



# EUROPEAN CANTORS ASSOCIATION

*The future of synagogue music*

Patrons: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Cantors Naftali Herstik, Joseph Malovany, Asher Hainovitz

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

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## European Cantors Association Newsletter No 4, March 2021

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### Message from Alex Klein, Director, ECA



My dear Friends

Throughout this year-long plague of coronavirus, we have seen our prayer leaders around the Jewish world dig deeply into what is most relevant and most meaningful in our prayers. They have found ingenious ways of communicating with their communities, with the beloved and powerful prayer-music. The role of the cantor has never been more central and more important. Let us hope, and also work towards, this being noticed by those who lead communities. Let us try to ensure that in future cantors have the jobs, the facilities and pride of place they deserve.

Despite the difficulties, lockdown has brought some wonderful opportunities due to our advanced technology. Zoom can bring us all together instantly at the touch of a button – no queues at the airport and months of planning. I have relished, and benefitted enormously by being with colleagues around the world, listening – and contributing – to informative and enlightening sessions on Jewish music and the cantorial art. These have been run by the Milken Archives, the Cantors Assembly, the International Forum for Jewish Music Studies, the Jewish Music Institute and many others. Now we at ECA are presenting our own unique and timely online series – The Voice of the Cantor (VOC).

### The Voice of the Cantor (VOC)

This for once, is not about the cantor's singing voice. Rather, we will hear the candid opinions of cantors across a range of topics that affect every prayer leader today – such as 'Who needs Nusach?' 'Do we need a Rabbi?' 'The Carlebach Conundrum'. You can see the full programme in this Newsletter and also on the Website [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu).

As an independent association we welcome dialogue and participation across the Jewish spectrum with respect and engagement. We are bringing together the voices of people on the front line of communities around the globe. Are those making decisions about the music of prayer the right people to do so? Have they got it right? Are they being allowed to destroy something that we cherish?

Join us fortnightly on Wednesdays at 7.00pm UK time, to add your voice in shaping the future of our longest heritage. Ask our distinguished panels from the UK, USA, Canada, Europe and Israel the questions you have always wanted to ask. The next session is at **6.00pm this week only** on **Wednesday 17 March**. Read about our wonderful opening session that we shared with the Cantors Assembly, when I interviewed my dear friend **Dudu Fisher** about his career on the Bimah and the Stage. Enjoy!



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With warm wishes, Alex Klein, ECA Director, [alex@cantors.eu](mailto:alex@cantors.eu)

**Alex Klein celebrates** a special birthday later this month. We all at ECA wish him good health and happiness with his family and friends, and may he continue to inspire all around the world with the beauty and value of memorable synagogue services and the cantorial art.

European Cantors Association presents:

## The Voice of the Cantor

Hear the Voice of the Cantor speaking about the joys and fears of the Jewish prayer leader across the Jewish world today.

'Who needs Nusach?' 'What does a choir add or subtract? The Carlebach Conundrum' 'Do we need a Rabbi?' and more.

Starting Wednesday 3 March 2021 with Superstar Cantor Dudu Fisher

They tell us how they came to be where they are – and their advice to those entering the field. Alongside cantors you will hear the voices of rabbis and community leaders .

Listen to leading cantors, young and old, from Europe and North America, tackle some of the bigger issues of our times:

You too can join the conversation.

### Wednesdays fortnightly on Zoom

11.00am Pacific | 2.00pm Eastern USA | 7.00pm UK  
8.00pm Europe | 9.00pm Israel and South Africa

Full programme and Zoom log in  
[www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu)



### European Cantors Association presents **The Voice of the Cantor (VOC)**

Leading cantors, and those they work closely with, from the UK, Europe, Israel and North America tackle some of the bigger issues of our times.

