

## **Music for the Soul**

Sunday 25 February St John's Wood Synagogue  
Guest cantors, **Simon Cohen**, **Netanel Herstik** and  
**Avraham Kirshenbaum**  
**Miriam Kramer** Violin and chamber orchestra,  
**The Neimah Singers**  
**Accompanist and arranger, Raymond Goldstein**  
**Conductor, Marc Temerlies.**

Review by Robert Brody



I had the pleasure of attending a superb concert at St John's Wood Synagogue, London on Sunday 25th February 2024. It featured three of the world's leading cantors, **Simon Cohen** from the UK now in Israel, **Netanel Herstik**, son of Naftali based in The Hamptons, New York, and **Avraham Kirshenbaum**, from Jerusalem who was at home at St John's Wood Synagogue where he leads choral services for the High Holydays. They were superbly supported by the Neimah Singers and also by a wonderful chamber orchestra led by the well-known London violinist, Miriam Kramer.

Above, from left: Simon Cohen, Netanel Herstik, Avraham Kirshenbaum

All were under the baton of Marc Temerlies, who had created the Neimah Singers 30 years ago in 1994, together with chorister Jonathan Weissbart. They had been the regular monthly choir at St John's Wood Synagogue, accompanying Cantor Moshe Haschel. The accompanist on piano, who was the musical arranger of most of the programme, was Raymond Goldstein of Jerusalem. The concert was attended by an extremely enthusiastic and supportive audience of nearly 400 men and women with an encouragingly wide age range.

### **The programme**

Reflecting the current situation and in solidarity with Israel, the three cantors joined forces in opening the concert with a Prayer for Israel, the IDF and recovery of the hostages. This was followed by a beautiful rendition of by Simon Cohen "Bring him home" from *Les Misérables*, adapted ("**Bring Them Home**") and dedicated to the hostages still in the hands of Hamas.

The general atmosphere of the concert was warm and felt like a reunion of long-standing family friendships from across the world. Choirmaster Marc Temerlies, from the UK, who now lives in Israel, is a brother-in-law of Netanel – and Simon Cohen's father Stanley had sung for many years in London. However, as one of the constituents of the European Cantors Association's 'From Our Lips ...' Festival Celebrating Synagogue Music, each chazan, singly and in duets and trios, presented some major cantorial compositions.

**Avraham Kirschenbaum** chose **Emess** from the *Yamim Noraim Musaph*, by Y Green and arranged by Eli Jaffe and Raymond Goldstein. This is a paragraph following what I believe to be the focal point of the service, *B'rosh Hashana Yikateivun* noting the frailty of man whose life, in the end, is no more than a dream that fades away. His singing and heart-felt rendition was a most excellent example of the power and emotion that can be conveyed by a skilled chazan, that these days is so rarely experienced in its intended context – a shul service.

Avraham also sang **Ki Hinei Kachomer** by Leibele Glantz and Moishe Oysher's **Amar Rabbi Eliazar**. With Simon Cohen he sang the famous Roitman/Rumshinsky **Ba'avur David**, and with Netanel Herstik he sang **Mimkomecha** by Carlebach and **Odecha**, composed and arranged by Goldstein.

**Netanel Herstik** chose Yossele Rosenblatt's **Ad Heino**. Rosenblatt is one of the most prolific and honoured chazan/composers, responsible for many of today's popular cantorial melodies. Netanel reminded us that Rosenblatt's well-used composition of *Shir Hama'alot* was the runner up melody when an Israeli National Anthem was being sought. **Ad Heino**, from the end of shabbat *shachrit's Nishmat* is not ideally suited for incorporating into a shul service, and, as a very demanding test of a cantor's skill and training is more at home on a concert platform. It begins in recitative style but soon moves to a lighter mood, reminiscent of Donizetti or Mozart. The orchestral accompaniment was a delightful arrangement that was in accordance with the change in mood and one that I had not previously heard and enjoyed. Herstik also performed **Ana Avda** by David Kushevsky, and ended the show with **Moishe Oysher's Seder Medley**.

**Simon Cohen** grew up with his very musical family in London – his father Stanley z"l was one of the community's best and well-known bass-baritone singers who shared history with Simon in singing together at St John's Wood. In **Lo Amut** by J Gottbeiter a recording of Stanley was incorporated into the performance that reminded so many of us present of the very special quality of his voice. Simon also sang an **Acheinu** medley arranged by E Gezuntheit. With Netanel, Simon memorably sung an adaptation of melodies **Mi Sheasa Nissim** in the styles of Mozart and Puccini.

Rabbi Mendel Cohen (who leads the attached Saachi Synagogue) and Dayan Binstock's son, Rabbi Yossie Binstock (the regular weekly chazan of St John's Wood Synagogue) were invited to join the three guest chazanim in the Israeli and Seder medleys the ended each half of the concert.



From Left: Neimah singers, chamber orchestra with Miriam Kramer centre, Simon Cohen, Netanel Herstik, Avraham Kirshenbaum and Marc Temerlies at St John's Wood Synagogue 25 February 2024.

The musical, as well as the emotional content of the programme encompassed as wide a range as could be hoped for, and the evening proved to be a rare opportunity in London to see and hear artistry of top international standard.

Heartfelt thanks are due – and were voiced – to all the participants, performers, technical support and organising team for an outstanding experience. It is hoped that the concert and information imparted about the chosen charities, JAMI ([jamiuk.org](http://jamiuk.org)) and Camp Simcha ([campsimcha.org.uk/](http://campsimcha.org.uk/)) will generate ongoing assistance to them, to continue their work to our community.

**Robert Brody, London, February 2024**

A recording of the concert is on YouTube [Music for the Soul 25 Feb 2024 St John's Wood](#)