PRAYER, PERFORMANCE, AND THE CREATION OF MEANINGFUL WORSHIP

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Contents

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Chapter 1

Framing Issues of Performance and Prayer

Contextualizing the Topic

The tension between performance and prayer is an issue that pervades the Reform Jewish cantorate today, but has also been encountered throughout the history of the prayer leader. This issue was particularly highlighted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the development of the American cantorate. The Golden Age of the Cantorate gave rise to star cantors who became household names and celebrities, known for their vocal acrobatics and impressive cantorial compositions, with vocal techniques not dissimilar from Western Classical vocal music and opera. However it was not always easy for cantors to serve a pulpit and simultaneously pursue a career on the opera stage. In this thesis, in order to understand issues of performance and prayer that exist in the contemporary cantorate, I will explore the lives of cantors, largely in the first half of the twentieth century, who, in addition to their pulpit, sought or were offered careers on the stage, and how those two aspects of their lives intersected.

The area of historical and biographical study of this thesis will largely be centered around Yossele Rosenblatt (1882-1933), who will serve as a model of the cantor that sang in a classical vocal style, generally consistent with his secular, operatic contemporaries and predecessors, namely Enrico Caruso, yet whose techniques remained primarily within the context of the synagogue. Rosenblatt had access to recordings of his secular contemporaries and predecessors, who may have served as an influence on his vocal style

and technique. Analysis of Rosenblatt's own recordings will provide a better understanding of the classical vocal techniques he employed in his sacred music, and how these sounds associated with secular, operatic performances, were used in the service of the Jewish liturgy and text. Additionally, a study of his career on the concert stage will reveal how the genre of liturgical concert music has colored contemporary opinions of cantorial music in worship.

While Rosenblatt turned down a career in opera due to its incompatibility with his religious practices, other later cantors were successful in performing the music of both the synagogue and the opera stage, namely Richard Tucker (1913-1975) and Jan Peerce (1904-1984). Tucker spent a good deal of his career as the cantor of a synagogue, but later found success at the Metropolitan Opera, all the while maintaining his Jewish identity. Peerce, on the other hand, Tucker's brother-in-law, spent his career mainly on the opera stage, but served as a cantor on the high holidays, and also made recordings of Jewish music. Additionally, it is important to note that both of these figures, the children of immigrants, changed their names, from Reuven Ticker and Yaakov Perelmuth to American names that they deemed more suitable for the stage and secular world. The varying trajectories of Rosenblatt's, Tucker's, and Peerce's careers will provide insight into the different balances they each struck, or did not, between sacred and secular musical realms, and where or if they intersected. This intersection of classical and cantorial singing and careers in the twentieth century provides insight into contemporary perceptions of these genres in worship today.

Review of Relevant Literature

The main sources on this topic each provide a unique lens with which to explore issues of, and the relationship between, performance and prayer within the context of cantorial music and synagogue worship. These sources include biographical and autobiographical accounts and perspectives, historical overviews and context, and various theoretical and critical examinations of the subject matter, from anecdotes from cantors and opera singers, the history of *chazzanut*, to the study of performance theory. These sources can be seen as focusing on three central themes: discourses on the ideal cantorial identity, the relationship between cantorial and Western musical styles, and the lines between ritual and performance. I have found, during the course of this literature review, that several of the sources fit into more than one of these categories. This proves to me, however, that there is an innate connection between cantorial and Western music, and between prayer and performance, but that these connections have not been explicitly or comprehensively studied, to my knowledge, as I plan to do in my thesis. This literature review, then, will examine the unrelated and independent ways in which these topics have been illuminated in writing, and have aided me in further understanding the missing links I attempt to connect in my own research.

Discourses on the Ideal Cantorial Identity

All but one of the sources surveyed here deals with the perceptions of the role of the cantor on some level, as viewed by society, as well as the standards to which a cantor holds himself. The biographies and memoirs of Rosenblatt, Tucker, and Peerce, which I

will explore in more depth in the following chapter, illustrate the tensions and challenges that existed for these three men, of being both a cantor and a stage performer.

