



Dunajewski Choral Evening

West London Synagogue, 17 March 2024

Review by Robert Brody

Abraham Dunajewski (1843 – 1911) was the conductor of the choir at the Great Synagogue of Odessa in Ukraine. He wrote many liturgical compositions which were explored in an exceptional and well attended concert at the West London Synagogue on Sunday 17 March 2024, supporting World Jewish Relief's Ukraine Crisis Appeal.



Blue and yellow bunting, representing the Ukrainian flag was strung across the beautiful oriental façade of the Aron Kodesh from gallery to gallery. The event, presented by the WLS Music Committee was introduced by its chairman, the well-known composer and conductor Malcolm Singer. It commenced with a *Maariv* (evening) service supplemented by poetic readings and specific prayers for peace to be restored to the population in Ukraine.

The Dunajewsky choral performance was divided into five sections: Firstly 'Songs of Welcome', followed by 'Shabbat', 'Holiness', 'Hallel' and lastly 'Music from the Torah Service'. The music was exquisitely performed by the West London Synagogue's superb professional choir with cantorial soloist Maya Levy, conducted by their musical director, Richard Hills. Richard had also, with Matt Pochin, prepared new editions of the music.

The programme included two compositions that have remained popular in current synagogue choral and congregational repertoire. Dunajewski's Friday evening *Veshamru* is one of the most sensitive and evocative settings of the short paragraph that leads into the silent *Amidah* of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service. Equally, his *Ein Kamocha* is frequently used on Festivals as the introduction to the *Torah* service – and appears in the ubiquitous 'Blue Book', which has been the musical basis of Anglo-Jewish traditional usage for the last 100 years.

Also performed were the full settings of *Lecha Dodi* and the *Kedusha* from the Shabbat *Musaph* service. The final items – fittingly – were the beautiful setting and familiar harmonies of *Ein Kamocha* and *Hashiveinu* that in the shabbat morning services, mark the start and end of the Torah service with the opening and closing of the ark.

Henry Grunwald OBE, President of World Jewish Relief spoke movingly about the important and ongoing tasks being faced and dealt with by Jewish communities in the Ukraine and how World Jewish Relief is trying to alleviate the suffering as far as it is able to of the Jewish community as well as the general population.

This memorable concert of Abraham Dunajewski's musical compositions, both well-known and unknown, that took place in the welcoming environment of one of London's Great Synagogues, spiritually linked us to the Great Synagogue in Odessa, thus sustaining the memory and legacy of one of Jewish Music's most distinguished and venerated composers and also helping to raise funds to support efforts to reduce suffering in the Ukraine today.



DUNAJEWSKI CHORAL EVENING
SUNDAY 17 MARCH, FROM 18.30

**CELEBRATING THE
MUSIC & CULTURE OF JEWISH UKRAINE**

- Special candlelit solidarity service followed by
- Meditations and choral music concert with our professional synagogue choir, featuring the compositions of Abraham Dunajewski (1843-1911), Choirmaster of the Great Synagogue in Odessa for over 30 years and a famous 19th century Ukrainian Jewish composer renowned for his liturgical melodies.
- Following the concert, you are invited to join us for a buffet supper (not kosher certified).

Please visit www.wls.org.uk/choralconcert24 for more information and to book your place.

All the profits from the concert and buffet supper will go to World Jewish Relief's Ukraine Crisis Appeal.

At West London Synagogue, 34 Upper Berkeley Street, W1H 5QE



BOOK HERE

This concert is part of the 'From Our Lips ...' Celebrating Synagogue Music Festival.



The ECA Festival 'From Our Lips ...' Celebrating Synagogue Music from January to April 2024 has been privileged to include this fine evening of choral music by a great synagogue music composer and outstanding performers as one of the five concerts and seventeen synagogue services showcasing Jewish liturgical traditions. For the full 'From Our Lips ...' Festival programme, see the European Cantors Association Website www.cantors.eu. *Robert Brody*