11.00am Pacific / 2.00pm Eastern USA / 7.00pm UK / 8.00pm Europe / 9.00pm Israel /South Africa  
(Please note, the session on 17 March (only) is one hour earlier outside America)

Zoom Login at ECA [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu) Register at <http://bit.ly/eca-voc>



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### **The Voice of the Cantor (VOC)** (see the end for the full printable timetable)

In this ground-breaking series, ECA explores the cutting issues of the day for cantors in ten illuminating Wednesday sessions. Our moderators **Hirsh Cashdan, Russell Grossman, Daniel Tunkel** and **Alex Klein** have chosen topics that concern all those leading prayer today across the Jewish spectrum.

The panels have been carefully chosen to express their differing views and experiences. Included in the panels are Rabbis, and leaders of synagogue movements to engage in the subjects.

### **Hirsh Cashdan deals with Passover in Pandemic, The Challenge of Modern Orthodoxy, Who needs Nusach? and New Cantors for a New Europe.** He says:

- Normal service was clearly disrupted but imagination has run riot – hear what ideas have been generated and **how synagogues have maintained connections** and services in face of the unprecedented challenge of Covid-19. Contribute your ideas and experience on **31 March**.
- Does the **Modern Orthodox agenda** leave room for a conventional cantor? Is the cantor now only for the concert hall? Who should lead the service in the synagogue and how do they become equipped to do so? Is this a question of finance, time, interest, new media or what? Do we need a Rabbi? Or must chazanim become rabbis and fulfil a dual role to be able to perform in their original role? Join in on **14 April** to hear and give your views.
- Is the centuries-old *nusach* the glue that holds our service traditions together, or is it becoming archaic? What do we mean by “nusach” and wherein lies its importance? **Is this the immutable structure for the music of Ashkenazi prayer?** Or is the melody of the synagogue more changeable and less constant than we think? Is it OK to introduce modern Israeli tunes? Carlebach tunes? Secular songs or even the latest pop song? Join on **26 May**.
- After the devastation of the Holocaust and the sterility of communism across so much of Europe, Jewish communities started to rebuild 30 years ago. What challenges have their cantors faced and what challenges remain? Are the communities very traditional in reflecting the pre-war communities they have replaced or to what modern and diverse influences are they open? Do the **former USSR communities even know anything about Judaism?** Our panel includes cantors from several “new” communities across Europe. Hear their experience and question them on their directions on **23 June**

### **Alex Klein tackles ‘The Carlebach Conundrum’ on 28 April**

Do we love and embrace his music – or are we losing something if we do? Do we fully understand Shlomo’s special gifts? Hear from different generations on their thoughts and contribute your own.

### **Russell Grossman and Daniel Tunkel each deal with two VOC sessions**

On **17 March** when Russell looks at differing experiences on either side of the Atlantic. In **Crossing the Pond** he has cantors who have worked on both sides and who explain the difference in working on one side or the other.



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In **Kol Isha** on **1 July** (the last session and the only one on a Thursday), he takes a look at how women are experiencing the challenges and highlights of a cantorial role in the UK.

In **Who Needs a Shul Choir?** (**9 June**) Daniel is giving a distinguished panel of choir directors the opportunity to tell us what they think a choir brings to the service. We hope to hear from rabbis, congregants, and cantors in the audience, whom we invite to add their views. On **12 May**, Daniel invites officiants from several Sephardi communities to talk about the role of the cantor in their tradition.

Our season of 10 Zoom sessions opened on 3 March with ECA Director Alex Klein talking to his dear Friend Dudu Fisher. This session, co-hosted by the Cantors Assembly in America, drew an audience of 600 people. There is a full report of this remarkable discussion below. It will soon be on the ECA YouTube channel to hear again.

The next session is on Wednesday 17 March at 6.00pm UK time (this week only), and continues fortnightly at 7.00pm. At the end of this Newsletter is a **full printout of the timetable** and with the dates, times in all parts of the world, topics and the panellists.

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## Dudu Fisher – Never on a Friday!

**ECA Director Alex Klein talks to Cantorial and Broadway Superstar Dudu Fisher**

First of the ECA series:

**‘The Voice of the Cantor’:**  
3 March 2021

### Early life

Dudu Fisher is the son of a Holocaust survivor from Poland. His mother has a great voice and still sings at 89. He is a man who counts the Pope and Presidents Obama and Clinton among those he’s met and entertained.

