryan Edelman

Rabbi/Cantor Barry Ulrych left this world on July 29, 2025, following a long illness.

His father, Rabbi/Cantor Barukh Ulrych survived World War II by securing a visa to Shanghai; his mother, Toby, the sole survivor of her family, escaped death many times while interned in the Lodz Ghetto and at Auschwitz. Finding herself unwelcome in Poland after the war, she traveled to Shanghai, where she met and married her husband. The couple arrived in Detroit in 1948 and raised their family there.

Barry completed high school at the Skokie Yeshivah (Hebrew Theological College) and went on to study in the joint program between Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary, completing degrees in sociology and religion. Returning to the Detroit area, he completed his cantorial studies with a number of local *hazzanim*, and was admitted to the Cantors Assembly. Barry served Temple Adat Shalom in Detroit, where he was much beloved. He was also appreciated at Congregation B'nai Chaim, in Murietta, CA, which he served as rabbi for several years before retiring back to Detroit to be near his family.

One friend noted the irony that Rabbi/Cantor Ulrych should have passed during the "Nine Days" leading to *Tisha B'Av*. He remembered Barry presenting a lecture entitled "The *Mishkan* as a Paradigm and Template for Generosity, Participation, Jewish Excellence in Design, Attentiveness To Detail, and Spiritual Continuity under Challenging Circumstances." He added, "Those were his words and Barry was actually the embodiment of all those things."

Our hearts go out to his beloved sister, Hannah Ulrych (Robert Robinson), his brother, Moses Ulrych, his extended family, and the many former classmates, congregants and friends who remembered his warmth and kindness, his devotion to Torah and his beautiful voice. *Yehi zikhro barukh.*

Journal of Synagogue Music

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