

## European Cantors Association Newsletter No 5, July 2021

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### Message from Alex Klein, Director, ECA

My dear Friends

#### The conversation has begun!

The cat is out of the bag! Nearly 50 cantors across the Jewish world have spoken and hundreds have listened. No longer will the orthodox cantors sit meekly in the shadows bemoaning the fact that their positions are so precarious and are diminishing by the day. The European Cantors Association has given them their voice – and they will use it.



**Our series of Zoom talks ‘The Voice of the Cantor’** (VOC) with distinguished panels of cantors, prayer leaders, rabbis, academics and choir directors round the world, and across the spectrum of Jewish worship, has shown unequivocally that synagogues with trained cantors, as a respected part of the synagogue leadership, have loyal congregations of people who are spiritually uplifted and supported from the cradle to the grave. These synagogues will surely come out of the pandemic with renewed vigour.



**Michael Goldstein, President of the United Synagogue** in the United Kingdom, a valued panellist (left) on the programme VOC 4, which addressed: ‘The Challenge of Modern Orthodoxy for the Cantorate’, sings in a shul choir himself and knows how much Jewish liturgical music, when one is familiar with it, led by a knowledgeable Shaliach Tsibur, adds that special spiritual dimension to a service, something we have all needed in this time of plague.

Michael Goldstein said at the session: ‘it is very important to me that the person who leads the services, understands and appreciates t’filah and can interpret the prayers using our wonderful nusach and knows what they are doing’. However, sadly, he admitted that there is no cantorial training in the UK, nor even a requirement that a prayer leader should be properly trained.

- The Challenge Of Modern Orthodoxy For The Cantorate



## EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION

*The future of synagogue music*

Patrons: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis; Cantors Naftali Herstik,

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He acknowledged that there were fewer than a handful of trained chazanim in the United Synagogue, none of them full time, and that there was no standard which people were required to reach in order to fulfil that role. He said he would be pleased to see a proposal from ECA regarding a joint teaching programme. We are working on that and hope to meet with him to discuss this very soon.



Michael heard and nodded in agreement when fellow panellist **Cantor Steven Leas**, (left) of the Central Synagogue (Great Portland Street) London backed up enthusiastically by **Cantor/Minister Alby Chait**, (right) of the United Hebrew Congregation, Leeds, explained how employing a cantor, full time in the senior leadership of the synagogue, unleashed so much good in the community. Such cantors grow with all the members of the community, officiating with beautiful music at their weddings, baby blessings, teaching barmitzvot and consoling the families at



funerals as well as leading them in prayer every week. They are an integral and musical part of each family and help weave together the fabric of the community.

Meanwhile, there are superb four and five-year **nusach based cantorial courses** in the USA in Europe and in Israel. ECA has supported several young men to attend the Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute, many of whom are now gainfully employed, such as Alby Chait (Leeds) Yossi Schwartz (Edgware) Natan Fagelman (Liverpool) and Nathan Goldman (Stuttgart). In recent years other UK synagogues have embraced several of the excellently American trained cantors, many of whom now enjoy full time positions and are inspirational for their communities. They are valued and supported by their rabbis and lay leaders. They are all in progressive movements.

Our sages say Judaism stands on three pillars or foundations each one as important as the other : Torah, Avodah, Gemilat Chassadim. We cannot afford to leave out Avodah ,prayer as our successful VOC reminded us all. If the orthodox community wishes to sustain the beautiful and unique music of Jewish prayer (as Chief Rabbi Mirvis has declaimed) they might like to take up the conversation and see what is happening. There may still be time for a change of heart by the United Synagogue, to recognise that sacred music from a properly trained and respected full-time member of the synagogue leadership team who looks after families from the cradle to the grave, glues a community together. If they do not pay attention, the traditional music of Jewish prayer properly presented could simply disappear from orthodox services in the next generation – by neglect or default – on their watch.

