



Undoubtedly, the greatest influence upon cantorial music in the last hundred years has been the inspirational figure of **Yossele Rosenblatt**. The eightieth Yahrzeit of his passing (23rd Sivan 5693) has recently been observed across the world with memorial concerts in both the USA and in Israel spreading the beauty of his music. And it is with this in mind that this edition is focussed upon his memory and legacy. It includes a biography and also my thoughts about which chazzanim have best been able to reproduce his glorious music.



ECA welcomed 3 new full-time cantors to London at an event at SOAS together with EAJL and JMI. Cantors Steven Leas, now full time at Central (Great Portland Street); Jason Green of the New London and Paul Heller (Belsize Square) explained how they saw their roles as key players in the development of their communities not just shabbes singers. More details soon on www.cantors.eu

Welcome to the World of Synagogue Music

Dear Friends

Welcome to the latest edition of Cantors Banter, the Newsletter of the ECA (European Cantors Association) that seeks to inform, inspire and motivate you to engage with the world of Jewish liturgical music.

This edition has been produced in honour of **Shabbat Shira** (the Shabbat of Song), the title given to the weekly portion of Beshalach, (11th January) in which the Jews sang the famous Oz Yoshir poem of gratitude upon their deliverance from their Egyptian pursuers at the Red Sea. Why did they burst into song?

The answer is simple: song is the medium through which we can communicate our emotions. Music can take a person to a place that prose and rhetoric are unable to penetrate.

Prayer, a sincere expression of the longings of the soul is thus synonymous with song the language of the heart. (See our Shabbat Shirah competition on page 4) and Listen here to the English Sephardi version of the Shirah tune <http://www.piyut.org.il/tradition/english/2051.html?currPerformance=2689>

When the Jews began their song at the Sea of Reeds, our Rabbis point out that they used an unexpected Hebrew tense. Rather than record their song as an event in historical terms they used the word 'Yoshir' which means 'will sing' in the future. This, explains the Beis Halevi (Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik 1820 -1892), reflects their deep-rooted belief that the sound of authentic Jewish song will be voiced once again at the time of our final redemption.

This means that we as the congregations of today are charged with the sacred duty of guarding and enhancing the timeless and beautiful musical tradition that we have been bequeathed. This is why the ECA runs an annual international convention for Cantors and Lay prayer leaders seeking to enhance their skills and their understanding of our sacred prayers.

This year's convention will take place in Budapest from 10 – 14 July see details on page 4

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If your synagogue is looking for a cantor for any occasion contact ECA Convenor Alex Klein alex@cantors.eu

The remarkable career of Cantor Josef Rosenblatt (1882 – 1933)

By David Olivestone

In an obituary for Cantor Josef Rosenblatt, who died 80 years ago, The New York Times noted, "He was so well known in this country that letters from Europe addressed to 'Yossele Rosenblatt, America,' reached him promptly."

He was born in 1882 in the Ukrainian shtetl Belaya Tserkov---the first boy in the family after nine girls. His father, a Ruzhiner chassid who frequented the court of the Sadagora Rebbe, was himself a chazzan. Recognizing his young son's extraordinary talent, Yossele's father began to tour with his son to help supplement the family income.

When he was eighteen and just married, Rosenblatt accepted his first permanent position in Munkacs, Hungary. His creative genius as a composer had already begun to bloom, and he soon found the atmosphere in Munkacs too restrictive. When the position of Oberkantor (chief cantor) in the more forward-looking city of Pressburg, Hungary, became available, Rosenblatt, still only eighteen years old, was chosen over fifty-six other candidates.

Standing not much more than five feet tall, Rosenblatt was still a commanding figure with his heavy, dark beard. He possessed a magnificent tenor voice of extraordinary range and colour, with a remarkably agile falsetto. He had perfect pitch and could read the most difficult score at sight. The sweet timbre of his voice, the superb control he displayed-- particularly in coloratura passages--and his trademark "sob," inspired his congregants and thrilled his concert audiences. And much of what he sang, and later recorded, was his own composition, significantly influenced in its tunefulness by his Chassidic background.

His five years in Pressburg saw the composition and publication of 150 recitatives and choral pieces, and in 1905 the first of numerous phonograph recordings. The demands of a growing family and of supporting several relatives whom he had taken into his home, however, forced him to seek a better paying position. This he found in Hamburg, Germany, where he again earned instant acclaim. He stayed there for five years.



Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt recognised as perhaps the greatest cantorial singer of all time.

Cantor Josef Rosenblatt (continued from column 1)

By this time, his fame had begun to reach the New World, both through his records and the accounts of travellers. The premiere New York Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek, sent for him. In New York his reputation quickly spread. Not only was Ohab Zedek packed to overflowing every time he davened, but Rosenblatt became the chazzan of choice for all of the city's Jewish philanthropic and memorial events.

In May 1917 a crowd of 6,000 filled the Hippodrome Theatre to raise funds for Jews suffering in Europe because of the war. Neither Rosenblatt nor his congregation saw any problem with his giving Jewish or secular music concerts. He rapidly learned some operatic arias and a repertoire of other ethnic songs, and in May 1918, gave his first recital at Carnegie Hall.

In order to fight off offers from other congregations, Ohab Zedek was now paying Rosenblatt the record salary of \$10,000 a year; Rosenblatt was also earning huge concert fees and royalties from his records. But as his income grew, so did his philanthropy and his generosity so much so that 1922, he agreed to invest in a dubious Yiddish newspaper venture and in 1925 he was forced to declare bankruptcy! To repay his creditors, he began an exhausting series of appearances in vaudeville, then the most popular form of entertainment in America. – not however appearing in the Friday evening and Saturday shows, and his itinerary had to be drawn up in such a way that he could be at Ohab Zedek for all the Jewish holidays. In 1926, Rosenblatt resigned from the shul, accepting an offer of \$15,000 to daven in a Chicago auditorium just for the High Holidays.

