

Welcome to the world of synagogue music

Dear Friends

Welcome to the third edition of *Cantors Banter*. We hope its content will enhance your synagogue experience over the High Holy Days. If this is the first time you have seen our publication, may I remind you that our aim is to focus attention on **the remarkable music of our services** - whether you are a congregant, a rabbi, a professional cantor, or a lay service leader.

This issue is primarily dedicated to the sublime **Kol Nidre** – (all vows) sung at the opening of the **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) service. On page 2 we look at its musical structure and content, as well as the lasting emotional contribution it has made to the synagogue liturgy. Our exploration will take us to the Rhineland in the Middle Ages - where many of our liturgical tunes and modes were formalised to become the established custom from which cantors should not deviate.

Many commentaries explain that the reason we begin the service of **Yom Kippur** with a declaration annulling our vows is to instil within us the realisation that we are not inescapably bound by our past and that we are able to improve and effect positive change. The **ECA is also founded on this notion that the status quo may be improvable**. In recent decades, the position of the cantor has been under threat. Many congregations no longer understand or appreciate his role. ECA is engaging with synagogue leadership to impress upon them the value of having a trained and empathetic cantor to lead their congregations in prayer.

It is simply too tragic for us, who love the powerful, timeless and magnificent music of the synagogue liturgy **to contemplate its loss to the next generation**. We are overjoyed therefore with the tremendous support of the next Chief Rabbi for the role of the cantor. You can read (and hear) his address to us at our 8th Convention in London in June on our website (see article on the left). We are delighted that he has expressed his firm wish to work with us.

On another matter, the cantorial world has sadly lost one of the giants of our age; **Chazzan Moshe Schulhof** who passed away on 24 June aged just sixty-four. He embraced both the concert hall and the pulpit of the largest communities in the world almost up to his death, inspiring his audiences with his impassioned prayers.

He was a guest teacher of our Cantors' Convention in London in 2008 where he impressed delegates with his wealth of knowledge, warmth and charisma. We reproduce on page 3 part of an article that he wrote on the subject of putting cantors back on the *omud* (standing place). It contains a beautiful story about the *Kol Nidre* prayer, which demonstrates the immense power of our liturgical music to unite us as a people across international borders and communities.

I thank you for taking the time to read our Newsletter and wish all our readers and supporters a **'Sweet and Healthy New Year'**.

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Cantor, Sale and District Hebrew Congregation
Head of ECA Northern Group and ECA Newsletter Editor

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



Rabbi Mirvis Supports Cantors

Chief Rabbi-elect of the UK and Commonwealth, Ephraim Mirvis, addressed the 8th Annual European Cantors Convention on 19 June 2013.



Rabbi Mirvis (flanked by Alex Klein, left and Cantor Steven Leas, right) expressed his wholehearted support to cantors and to ECA.

His key messages were a reminder that the chazzan is the essential professional whose role it is to lead services; that a successful chazzan needs to have great familiarity and empathy with each of his congregants; and that although being respectful to the wishes of congregants, **nusach** should never be sacrificed.

He said 'We have to guarantee that traditional melodies and ways of leading a service will be preserved for the generations to come' and concluded **'I am absolutely and totally behind you and would like to be a partner in all of your noble efforts.'**

Hear and read the [address by Chief Rabbi-elect Ephraim Mirvis](#). Full Convention report at www.cantors.eu

The Music of the *Kol Nidre*

The music of the *Kol Nidre* is one of the most profoundly emotional melodies of our entire liturgy.

No other synagogue prayer has such an impact on the listener - arousing, uplifting, and inspiring passions that well up from the innermost depths of emotion for the entire congregation.

What makes this prayer so impressive to the congregant who is drawn to the synagogue with anticipation, trepidation, and awe?

To the casual reader the words of the text are simply a formal legal declaration. It is *Hatarat Nedarim*, an Aramaic time-accepted formula of absolution from personal vows and oaths between man and G-d. It is based on the statement in the Talmud (*Nedarim* 23b) that one who desires to annul his vows should publicly stand up at the "beginning of the year" and declare them null and void.