Other sources in the bibliography also make mention of this struggle for cantors to live in, or go back and forth between, the world of the cantorate and the world of performance, and that it was largely frowned upon by society and by Jewish institutions. In the opening paragraph of Irene Heskes' "The Golden Age of Cantorial Artistry," she writes, "cantorial tradition has always noted the manner in which the leader of prayer has lived his life and observed his duties to family, mankind, and God." Heskes bookends this quote with another in the concluding paragraph: "there were certain qualifications which the great rabbinical sages...considered as necessary for a truly devoted leader of prayer: good personal character and devout belief; proper knowledge of the liturgy and its melodic components; and, an acceptable voice."[1] Both these quotes leave room for the assumption that the cantor who strays from these ideals, perhaps to pursue a career on the stage, is undeserving of his title as a spiritual leader of the community. However, as I will discuss later on in this review, the ways in which Heskes writes about the stylistic traits of cantorial singing and composition, and the language she uses to describe it, show much more of a tie between cantorial music and Western classical vocal music than the aforementioned description of the cantor leads one to believe.

In chapter one of Jeffrey Shandlers' *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America,* "Cantors on Trial," Shandler addresses the effects recording technology had on cantors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

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[1] Irene Heskes, "Introduction," In *The Golden Age of Cantors* (Tara Publications, 1991), 11.

specifically the tension between a pull toward popular culture and the need to remain a pious, religious figure. Shandler writes, “in the modern era, cantors became the subject of an extended public discourse in which Jews negotiate their ideals of devotion to God in relation to the realities of daily life and the demands of the Jewish public sphere.” He expands on the idea of cantors grappling with the modern world, and how “new forums for live performances [transformed] the cantor’s public profile from communal messenger to star.”[2] Even though the chapter largely focuses on the transformation of cantorial music due to the advent of recording technology, and thus the transformation of ritual into performance, Shandler frames the chapter within the context of the ideal cantor, highlighting the effect technology had on the cantor as a community leader in the spotlight.

Mark Slobin also describes in Chapter 3 of *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate*, the allure of secular fame that many cantors either succumbed to or resisted. He describes the pull toward classical singing and opera that Cantor Lawrence Avery had, although he remained solely in the cantorate, and goes on to write that “some kids who started in the synagogue did become opera stars, most notably Richard Tucker and Jan Peerce...but we are more interested in those who stayed within the community.”[3] The latter, and highly loaded phrase alone describes the thin line that were a cantor to cross, he would be straying from the standards of the role, and no longer considered “within the community.” This short sentence from a scholarly source that is simply

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[2] Jeffrey Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (NYU Press, 2009), 14.

[3] Mark Slobin, "1880s-1940s: First- and Second-Generation Eastern Europeans." In *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate,* (University of Illinois Press, 2002), 72.

setting out to paint a historical picture, without critique, shows just how deeply embedded the idea of cantor as symbolic exemplar is within Judaism.

The Relationship Between Cantorial Music and Western Classical Vocal Music

While nearly all of the surveyed sources include a discourse regarding the ideal cantor, only two highlight the overlap of cantorial musical style and classical vocal styles, albeit in an indirect manner. Shandler briefly mentions two examples of this relationship between vocal styles. The first is an example of the "growing interest in artistic standards as defined by Western art music," within the context of cantorial singing. He cites Bernard Kwartin's call for the importance of classical vocal technique for the modern cantor, that proper vocal training is paramount, and that it would help to "create higher standards in the cantorial profession and accordingly to raise the prestige of the cantor as *the* leader of the musical activities of the community."[4] While we previously saw many examples of the cantorial world versus the opera world, the quote from Kwartin that Shandler provides illustrates that there was, perhaps, room for overlap, but specifically within the context of worship, as opposed to performance on the concert stage. Another example within this chapter of the confluence of vocal styles appears in Shandler's description of Richard Tucker's singing and career, identifying Tucker's vocal role model as the great Italian tenor, Enrico Caruso, as well as stating that "Tucker's public persona as an American and as a Jew was complicated by regular mention of his Italianate sound and sensibility."[5]

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[4] Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape*, 25.
[5] Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape*, 46.

In the various descriptions of cantorial music that Heskes includes in her overview of the Golden Age, other than one or two mentions of modes, motifs, or chant, it is difficult to distinguish the language she uses to describe cantorial music as being any different from the ways in which classical vocal music would be described. She describes the style of singing as involving "lyric facility, improvisational flow... textual focus...clarity of emphasis," and the use of "leitmotifs." She details how cantors would include "operatic snatches...into their cantorial renditions," and claims many cantors "were famous for their flexible vocalisms, their skillful interpretations and sweet falsettos, and their elaborate flights of melodic coloratura." Finally, Heskes describes cantorial "recitatives," which she claims were a "virtuoso craft which required a particular technique of production...vocal flexibility, and a wide range of color in the upper register of the voice." She even describes the Golden Age cantorial style as "a genre of operatic-like grand performance."[6] All this to say that were it not for the clarification she provides of the elements that tip this style into the cantorial realm, the reader would not be able to distinguish whether she was describing the art of the *chazzan* or the art of a skilled opera singer. These descriptions beg the question, then, as to whether cantorial music is simply most effectively written about using the academic language of Western music, or whether there truly is a great deal of overlap between the two styles.

