



## EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION

*The future of synagogue music*

Patrons: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Cantors Naftali Herstik, Joseph Malovany, Asher Hainowitz

Convenor Alex Klein: [alex@cantors.eu](mailto:alex@cantors.eu)

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### European Cantors Association Newsletter No 2, May 2020

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The European Cantors Association (ECA) established in 2012 has earned the reputation of running conventions that provide deep learning and generous sharing in a warm and welcoming atmosphere, providing hope that cantorial music and nusach is alive and well throughout the Jewish world. Teachers and presenters are of the highest calibre and sessions deal with what is most relevant to the cantor of today. Delegates are able to be heard and to secure real and professional feedback. Shabbat services and concerts are open to the public who share the love of synagogue music past, present and future.

### The 13<sup>th</sup> European Cantors Convention, Hanover, January 2020

Our 'Bar Mitzvah' Convention in Hannover, timed to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day and the 75th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was hailed as **breathhtaking – evocative – exhilarating!**

It was hosted by **Elijah Sakakushev von Bismarck**

*(seen front right, with from left, Russell Grossman, behind Russell, Asher Hainowitz then Jerry Glantz and Alex Klein).*

Elijah is the Director of the magnificent [Villa Seligmann](#), 'the House of Jewish Music'. Events also took place at the Hannover Orthodox Synagogue.





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The five-day event featured participation from a glitterati of international cantors plus the Moscow Jewish Acapella Choir. We were welcomed by the Jewish Communities and the President of Parliament of Lower Saxony, (seen below in the centre of the delegates with her certificate from ECA).



The convention showcased the **diversity of cantorial art** from the famous 20<sup>th</sup> century cantors Leib Glanz and Israel Alter both with relevance to Hannover, to contemporary Chazzanim in Europe and the US.

It took in **special memorial events** with the Hannover Jewish Community including a cantorial concert in the synagogue in which our delegates participated and the 'Night' Oratorio on Holocaust Memorial Day, attended by 3500 people, and a moving visit to the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, now a place of memorial and reflection.

**Comments** from delegates from Budapest, Prague, Germany, Israel, the USA, and the UK, included how warm the hospitality was and how delicious the food: they said it was:

*Beyond my expectation. Very well organised, outstanding programmes. Very enjoyable*

*Great mood, very inspiring, rewarding and providing hope that cantorial music and nusach us alive and well*

*The singing, the exchange of oral traditions, the energy and creativity of it all everything was helpful, life enhancing and illuminating*

*Completely wonderful! First of many to come (P.G.)*

*And from a rabbi ...re-ignited my passion for chazanut*

**Plans are already being forged for the next ECA Convention, another International Conference and some interim events. We look forward to returning to Hannover again in November 2023**



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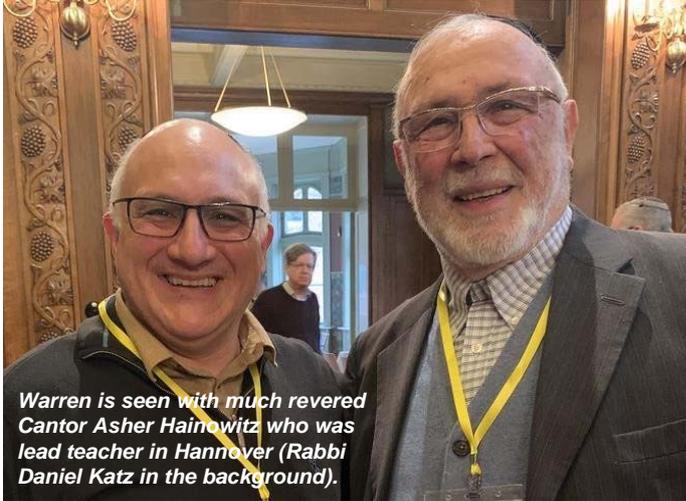
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### Warren Bank of Leeds, sent us his enthusiastic personal report



*Warren is seen with much revered Cantor Asher Hainowitz who was lead teacher in Hannover (Rabbi Daniel Katz in the background).*

I have always wanted to attend one of the Annual conventions of the European Cantors' Association. They meet once every year or two in a European city (Budapest, Prague, Leeds, London, Manchester) inviting cantors, prayer-leaders and anyone with an enthusiasm for chazzanut, nusach or Jewish music in general to spend a few days together learning, teaching, discussing, arguing (of course!) but all united by a common passion for the Cantorial art.

Warren continued: This was my very first ECA Convention. It was held at the Villa Seligmann, Hanover 'The home of Jewish music' also the base for the **European Centre for Jewish Music (EZJM)** <https://www.ezjm.hmtm-hannover.de/en/home/> which is attached to the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media – where last September, our ECA /EZJM International Conference, Magnified and Sanctified had taken place.