The *Kol Nidre* text probably existed in its present form in the eighth or ninth century in the Babylonian liturgy. It is primarily the haunting music of this text and the mystique of its history that augments the urgency, weight, and seriousness of the day and draws us to come to shul.

The melody as heard today in the *Ashkenazic* Synagogue was not known until the middle of the 15th or the 16th century. (*Sephardic* Jews recite *Kol Nidre* to a completely different tune.)

We do know that the singing of this "declaration" was instituted by R. Yehudai Gaon in the 8th Century, to be sung to a (nonspecific) melody by his Cantor in the academy of Sura, Babylonia.

**L'dor Vador -
From Generation to Generation**

Kabbalat Shabbat Live?

Would you like a lively pre-Kabbalat Shabbat with youngsters and their instruments and voices to delight your congregation at your school or synagogue?

**Contact Cantor Steven Leas
steven@cantors.eu to find out more,
express your interest and book a date.**



'Cantor' Al Jolson preparing to sing *Kol Nidre* flanked by two torah-bearers in the film "The Jazz Singer"

The Music of the *Kol Nidre* (continued from column 1)

According to the 11th Century prayerbook, *Machzor Vitry* of R. Simcha ben-Samuel, it was to be chanted three times: first, in a low and soft voice, then gradually increasing with each repetition to full voice. This represents the entrance of a subject into the king's palace with trepidation and his eventual standing before his king with confidence. This custom remains with us today.

The first mention of an established melody for *Kol Nidre* is found in the *Levush* of Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe of Prague (1530-1612), who writes of 'a widely accepted tune' known to the chazzanim of his time. The earliest notation of this melody is from 1765, written down by Cantor Aaron Beer of Berlin (1738-1821).

Upon analysis, the *Kol Nidre* melody appears to be an amalgam of other *Missinai niggunim* (tunes that are so old as to be considered 'as if' they had come down from Mount Sinai) such as the older tune of *Alenu*, and the *Taamei HaMikra* (cantillations) of the *Torah* and *Haftarah*. Abraham Z. Idelsohn (1882-1938) – our first Jewish Ethnomusicologist – has written that it was a chazzan in 15th/16th century Southwest Germany who 'voiced the sentiments of the terror-stricken *Marranos*, (secret but converted Jews in Catholic Spain) who as they recited the *Kol Nidre* expressed their wish to annul their catholic vows.

Throughout the world, the profound melody of *Kol Nidre* is recognized as one of Judaism's signature contributions to song and prayer.

As we are about to endure the fast of *Yom Kippur*, we all hope that our prayers will have an impact on the coming year's health, prosperity, peace, and tranquility. It is with trepidation and a prayer of hope for the future that the Jew is drawn to this solemn melodic declaration at the onset of the holiest day of the year.

Natan Fagleman May 2013

With acknowledgment to Sherwood Goffin of the Belz School



Nusach Hatfilah – A Unifying Force in Judaism

A story by the
late Cantor Moshe Schulhof

A survivor of the Holocaust by the name of Chaim related a remarkable story that I would like to share with you. Chaim grew up in Budapest and remained there during the war years. Though life was not easy, he managed to survive, living in the Jewish part of the city before the Nazi occupation. But then the Holocaust came to Budapest as well, with all its fury. The Nazis were aided by the Hungarian Arrow Cross, who murdered Jews randomly. The infamous Eichmann herded the Jews into a Ghetto from where they would be deported to Auschwitz. Chaim wasn't going to wait to be taken away or to be shot at by the Hungarians. He decided to move to the other side of the Danube into Buda where no Jews lived and hide out as a Gentile.

He found a room in a remote part of the city, hoping not to be recognized and thereby save himself. Armed with false papers, Chaim claimed to have come from the south of Hungary looking for work. Most of his neighbors paid little attention to him except for one young man by the name of Laszlo. He seemed to always be looking suspiciously at Chaim. When Chaim tried to make conversation with Laszlo, he became very evasive and defensive. He made Chaim feel very uneasy. Fearing that this man might be onto him, Chaim decided to look for another place to live. One day he noticed that he was being followed by Laszlo and quickly went into a crowd to lose him. Yet, something about him didn't seem sinister.