[6] Heskes, "Introduction," 5-11.

Lines Between Ritual and Performance

Three of the sources I have already mentioned delve into this final category within the context of cantorial music specifically, but the source I have yet to mention, Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory*, provides a look into the issues of ritual versus performance through a wider lens. Several excerpts from the book are particularly useful in framing the topic of my research. Schechner's research serves to blur the lines we often draw between ritual and performance, arguing that there are elements of both in either category; that there is entertainment or theater involved in ritual, and that performative moments can be transformed into ritual. He does argue, however, that "whether one calls a specific performance 'ritual' or 'theater' depends mostly on context and function [and on] where it is performed, by whom, and under what circumstances."[7] He is able to draw certain distinctions between the two, yet argues that the lines are more blurred in most cases. Schechner also explores how the idea of an audience affects which box we fit a "performance" into, in terms of their participation in the event, whether they've chosen to be there or are required in some sense, whether they've paid to be there, or not.

The ideas in Schechner's writing appear in more specific ways within several other sources in this bibliography. Jeffrey Shandler, for example, examines the implications of recording technology on cantorial music, and the fact that it blurred the lines between ritual and performance. Shandler lays out several key themes in the introductory section of the chapter:

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[7] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory,* (Routledge, 2003), 130.

> How the notion of Jews as an audience, defined by their engagement with new media engenders new understandings of this community; the importance of celebrity as a new cultural force in religious life; how new consumer practices inform discussions of religiosity…how new media challenge traditional notions of religious authority and literacy; [and] the impact of new media on the relationship of theology to religious behavior.[8]

Later in the chapter Shandler argues that "a sound recording does not simply replicate live cantorial performances; it, too, transforms them," in that the individual piece of c*hazzanut* is then isolated from its original context within a larger synagogue service, and thus, "it is separated from its original sacred intent." Today, the trend of congregations livestreaming their worship services means that this argument is no longer only applicable to sound recordings, and this new medium provides insight into how Shandler's claims play out in a contemporary context.

Mark Slobin discusses the issue of ritual transforming into something else by exploring what he calls "the commercialization of the cantorate." He goes into detail about "star cantors," and issues of advertisement and public performances. Included are anecdotes about Cantor Gershon Sirota's appearance at Carnegie Hall, but also the first performance of his subsequent "tour" which included a "Sabbath service, though still on a stage decked out with an Ark."[9] Similarly, Heskes brings up the fact that for some of these religious services, not only were there advertisements, but that synagogues began charging for entry. Like Slobin, Heskes also mentions the use of theaters or performance spaces for services, and conversely, the use of liturgical and cantorial selections in benefit concerts on the stage. Religious services taking place in concert halls, and advertisements

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[8] Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape*, 12.
[9] Slobin, *Chosen Voices*, 59.

touting cantors who would be singing in upcoming High Holiday services to pique the interest of the community and increase attendance, as well as liturgical works being performed on the concert stage, create confusion as to where the lines of ritual and performance lie.

Conclusions of The Literature Review

All of the literature that I examined in the review explores different areas of performance and prayer both in a general context and specifically in terms of cantorial trends during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are common threads throughout—the lines are blurred between performance and prayer regardless of the old ideals and standards of the cantor and where his career and religiosity should intersect. What is not found in this literature, and what I seek to make clear with my research is where all of this fits within the contemporary cantorate. What is clear from these sources is that there was a time in which ornate, quasi-operatic vocal stylings lived within the synagogue walls, even though it was not deemed acceptable for a cantor to perform in an actual opera on the stage. Today, however, while revered and held up as our tradition, these cantorial works are seldom heard in Reform worship services, and are quite frequently described as “performative.” Similarly, many of these sources highlight the narrative of the ideal cantor, with the example of Rosenblatt at the forefront, however this image, at least in the Reform context, is no longer relevant to the cantorate today.