This modest and humble superstar of the Bimah and the Stage, opened the European Cantors Association’s ‘Voice of the Cantor’ series on Wednesday, 3 March 2021. This opening event was held in association with the Cantors Assembly of America. 600 people tuned in online to hear him being interviewed by his friend, respected UK impresario and director of the European Cantors Association, Alex Klein.



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Reminiscing about how it all started, Fisher (69) confided that after army service in the IDF, he had been planning to become a dentist. However, after singing at a friend's wedding he was approached, out of the blue, by a guest with an invitation to lead a synagogue service in Winnipeg for the High Holydays!

Although he had grown up in a profoundly orthodox and musical family, this has not crossed his mind. The offer of \$5000 however to this newly demobbed young man however, clinched the deal, and from that moment on, his path was set. Reflecting that "everything in life, happens – B'shert", he showed us how he had not sought positions – it was others who sought him out.

### ***Winnipeg, Johannesburg, Tel Aviv***

Dudu looked for a teacher to explain to him what was needed. He approached the renowned Cantor Shlomo Ravitz and with this superb tutoring and the experience in Winnipeg, on his return to Israel, he became the cantor at the Tel Aviv Great Synagogue in Allenby Street.

This happened because the previous incumbent had been fired for not saying a brachah before Hallel on Yom Ha'atzma'ut. This was 1973 when he was just 22 years old.

Dudu was then invited to Johannesburg as the Cantor of prestigious Berea Synagogue, succeeding the famous Chazan Shlomo Mandel. He learned so much about singing from his association with Mandel, including how to sing Yiddish songs. But three years later, after his contract ended, he did not want to stay in apartheid South Africa, and returned to Israel.

### ***What qualifications does a cantor need?***

Alex Klein asked him how he came to those jobs? What qualification did he need to show them for instance? Dudu threw up his hands. 'Shtus'. He said you could bring certificates of doctorates from ten Universities, but that cuts no ice. The implied that community wants to look at you, to hear how you sing and to notice if you are a mensch. He admitted that he had just one audition piece *Av Harachamim* and that was all he ever needed for all the cantorial jobs he ever had. It was how your voice sounded and how you behaved at the audition which got you the job.

In those days there were many synagogues in Tel Aviv, all with a Cantor. Dudu lamented the state of cantors in Israel today. In Tel Aviv he said, there was now not one synagogue with a cantor.

### ***What do congregations want today?***

Dudu's view is that unlike the immediate post-Holocaust era, when there were no other forms of entertainment, today's congregations don't have the patience to listen to a chazzan *oy-oying* on lengthy pieces.

What congregations need today, he said, was congregational singing. People love to sing along. Successful cantors today were those who can promote and lead this approach in their synagogues. Those who can introduce more popular melodies into the *Nusach* of the *Tefillah* – these people will



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succeed. Of course, agreed Dudu, some prayers – like *Kol Nidre* and *Hineni* – cannot and should not be changed.

This is also why Dudu felt Shlomo Carlebach's music is so popular – “the songs come from the Neshama”. Everyone can sing it, and this is the way cantors communicate in shul. People who come to shul now don't want to come to the concert hall: they want to daven from their souls. Congregational singing inspires that, he said.

Dudu argued that many people who come to shul – often once or twice a year - are not religious. They don't understand the words but can identify and be inspired by some music they know and love from their secular lives.

### ***What about nusach?***

Dudu said that, unfortunately, he feels Nusach is no longer relevant today. He is sad when he goes to synagogues and hears the Nusach for Yomtov on Shabbat: because someone has said “I know how to pray”...and because there is no-one who knows, or able to take control. “And yet they have no idea what to sing or how to sing – and we're losing it”.

Dudu did not see this could be stopped, as long as shuls don't have the money or patience to employ a cantor. “And the older people who do know the correct way don't have the koyach to argue with the boards of management”.