Continues in column 2

Pictured left: Cantor Moshe Schulhof (who sadly died recently aged 64) left, with President of Israel Shimon Peres

Continued from column 1

Chaim concluded that this man was either a Nazi informant, or another Jew also in hiding. But how could he find out which it was? They kept eyeing each other uneasily. One day there was a heat wave and the occupants of the building remained outside until late into the evening. Chaim, not wanting to get into unnecessary conversation with the other tenants, remained in his room despite the stifling heat. Late that evening, Chaim noticed from his window that all the other tenants had gone into their apartments, except for Laszlo, who was still out in the front of the building smoking a cigarette.

Chaim decided that this was an opportune moment to try something. He went downstairs and stood within earshot of Laszlo. Chaim began to whistle the tune of *Kol Nidre*. If Laszlo was indeed a non-Jew, it would mean nothing to him, but if he was Jewish, there would be an immediate recognition. Laszlo looked at Chaim as if stunned and began to also whistle. Both had tears in their eyes. Laszlo then said *Oich a yid*" (also a Jew). Laszlo then told Chaim how frightened he was of Chaim, thinking that he might be a Nazi informant.

As Jews, we feel a strong affinity with other Jews because of many factors. Though we may come from different countries, have different languages, or cultures, one of the strongest connections that ties us together is our music, particularly our synagogue music. The *Kol Nidre* with its haunting melody is part of what makes us feel Jewish. No matter wherever in the world we might be, we pray with the same melody. A Jew from London or Moscow can walk into a shul in New York, Jerusalem or Melbourne and immediately recognize the *davening* and join in as if he had prayed there all his life.

What makes this possible? The answer is the age-old *Nusach Hatfilah*, the musical mode and familiar chant of the *shliach tzibur* (prayer leader). This is what enables any Ashkenazi Jew, no matter where he is from or what cultural background he has, to recognise prayers wherever he may be, and on a *yahrzeit* (anniversary of a family death) or sadly in *availus* (mourning), to act as the *shliach tzibur*.

Unfortunately, there are many people that are not proficient in the *nusach* to act as the leader, yet unabashedly walk over to the *omud* and attempt to lead the services. They are doing a great disservice to everyone present without realizing it. If the *chazzan* knows the *nusach*, you will always hear the meaningful sound of the whole congregation engaged with their prayer. One immediately acquires a feeling of oneness *k'ish echad b'leiv echad* (all become as one person with a singular heart). This gathering of people becomes truly one *Minyan* (quorum) praying together with enthusiasm and creating a sanctification of G-d's Name. We owe it to the great centuries of tradition that have passed before us to pray with the time-honoured musical tradition that has been afforded to us by our forebears and retain a deep and powerful emotional connection with our prayers.

**TO KNOW MORE ABOUT CANTOR SCHULHOF
SEE HIS WEBSITE**

WWW.MOSHESCHULHOF.COM

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.

Patrons: Cantors Joseph Malovany, Naftali Herstik**Convenor** Alex Klein alex@cantors.eu**Executive Officer** Geraldine Auerbach MBE
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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.



www.cantors.eu

EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION
the future of synagogue music

*Dohany Street Synagogue, Budapest*

Find out more details and register your interest now for the

**9th European Cantors Convention
in Budapest**

Friday July 11 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:

<i>A professional cantor</i>	<i>10 points</i>
<i>A trained lay leader</i>	<i>10 points</i>
<i>A Sermon about Jewish music</i>	<i>10 points</i>
<i>Verbal explanation of the music to the congregation</i>	<i>15 points</i>
<i>A written sheet about the music to the congregation</i>	<i>15 points</i>
<i>8 or more children under 12 are included</i>	<i>20 points</i>
<i>8 or more children over 12 are included</i>	<i>20 points</i>
<i>Any other amazing musical experience</i>	<i>10 points</i>
	<i>Possible total 100 points</i>

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

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