It seems to me then, that the missing piece between this literature and the present context is: can these “performance pieces” fit within the context of modern worship? Also absent is the narrative of the contemporary Reform cantor and how these traditions

and ideals fit into how the role has evolved in a modern context, both in terms of the character and piety of the cantor and in terms of liturgical repertoire. My research explores what the classical or traditional style of cantorial music could bring to the contemporary worship service and where tradition could mesh with the popular styles of today. Where certain lines of performance and prayer used to be indistinct when it came to the use of this repertoire, as shown in these sources, new lines have since been drawn, designating certain styles and genres as "performative," and classifying folk or participatory music as prayerful. Through my research, I seek to understand why and how, if possible, the lines can be blurred and how tradition can become familiar and prayerful instead of a relic to be viewed behind glass.

Guide to the Thesis

I have researched this thesis topic by means of various methods, such as historical and biographical research, analysis of recordings and video, as well as conducting interviews. In order to elaborate on the contemporary understanding of performance and prayer in worship, it is necessary to briefly delve into the world of Western classical vocal music and synagogue music, especially within the context of the Enlightenment and acculturation, which I will do in Chapter Two. With many French Jewish composers of the nineteenth century writing for both the synagogue and the opera stage, Jacques Fromental Halevy for example, there is a clear overlap of styles between the two. The music of the opera house pervaded the French synagogues, and in Berlin and Vienna, the music of Louis Lewandowski and Salomon Sulzer was clearly influenced by their

secular, classical contemporaries and predecessors. This development in synagogue music is important when considering the cantorial tradition that emerged thereafter, making its way to America at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two will also explore the lives of Rosenblatt, Tucker, and Peerce, through the study of their biographies and memoirs, as well as other primary source material. With these materials I have put together a picture of their careers, gaining an understanding of what balance they each had between performance and prayer leading, and how, or if, the two intersected within their careers. Analysis of vocal recordings from Rosenblatt and Peerce reveal connections and differences between cantorial and classical vocal styles, and analysis of a video clip of Tucker explores the transformation of ritual to performance through means of technology.

In Chapter Three I will elaborate on the phenomenon of liturgical concert music in order to explore how this genre, in which Rosenblatt, Peerce, and Tucker took part, affects notions of performance and prayer in a contemporary context. I also identify elements of performance present in the contemporary worship service through attendance at synagogues services, analysis of live streamed services and through interviews with cantors in the field who are classically trained or come from an opera background, and can speak to these issues from their own experience. These interviews have revealed these cantors' own feelings toward and tensions between performance and prayer in their careers in the cantorate, or on the stage, in regard to issues such as aesthetics, classical vocal style, and authenticity.

Lastly, Chapter Four looks to the future of this topic within Reform worship, considering ways in which the cantor can incorporate music often viewed as "performative" into worship, as well as opportunities to create new music that appeals to both the classically trained cantor and the participatory congregation, and how these efforts can contribute to the continued relevance of the cantorate.

Contribution to The Field

The biographies of Rosenblatt, Peerce, and Tucker, which I have explored within this thesis, raise questions that still arise within the cantorial world today. For example, what are the boundaries of religious music and secular music styles? Is there overlap? Is there a difference between performance and prayer; does one outweigh the other in certain musical contexts, or can there be a merging of the two? Why have we designated certain vocal or compositional styles that were once the norm as "performance pieces," meaning that we hardly ever experience them within the context of the synagogue service? Is it possible to bring these types of cantorial works into the synagogue mainstream, or have they already become museum pieces, with preconceptions of "performance" attached to them? The texts of these pieces are our liturgy, sacred texts—texts meant to be prayed. Can the modern cantor effectively pray these so-called "performance" pieces within the synagogue service today?

My research is particularly relevant to cantors in the field today as well as those who are preparing to be ordained. We learn so much of the history of the cantorate and Jewish music as well as impressive vocal compositions at Hebrew Union College -

Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), but often struggle to find ways to incorporate them into the modern worship service. This thesis is intended to inspire cantors to consider reviving certain repertory in worship services that has been designated to recitals and concerts. It should encourage cantors to educate their congregants and rabbinic partners about why this repertory and history is important, and how it can enhance synagogue worship today.