This is a sumptuous and stately mansion built by a wealthy Jewish merchant in 1906. It has a magnificent salon dominated by a beautiful chamber pipe organ (which I had the privilege to play when accompanying one of the cantors). Various other musical instruments rescued from destroyed synagogues, are dotted around the various rooms of this multi-story centre, including a spectacular Steinway grand piano which I too had the privilege to play!

### Learning sessions

What struck me was the diversity of the group: not all were cantors! But among us were Chassidim, Modern Orthodox, Reform and Liberal, men and women. All learnt from each other during the course of the convention, and particularly over Shabbat in the orthodox synagogue of Hannover, and during the various performances. I was particularly impressed by the atmosphere of complete respect and admiration for each other's artistry and experience, no matter one's denomination or outlook. It was abundantly clear that everyone present was just as passionate about the preservation and enhancement of the cantorial art and nusach, and Jewish music in general.

Some of the guest speakers included **Professor Mark Kligman** of UCLA (Musicology), **Cantor Asher Hainowitz** of Yeshurun, Jerusalem (and previously of Pretoria, South Africa), **David Prager** (ex-Manchester), Cantor **Matt Austerklein** of Akron/Cleveland Ohio, **Dr Jerry Glantz**- son of the famous chazzan Leibeke Glantz, **Cantor Benny Maissner** (Toronto) nephew of the great Israel Alter who had officiated in Hannover 1925-1935) and **Cantor Dan Mutlu** (New York), along with a strong delegation of cantors from Budapest.



*Cantor Dan Mutlu showing how he mixes traditional chazzanut with more popular melodies while Russell Grossman holds the mic*

A common theme among the topics discussed was: how do we integrate the beauty of true chazzanut with contemporary Jewish music and make our contemporary services both authentic but relevant at the same time. All agree that this is no simple task.

What appears to have made this particular ECA Convention stand out from others was the incredible organisational skills and timing.

The Hannover team expertise was superb from the management of Villa Seligmann (**Elijah Sakakushev**), the Hannover Jüdische Gemeinde President **Michael Furst**. and the inimitable coordinator **Tova Harety**.

## Holocaust Memorial Day

The timing of the Convention around **Holocaust Memorial Day** brought us two unforgettable concerts.

The first was hosted by the *Landesverband der Jüdischen Gemeinden von Niedersachsen* at the Hannover Synagogue in which several of our delegates participated, and which was attended by various local dignitaries including the Prime Minister of Lower Saxony, the Mayor of the State Capital of Hannover and the State Bishop, Ralf Meister (who has studied at Hebrew University of Jerusalem). (see picture below of the synagogue concert.)



*Pictured left: Alex Klein, ECA Convenor and Elijah Sakakushev, Director of programmes at the Villa Seligmann share a joyful moment*



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On Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January we attended the **'Night' Oratorio**, based on Primo Levi's Holocaust testimony of that name. This event, performed by the Kaliningrad Symphony Orchestra, the Vilnius State Choir, the Moscow Jewish A Capella and wonderful soloists including our Cantors Benny Maissner (Toronto) and Dan Mutlu (New York). It took place before an audience of 3,500 in Hannover's massive Congress Centre Kuppelsaal. The German narration of excerpts from Elie Wiesel's horrific story of deportation and life in Auschwitz was sensitively performed by one of Germany's most famous actors, Sebastian Koch (*Bridge of Spies*, *The Danish Girl*).

### The Jewish community of Germany

A particularly moving experience for me was walking to shul on Friday night in a group, many openly displaying their tzitzit, donning their hats and kippot. I

found myself marvelling at the moment, and how fascinating it was to be part of a group of Jews walking to shul in Hannover, openly and proudly: when last did this city last witness such a scene?

Many people unfamiliar with the German Jewish community do not realise how extremely large it is. At last count there were over 100,000 affiliated members and possibly 50,000 more Jews in Germany - making it the 8<sup>th</sup> largest in the world. These numbers swelled in the 1990s with immigration of Jews from the Former Soviet Union and Israelis. Hannover is a relatively small community but has approximately 10,000 Jews living here, but not all are members of the official community. The community is still able to support four shuls of various denominations including Chabad and Liberal. The present Orthodox shul where we were based for all services was built in 1963 and is a beautiful structure adjoining the modern aged home. The community has its own excellent orchestra and mixed-voice choir that performed for us on our arrival and also at the community Holocaust Memorial Commemoration which I mentioned earlier.