### ***How did you get from the bimah to the stage?***



“I love stage musicals and when I heard that an Israeli company was putting on *Les Mis* – I rushed to audition. I was so pleased to get the lead role of Jean Valjean and loved every minute of this.

It so happened that the producer of the show in London invited several Jean Valjeans from productions around the world to appear in a Royal Command performance at the Royal Albert Hall – and I was one of the chosen”.

After that Cameron Mackintosh, the promotor of the show in the UK, was so impressed that he asked Dudu to come and play the role on Broadway!

This created a real conflict in Dudu's mind. What an opportunity. But as a frum man, he was not able to perform on a Friday or Saturday. Cameron was not sure he could accommodate that. So, Dudu's mother suggested Dudu consult with the Lubavitcher Rebbe (a picture of whom was hanging behind him in the interview).

The Rebbe told him to be strong – not to be shy about being Jewish and explain the situation to Cameron – who agreed, against all odds, to give him a unique contract that allowed him not to perform on Shabbat or Jewish holidays. (He also confirmed that his weekend replacement had on his dressing room door ‘Dudu Fisher's Shabbes Goy.’) The same applied when he appeared in *Les Miserables* in London's West End. “I'm not some big Tzaddik, but for me the Shabbos was very important – the Shabbos kept us, more than we kept the Shabbos” he reminded us.



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### ***What advice did Dudu have for cantors today?***

Dudu said today it's very, very difficult - and a lot of hard work. And Covid had made it even more difficult. He said he had been working in care homes and gated communities for the elderly over the pandemic, reflecting that for older people trapped in their communities it was a mitzvah, and important to lift people's spirits during this difficult time.

Zoom shows were actually giving him great pleasure – still in a studio, but with a virtual worldwide audience.

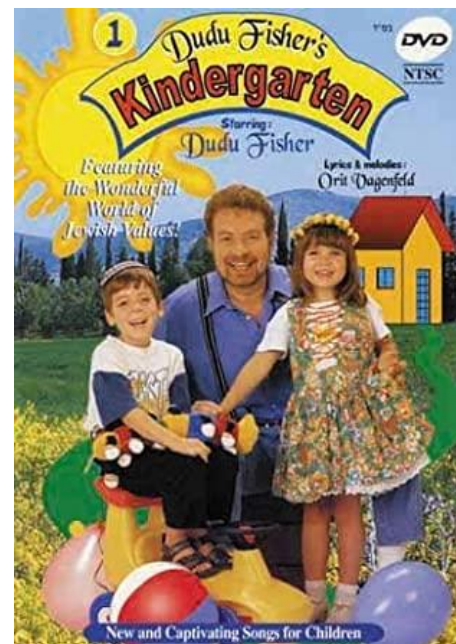
He also told us that with shuls closed during the pandemic he had davened the last High Holydays at home. This had given him more opportunity to actually look at the words. Citing from the high holyday Avinu Malkeinu liturgy אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ מִנְעַ מִגָּפָה מִנְחֵלְתֵךְ: *Our Father, our King, prevent a plague from your inheritance* - he had never considered what “plague” had meant before; now in Covid this took on new meaning and suddenly he was paying attention to words in a new way and davening for himself, not others.

### **Were there still things on his ‘bucket list’?**

Despite being on the precipice of septuagenarianism, Dudu said there were many things he still wanted to do, G-d willing.

He is writing a script for a film and also has a line of 19 children's DVDs, with new ones still in production, of Jewish culture for religious and non-religious children. Originally he thought this would be a joke but these “Dudu Fisher's kindergarten” videos (now streamable online) are helping educate children in a new way for those who might not otherwise have the opportunity of learning about Jewish life. It was as important as being on Broadway for him.

In closing, Dudu reflected on the *March of the Living* trips to Poland that he had supported in person for many years. To experience this was the responsibility of every Jew – to understand how difficult the Holocaust had been. And the name Dudu? It came from a ballad his grandmother used to sing to him; he kept it. “Even though it's not great in America, you'll remember the name even if you don't remember the singing”!