Best wishes

**Alex Klein, Director European Cantors Association**

To listen again to Michael Goldstein and the other great panellists on this programme addressing 'The Challenge of Modern Orthodoxy to the Cantorate' click [here](#) and also see later in this Newsletter how to listen again to all the intensely interesting programmes in The Voice of the Cantor (VOC) series.



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### We must never compromise on Nusach – UK Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis



**UK Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis** (left) spoke at our 2013 European Cantors Convention about his support for ECA and for the chazzan.

He said: 'The Chazzan represents the Jew in the Pew'. We must never compromise on Nusach. Nusach is so important that we have to guarantee that the traditional melodies and ways of leading a service will be preserved, please God, for generations to come.

Watch him making this speech here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4BEPLn-8mA>

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### Cantor Benjamin Z Maisner reflects on the joys of the EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION

I have known about ECA since its inception in 2012, having learned of its various activities from many dear colleagues, mainly of the Orthodox ilk. Yet, I have always been hesitant to participate. Although my upbringing and educational background are orthodox and my lineage connects me to the orthodox cantorial world, as the nephew of one of the Great Oberkantors, Israel Alter, my professional path led me, I believe by divine intervention, to the liberal spectrum of Judaism.

But as fate, or divine intervention, would have it, retirement in June of 2020, encouraged me to widen my horizons of Jewish expression. You can take the Cantor out of the orthodox, it seems, but you cannot take the orthodox out of the Cantor. So here I am, in the later stages of my career, thrilled to be associated with ECA.



#### European Cantors Conventions - across the spectrum of Jewish denominations

But let me go back a few years, when my engagement truly began. Alex Klein, Director of ECA, and Hirsh Cashdan, Prague 2016 Convention Program Director, with the encouragement of Raymond Goldstein and Cantor Naftali Herstik, whom I knew from childhood, invited me to lecture, teach and share my experiences as Cantor and Music Director of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Canada, one of the most prestigious congregations in North America. The warm welcome and embrace I received from so many ECA colleagues, across the spectrum of Jewish denominations, was immediate. All members were equally accepted—



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presenters, participants and observers alike. It was heart-warming to be in such an open environment, where appreciating each other's experiences, knowledge and ideas was the norm, and building professional comradery the goal.

Again, with Alex Klein's encouragement, I was invited to the 2018 convention, and given more opportunity to share my vision for using various modes of Jewish music to teach about Judaism.

The Hannover convention, in January of 2020, however, marked for me a most positive turning point. I witnessed the sincere inclusion of female Cantors, presenting and participating in sessions, and generally taking part in convention activities and informal concerts. Coming from a Reform congregation, this was a familiar and comfortable scenario.



It was also at this convention that the Holocaust "Night" Project, blending the glorious music of Leib Glantz with the narration of Eli Wiesel's acclaimed book, was most movingly performed as the convention's highlight and conclusion.

Given my mixed Jewish and musical backgrounds, I find the purpose and goals of ECA so valuable. I am very impressed with the programming of

conventions and find the environment of these conventions to be rich in *Yidishkeit* and philosophical exploration.

The leaders make it not only possible but also desirable for Cantors, *Ba'alei T'filah* prayer leaders, and lay people to come together for learning, dialogue and discussion about Jewish liturgical music, all with a vision to ensure that the beautiful and unique music of Jewish prayer continues to enhance synagogue services for future generations. In this, the ECA most certainly lives up to its own description of striving to provide 'deep learning and generous sharing, in a warm and welcoming atmosphere'.

### **The Voice of the Cantor (VOC) - nourishment for our souls**

During the long months of Covid restrictions, I so looked forward to "The Voice of the Cantor" series. It provided, not only contact with friends and colleagues, who we missed so much, but also nourishment for our souls that yearned for music and professional interaction. The variety of topics was enlightening and full of content and creativity.

The wide scope of topics gave us an opportunity to look closely and intimately at the future of our profession.



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The Cantorial Art, in all of its aspects, was discussed intellectually and emotionally, revealing the passions of each presenter. It is difficult for me to identify specific sessions, as all were excellent. But a few did stand out as important and valuable to me, personally.