His fortunes went up and down - but after the stock market crash of 1929, most of his synagogues unable to pay him even Ohab Zedek (now in its new home on West 95th Street), Then in 1933, he was offered a movie role. In the "Dream of My People," Rosenblatt was to sing his own compositions at the Biblical sites relevant to the words of those prayers. The movie was designed to show the Jews of America the Holy Land, with its sacred sites, newly built cities and settlements.



Above: left Klang, right Weinbach

Cantor Josef Rosenblatt (cont from page 2)

Besides working on the movie, Rosenblatt gave concerts and davened in the major shuls and yeshivot in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv enchanting all who heard him. He spent Shabbat afternoons in the home of Rav Kook, the chief rabbi of what was then Palestine, who was deeply moved by his singing.

Rosenblatt decided to undertake a European concert tour to raise funds that would enable him to settle in Eretz Yisrael. On Shabbat, June 17, 1933, he davened at a "farewell" service held at the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem. The next day, after filming a scene at the Dead Sea, Rosenblatt suffered a sudden heart attack. Within a short while he died, at the tragically young age of fifty-one.

Eighty years after his passing, Yossele Rosenblatt's impact on chazzanut, in particular, and Jewish music, in general, continues to be felt. Many of his pieces have become staples in the repertoires of Ashkenazic chazzanim and are regularly sung in shul services and concerts. His recordings have been repeatedly reissued, most recently on CD. And still the greatest compliment that can be paid to any aspiring chazzan is that he is "a second Yossele."

But there has been no second Yossele who has captured the hearts of the public quite the way he did. In shul, he gave voice to the deepest feelings and yearnings of those who entrusted him as their shaliach tzibbur. On the concert stage and in the theatre, he would bring down the house night after night, impressing his audiences as much with his Yiddishkeit as with his artistry. In both settings, Yossele Rosenblatt sanctified G-d's name every time he sang.

Cantors who bring Yossele Rosenblatt back to life

I recognise that I may be embarking on a dangerous path: many a chazzan will believe that they have performed Rosenblatt's compositions to great acclaim. They may well be justified.

I will look at those who in my opinion have dazzled their listeners with their presentations of Rosenblatt. You can listen at the links and see if you agree.

His compositions require vocal flexibility for easy transition between full voice and head voice and to accurately present complex coloratura.

Elements of nusach are infused with chassidic melody and expressive emotion to form masterpieces that have stood the test of time.

You can hear Rosenblatt sing Brich Shmei from the Torah reading service - a good example of his magnificent singing.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOq8IBLi9NM>

Whilst historically there have been many cantors of old who modelled their singing style on Rosenblatt, the cantors I present below are all contemporary - both senior veteran cantors as well as younger rising stars.

Naftali Herstik is a well known cantor and teacher. Today he is the Dean of TACI (Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute). Below is his performance of Rosenblatt's Hashem Moloch arranged by Raymond Goldstein.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4fzf0zTBYY&list=PLtvNwAlXizPUrr7gOvK5ijkmkh0ohPxNC>

Benjamin Muller is presently the Chief Chazan of the Jewish Community of Antwerp. In this concert he is singing Rosenblatt's Rabbi Yishmael Omer, together with the Yuval ensemble conducted by Mordechai Sobol.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRRDOvWIOa8>

Yechezkel Klang was born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y. and is a freelance Cantor and a teacher at the Ramat Gan School of Cantorial Arts. In this selection he is chanting one of seven Kiddush (Sanctification) compositions by Rosenblatt.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkuoVWWJkbE>

D. Weinbach succeeded I.Rand at the Rammat Gan Great synagogue.

Here he presents a Rosenblatt Yiddish Composition 'Lomir Zich Iberbaten' arranged by R. Goldstein and with the Choir of TACI.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WvOeseM2uE>

I will be pleased to hear about your favourite interpreters of Rosenblatt today. Send your links to me at

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EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION (ECA)

the future of synagogue music

ECA is a new framework for cantors, prayer leaders and interested lay people, to engage in dialogue, training and profile-raising to ensure that the beautiful and unique music of Jewish prayer continues to enhance synagogue services for future generations.

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ECA is based on orthodox tradition and convention and is open to all who are interested in the music of the synagogue and the role and art of the cantor.



EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION

*the future of synagogue music*Published by the European Cantors Association,
Manchester UK

Dohany Street Synagogue, Budapest

Find out more details and register your interest now for the 9th European Cantors Convention in Budapest Thursday July 10 to Monday 14, 2014
DAVID@CANTORS.EU

Shabbat Shirah 10/11 January 2014

ECA is running a competition – Europe wide – for the synagogues that have services that most effectively draw the attention of the congregation to the music of Jewish prayer. Points will be awarded if the following are included in the service:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| A professional cantor or | 10 points |
| A trained lay leader | 10 points |
| A Sermon about Jewish music | 10 points |
| Verbal explanation of the music to the congregation | 15 points |
| A written sheet about the music to the congregation | 15 points |
| 8 or more children under 12 are included | 20 points |
| 8 or more children over 12 are included | 20 points |
| Any other amazing musical experience | 10 points |

Possible total 100 points

All synagogues with over 70 points will be acknowledged on the ECA website

Apply and register your interest and ideas to shabbatshirah@cantors.eu

Cantors banter (Print)
Cantors banter (Online)ISSN 2053-5198
ISSN 2053-5201