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*ECA is delighted to have had such a wonderful opening session, and to have shared it with 600 people via the platform of the Cantors Assembly in the USA.*



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## ECA presents: The Voice of the Cantor (VOC)

Full programme to print out and stick on your fridge

Leading cantors, and those they work closely with, from UK, Europe, Israel & N America tackle big issues of our times.  
**11.00am Pacific / 2.00pm Eastern USA / 7.00pm UK / 8.00pm Europe / 9.00pm Israel / South Africa** [Zoom Login at ECA](#)

[www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu) [Register at http://bit.ly/eca-voc](http://bit.ly/eca-voc)

Topic	Panellists include
<p><b>VOC 1: Wednesday 3 March, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>Never on a Friday</b>            As a curtain-raiser internationally renowned cantor and star of the musical theatre, Dudu Fisher, in conversation with ECA Director Alex Klein, exploring his amazing trajectory and balancing a career on bimah and stage.</p>	<p><b>Dudu Fisher</b>  <b>Moderator Alex Klein</b>            This event is held in conjunction with the Cantors Assembly.</p> 
<p><b>VOC 2: Wednesday 17 March, 6.00pm UK time</b>  <b>Crossing the Pond</b>            The nusach is the same and the music similar. So, what is different in working on either side of the Atlantic? Three long-serving cantors who have practised both in the UK and in North America discuss their experiences.</p>	<p><b>Cantor Benny Rogosnitzky</b>,  <i>Park East Synagogue, New York</i>  <b>Cantor Jason Green</b>  <i>Kehillat Beth Israel Congregation, Ottawa</i>  <b>Rabbi Cantor Gershon Silins</b>  <i>West London Synagogue, London</i>  <b>Moderator Russell Grossman</b>            Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 3: Wednesday 31 March, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>Passover In Pandemic</b>            Hear from a distinguished panel how they adapted in face of the unprecedented era of Covid-19.</p>	<p><b>Rabbi Meir Shindler</b>  <i>Richmond Synagogue, Surrey</i>  <b>Rabbi Cantor Natan Fagelman</b>  <i>Allerton Synagogue, Liverpool</i>  <b>Cantor /Minister Alby Chait</b>  <i>United Hebrew Congregation, Leeds</i>  <b>Moderator Hirsh Cashdan</b>            Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 4 Wednesday 14 April, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>The Challenge of Modern Orthodoxy</b>            Does the modern orthodox agenda leave room for a conventional cantor? Who should lead the service in the synagogue? Do we need a Rabbi, or must chazzanim become rabbis?</p>	<p><b>Michael Goldstein</b>  <i>President, United Synagogue UK</i>  <b>Cantor /Minister Alby Chait</b>  <i>United Hebrew Congregation, Leeds</i>  <b>Cantor Steven Leas</b>  <i>Central Synagogue, London</i>  <b>Rabbi Cantor Danny Bergson</b>  <i>St Annes Hebrew Congregation, St Annes</i>  <b>Cantor Adam Caplan</b>  <i>Prestwich Hebrew Congregation, Manchester</i>  <b>Moderator Hirsh Cashdan</b>            Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 5: Wednesday 28 April, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>The Carlebach Conundrum</b>            Has Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's music become the new tradition? What does his music bring to a synagogue service? There are those that embrace his music, and those who prefer other traditions – or to bring in tunes from elsewhere. Is there a happy medium? What is the answer?</p>	<p><b>Cantor Asher Hainowitz</b>  <i>Yeshurun Synagogue, Jerusalem</i>  <b>Rabbi Yossi Binstock</b>  <i>St John's Wood Synagogue, London</i>  <b>Rabbi Michael Wolk</b>  <i>Temple Israel, Charlotte NC</i>  <b>Cantor Yehudah Marx</b>  <i>Heaton Park Synagogue, Manchester</i>  <b>Alex Klein</b> Director ECA  <b>Moderator Russell Grossman</b>            Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>