These include: Russell Grossman's discussion on Carlebach's music (April 28, 2021); the two *Nusach* sessions and the expertise with which ideas, experiences and philosophy were presented; and the two last sessions on the future of Cantorial Art, were inspirational and gave hope that the sacred calling of the Hazzan will enjoy a glorious future once again. Amen.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge, with many thanks, all who organize, plan and maintain the communications, especially Geraldine Auerbach. Your efforts, on behalf of ECA, provide us with an extremely important platform for keeping connected. I look forward to seeing you all in person very soon.

See all 'The Voice of the Cantor' (VOC) programmes and how to access the podcast and the video of each session on [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu)



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**Cantor Benjamin Maissner**

**Cantor Emeritus**

Holy Blossom Temple

[www.holyblossom.org](http://www.holyblossom.org)

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### 14<sup>th</sup> Cantors Convention Begins Planning!

The European Cantors Conventions are a heart and soul of our movement. Our thirteenth 'bar mitzvah' convention (left) was in Hanover, Germany, in January 2020 just before COVID-19 closed in.

We are currently beginning the planning for our 14<sup>th</sup> Convention, to be held IYH in mainland Europe in November 2022. Keep an eye out for details later this year.



European Cantors Association presents:

# The Voice of the Cantor

An innovative new series of talks in which renowned cantors speak about the joys and fears of the Jewish Prayer leader across the Jewish world today

**כי בתינו בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים** *For my house is a house of prayer for all the peoples*

## The Voice of the Cantor (VOC)

The European Cantors Association presented a series of eleven Zoom sessions in Spring and Summer 2021 in which leading cantors, and those they work closely with, from the UK, Europe and North America tackled some of the bigger issues of our times.

You can listen to the podcast or see sessions again : all the links are on our website at

<http://www.cantors.eu/VoiceOfTheCantor.html>

## Do we need a Synagogue Choir?

### Daniel Tunkel summarises the discussion of his panel of choirmasters from VOC 8

The eighth in our 'Voice of The Cantor' sessions did, technically, depart from the purely cantorial theme of the series, as we sought to look at the synagogue choir as a core component of service music. We brought together five synagogue chorus directors to share their experiences.

Many synagogues have, or have had, choirs. Much music that is sung even today was written for choirs to sing. But, as with the cantor and the cantorate, tastes and fashions change and the "choral synagogue" format that dominated European Jewry until well into the 20th century is no longer definitive.



We found that in some communities it certainly is still expected that the choir will have a leading role, though typically to expressly preserve an acknowledged past or established tradition. As a clear example, we heard from Ben Wolf, who directs music at Belsize Square Synagogue in London, whose mission since foundation has been to preserve the majesty of the German choral tradition developed by Lewandowski and others in the mid-19th century.

(Pictured left, is cantor Paul Heller and London's Belsize Square Synagogue professional choir at the Lewandowski festival in Berlin in 2013).

In quite different ways, the choral tradition preserves a community's identity (as with the work that Ruti Worrall has ably done at the Menorah Synagogue in South Manchester) or redevelops it (as with Sasha Tsaliuk's remarkable work at the Moscow Choral Synagogue in re-generation after the end on communist rule).

But we also heard from Alan Freedman, who grew up with and came to conduct the choir at the Hendon Synagogue in NW London: a community that boasted a fine choral tradition that is now substantially in abeyance. And Evelyn Green clearly lamented the fact that the choral tradition in her home town, Johannesburg, South Africa is perceptibly on the decline.

Much that was written for the synagogue has found a second (or secondary) home on the concert stage. All five of our panellists also run concert music programmes, either with their synagogue choirs or through others that they conduct.

The concept of "concertisation" might be a saviour of this music (or some of it, at least) but at the expense of taking it out of the setting for which it was created. Curiously, Jews will pay good money to these concerts, and "kvell" over the sound that this all makes. Yet the same folk show parallel reluctance to be enthralled by this material in the context of worship for which it was written. So many communities, it

seems, reject this style of worship and appear to want something else that the conventional shul choir is - for whatever reason - not providing.