**Shabbat services** were led by various chazzanim. **Nathan Goldman** formerly of Liverpool lead Kabbalat Shabbat. He is the grandson of chazan Maurice Katanka Z"L of Liverpool's Old Hebrew Congregation and nephew of Rabbi/Chazan David Katanka Z"L He is now employed in Stuttgart. The legendary **Asher Hainowitz** astounded us with his magnificent and heartfelt Mussaf, showing that, at age 80, he is a true master of the art of tefillah. **Russell Grossman** led the Torah Reading. The male members of the community choir together with their chazzan, **Andrej Sitnow**, led the rest of the service.



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Above: ECA Delegates with **President Dr Gabriele Andretta** at the Landtag

On Monday morning, Holocaust Memorial Day, we were special guests of the **President of the Lower Saxony Parliament (Landtag)**, Dr Gabriele Andretta, who welcomed us to the state-of-the-art *Landtag* building and we were given a guided tour. Most of us noticed that all official flags had been lowered to half-mast in honour of HMD.

We then went to the **Ahlen Memorial** which was a pre-war agricultural centre just outside Hannover at which Jewish students learnt farming and agricultural methods, From 1942 however the Gestapo turned it into a centre where Jews were rounded up, imprisoned, tortured and executed. Some 2173 Jews were deported from there mainly to Riga, Warsaw, Theresienstadt and Auschwitz of which only 144 survived.

Just before we left I went to inspect the wreaths that had been laid during a short commemorative ceremony and met a German woman clutching a handful of photos. I engaged her in conversation, and she told me that she had been very close to a local Holocaust survivor, Moshe, who had been living in Israel since after the war. She had always been in touch with him and showed me photos of another memorial ceremony some years earlier at which Moshe had been present along with two of the US armed force personnel who had liberated him from Ahlen in 1945. She told me that Moshe had survived all this time but passed away only last week at the age of 94.



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She was carrying these pictures as “a memory of love”. I found this very moving and thought how sometimes we encounter people for a brief moment of our lives and they are somehow able to touch us forever in ways we could never have imagined. I was glad to leave Ahlen as I found its atmosphere oppressive and full of sadness at the horrors experienced there not so long ago.



*Photos: Top: A German woman showing me photos of her dear friend, a Holocaust survivor who had passed away just one week earlier, and whom she had come to honour at Ahlen. Bottom a poignant reminder of the losses at Bergen-Belsen*

### Bergen-Belsen

There was an optional tour to **Bergen-Belsen** Concentration Camp on the final day and a group of about 15 of us were taken there by coach. We were personally escorted by one of the chief historians of the site, Diana Gring, who told me that she had personally spent many hours interviewing Chazzan **Moshe Kraus** (a Belsen survivor) and how moving she had found his faith and his music. This will hopefully find its way into a fascinating movie one of these days.



There are of course simply no words to describe the experience of Belsen – there is nothing there: only dozens of mass graves beneath which lie the remains of more than 50,000 inmates who were so badly starved, beaten and emaciated, that when the liberating British forces arrived on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1945 and started filming the conditions, it was very difficult to distinguish the living from the dead. The museum treats this very sensitively by showing this harrowing army footage (restored in high quality monochrome) in a curtained-off semi-private viewing area. This footage brought a new level of hideousness to the indescribable crimes of the Holocaust in such a graphic way that will forever be seared into my memory.

Of great potency was the powerful manner in which Rabbis **Natan Fagleman**, **Danny Bergson** and Yiddish singer **Sveta Kundish** intoned the Hazkarah, the Kaddish and a haunting Yiddish song (Here lies Abie) at the Belsen Memorial.



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**ECA has forged some wonderful bonds across continents, communities and practice.**

So many special friendships have been created – and a sense of deep admiration for the craft and unique mission of our fellow chazzanim and ba'alei tefillah. Kol Hakavod to **Alex Klein, Russell Grossman, Barbara Rosenberg** and **Geraldine Auerbach** of ECA. Long may ECA continue to flourish and not only keep the art of the cantor and Jewish music alive, but promote its growth and future innovation and development.

**Warren Bank, Leeds, February 2020**

**It is with great sadness that we mention the death of Rabbi Benjamin Wolff – of Chabad in Hanover. Rabbi Wolff had found time to attend a session of our Convention and gave a moving address to the delegates. He was 43 and leaves a wife and eight children. You can read an obituary here**

**[https://www.chabad.org/news/article\\_cdo/aid/4725647/jewish/Rabbi-Binyamin-Wolff-](https://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/4725647/jewish/Rabbi-Binyamin-Wolff-)**

**We are also very sad to report the death of Roger, the dear husband of Barbara Rosenberg, a stalwart of our ECA Committee and Conventions.**

For further and continuing information on the European Cantors Association, see the ECA Website: [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu) Twitter: [@eurocantorsassn](https://twitter.com/eurocantorsassn) Instagram: [europeancantors](https://www.instagram.com/europeancantors) Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/cantors.eu/>

Newsletter No 2, compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, May 2020