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Topic	Panellists include
<p><b>VOC 6: Wednesday 12 May, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>The Sephardi Cantor: How similar and How different?</b></p> <p>What is the role of the Sephardi cantor, and how much can the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim perhaps learn from each other? Daniel Tunkel moderates a panel of cantors and prayer-leaders who have experience in both traditions.</p>	<p><b>Cantor Eliot Alderman</b>  <i>Freelance, Ashkenazi and Sephardi UK</i>  <b>Cantor Aaron Bensoussan</b>  <i>Toronto</i>  <b>and others</b></p> <p><b>Moderator Daniel Tunkel</b>  Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 7: Wednesday 26 May, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>Who needs Nusach?</b></p> <p>Is <i>nusach</i> the glue that holds our services together and places them in their time? Is this the immutable structure for the music of Jewish prayer? Or is it more changeable and less constant than we think?</p>	<p><b>Cantor Asher Hainovitz</b>  <i>Yeshurun Synagogue, Jerusalem</i>  <b>Rabbi Cantor Geoffrey Shisler</b>  <i>Teacher and Rabbi/Cantor (retired)</i>  <b>Charles Heller</b>  <i>Writer and retired choirmaster Toronto</i>  <b>Rabbi Benjy Rickman,</b>  <i>Holy Law Synagogue, Manchester</i></p> <p><b>Moderator Hirsh Cashdan</b>  Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 8: Wednesday 9 June, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>Who needs a Shul Choir?</b></p> <p>Is the choir still relevant today? Choir directors from around the world offer their views. What are the opportunities and challenges for choirs in the modern-day synagogue service? <b>And what do others think</b></p>	<p><b>Alan Freedman</b> <i>Hendon, London</i>  <b>Alexander Tsaliuk</b> <i>Moscow Jewish Male Choir</i>  <b>Ben Wolf</b> <i>Belsize Square Synagogue London</i>  <b>Ivor Joffe</b> <i>Marias Road synagogue Sea Point Cape Town</i></p> <p><b>Moderator Daniel Tunkel</b>  Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 9: Wednesday 23 June, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>New Cantors for a New Europe</b></p> <p>After the devastation of the Holocaust and the sterility of communism across so much of Europe, Jewish communities started to rebuild 30 years ago. What challenges have their cantors faced and how have they dealt with them – and what challenges remain? Our panel will include cantors from several “new” communities across Europe.</p>	<p><b>Cantor Shmuel Barzilai</b>  <i>Chief Cantor of Vienna</i>  <b>Cantor Nathan Goldman</b>  <i>Stuttgart Synagogue, Germany</i>  <b>Cantor Assaf Levitin</b>  <i>Liberal Jewish Community, Hannover</i>  <b>Cantor Daniel Rudas</b>  <i>Dohany Street Synagogue, Budapest</i>  <b>Cantor Brian Wood</b>  <i>Altneuschul, Prague</i></p> <p><b>Moderator Hirsh Cashdan</b>  Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>
<p><b>VOC 10: nb: Thursday 1 July, 7.00pm UK time</b>  <b>Kol Isha – The Voice of a Woman</b></p> <p>Progressive institutions in America and their counterparts in Europe and Israel have been training women to become cantors with outstanding results for some time. How are things changing in the UK? The panel share their experiences, challenges and highlights</p>	<p><b>Cantor Zoe Jacobs</b>  <i>Finchley Reform Synagogue, London</i>  <b>Cantor Tamara Wolfson</b>  <i>Alyth Synagogue</i>  <b>Cantor Jaclyn Chernett</b>  <i>European Academy for Jewish Liturgy</i>  <b>And others</b></p> <p><b>Moderator Russell Grossman</b>  Zoom Login at ECA <a href="http://www.cantors.eu">www.cantors.eu</a></p>



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### Newsletter #4 of the European Cantors Association

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, March 202-

**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 throughout the Jewish world 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.

For further and continuing information on the European Cantors Association, see

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/canntors.eu/>