One other key point is this. **The choir historically was the training ground for the cantors and chief musicians of the next generation.** If synagogues no longer have choirs, in particular to interest their youth,



how do we fill this void when it comes to teaching the next generation? There are (a few) places world-wide, where cantors can train (none in the UK), but the loss of the component of choral and participatory singing as such is damaging to a more general youth culture.

There is some choral singing in Jewish schools, but seldom directed towards the worship end of the Jewish musical tradition. A child who sang in a shul choir got to understand how the shul

service worked; this isn't happening very much anymore, Instead we have youth services and the like, where youth are somehow supposed to know how the show runs with little or no coaching and few if any role-models to follow.

**A good choir can still galvanise a community.** A choir that trains and learns and sings as a team can still inspire first of all itself, but more importantly everyone who hears it perform. That is the principle behind the concert choir. It can still be a guiding principle for the shul choir as well. And that does not have to stifle communal singing: there are ways to manage the two side by side.

Daniel Tunkel, European Cantors Association Executive Committee  
Moderator of VOC 8 – 'Who Needs A Shul Choir'?



**The Voice of the Cantor**  
Watch the [video](#) of VOC 8 or listen to the podcast [here](#).

**Who Needs A Shul Choir?**  
*In conversation with Daniel Tunkel*

 <b>Ruti Worrall</b> Choir Director Menorah Synagogue, Cheshire, UK	 <b>Evelyn Green</b> Musical Director Johannesburg Jewish Male Choir	 <b>Alexander Tsalluk</b> Artistic Director Moscow Male Jewish Acapella	 <b>Benjamin Wolf</b> Musical Director Belsize Square Synagogue, UK	 <b>Alan Freedman</b> Musical Director The London Cantorial Singers
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## The European Cantors Association

*Bringing together all who love Jewish liturgical music and the power it brings to prayer*

**The European Cantors Association (ECA) is an independent organisation** established in the United Kingdom in 2012. It is a framework for cantors, prayer leaders and interested lay people across the spectrum of Jewish worship, 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 generations to come. ECA's work is endorsed by several distinguished rabbis and cantors and recognises best practice wherever it exists.

**ECA partners with several international organisations** to create programmes that are relevant to cantors of today and those they work closely with. ECA presented a Zoom series in 2021, The Voice of the Cantor (VOC) tackling some of the burning issues in the cantorial world today. ECA's Academic Wing presents International Conferences on the music of Jewish prayer in partnership with universities around the world.

**ECA arranges European Cantors Conventions** along orthodox lines in the UK and European cities that are recognised for providing deep learning and generous sharing in a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Sessions deal with what is most relevant to the cantor and prayer leader of today. Teachers and presenters are chosen for their experience and expertise and are of the highest calibre. Delegates are able to secure professional feedback. Daily services are held, shacharit, minchah and maariv. Shabbat Choral and cantorial services are arranged with local communities. All food served is kosher. Shabbat services as well as concerts are open to the public who share the love of synagogue music past, present and future.

**All who are interested** in the music of the synagogue and the role and art of the cantor or prayer leader are welcome to join the European Cantors Association and attend its activities.

**ECA Membership is free. To join [download the membership form](#)**

**Donations are welcome** to support ECA scholarship programme

**To make a donation,** Transfer to the ECA Bank:

Sort code 40-20-14, Account name: European Cantors Association

Account number 91408429 (International Bank Account Number GB60MIDL40201491408429)

**For further and continuing information** on the European Cantors Association, join our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/canntors.eu/> or send us your email address to be put on the Newsletter list. Also see the

ECA Website: [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu)

Twitter: [@eurocantorsasn](https://twitter.com/eurocantorsasn)

Instagram: [europeancantors](https://www.instagram.com/europeancantors)

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## Newsletter #5 of the European Cantors Association

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, July 2021