As a classically trained singer with a love of opera and classical music, this research is particularly important to me as I consider how to stay true to myself as a singer and musician, yet still effectively serve my congregation's needs and musical tastes. This research has given me a platform to further explore an idea I have thought much about during my studies in the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music (DFSSM): where do performance and prayer intersect? Through this project, I have been able to refine my personal ideas about this query, but also consider its relevance to the modern cantorate and synagogue. The following research is intended to provoke thought among current cantors and future cantors on the topic of performance and prayer, and to inspire them to consider their own relationship to the topic within their cantorate. While cantors involving themselves in simultaneous careers in opera or as performers on the stage has become less prevalent now, there are still many for whom classical singing is a great passion, and a love of performing has become synthesized and transformed into the context of sacred duty in worship on the contemporary *bimah.* I hope that through this research, classically trained cantors, present and future, will be inspired to shape the

future of Reform worship and music in ways that can rely on their musical abilities to create meaningful prayer instead of minimizing them.

Chapter 2

Twentieth Century Cantors Caught Between Two Musical Realms

Historical Context

In order to properly understand the lives and careers of Rosenblatt, Tucker, and Peerce, it is important to contextualize them within the history of the use of Western musical styles in the synagogue. Only with this context in mind can one examine these three early- to mid-twentieth century cantors, as well as the contemporary cantorate. When considering the following information, it is important to note that, in many cases, Jewish composers or cantors had limited access to the secular music world, and that over time, emancipation and acculturation contributed to a wider availability of musical resources.

The earliest example we tend to encounter, although there certainly may have been earlier Jewish liturgical composers influenced by Western musical styles, is Salamone Rossi, the Italian court composer of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries known in the Jewish music world for his liturgical choral works composed in the polyphonic style and harmonic structures of the secular and church music of his contemporaries. In the forward to a publication of Rossi's *HaShirim Asher LiSh'lomo,* Hugo Weisgall describes Rossi's liturgical composition as a "unique effort to introduce Western musical practices into the Synagogue," and asserts that "a composition such as Rossi's setting of Psalm 137 can be placed beside the most passionate utterances of a Monteverdi [and] demonstrates both the charm and the intellectual subtleties of the best

of Lassus," two of Rossi's compositional contemporaries.[10] Rossi was a successful composer of secular music in the Mantuan courts and brought the compositional techniques and styles he learned and mastered to the synagogue music he composed.

According to Abraham Zevi Idelsohn in *Song and Singers of the Synagogue in the Eighteenth Century*, the music and ideas of the Italian Renaissance spread north to the Jewish ghettos of sixteenth-century Germany, and "Italian music came to be the synonym for music in general," inspiring the *chazanim* to devote themselves entirely to the study of music, and to abandon their other duties. In the 17th and 18th centuries *chazanim* were known to "transfer tunes from the secular to the sacred," and would often borrow "tunes from the theater or the dance hall and use them for the service."[11] There were also instances of *chazanim* borrowing melodies from the Catholic church for use in the Jewish synagogue service, even though there is a strict prohibition set on this in the *Shulchan Aruch*.[12] Throughout the eighteenth century, "Jewish singers adopted [a] rococo style [and] developed the rhythmical, metrical, melodic form, utilizing the minuette, andante, allegretto, aria, rondo, polonaise, preludio, adagio, Siciliano, and Waldhorn" all styles in keeping with the secular, classical composition at the time.[13] Idelsohn expresses his views on the matter.

> The *chazanim* of the eighteenth century, with the exception of Israel Lovy, did not make any effort to reform the [traditional cantorial] recitative. Their only innovation was the introduction of measured melodies—tunes in the classic style

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[10] Hugo Weisgall, "Preface." In *HaShirim Asher LiSh'lomo* (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1967), v-vi.

[11] Abraham Zevi Idelsohn "Song and Singers of the Synagogue in the Eighteenth Century," *Hebrew Union College Jubilee*, Vol. 1875-1925, 400-401.

[12] Gersion Appel "The Sheliah Tzibbur in Halakhah and Jewish Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*, vol. III, no. 1 (1979-1980): 2.

[13] Idelsohn, "Songs and Singers," 404-405.

> of the eighteenth century, thus paving the path for the Synagogue composers of the nineteenth century, in their Europeanization of the Synagogue song.[14]

One such nineteenth century composer well-known for his synagogue works, many of which are in keeping with the contemporary Western styles, is Louis Lewandowski, who served as music director of synagogues in Berlin. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "Lewandowski's style amalgamated the traditional liturgical melodies...with modern harmonies, often [using] instrumental accompaniment, [and with] choruses [that] reflected the influence of Felix Mendelssohn and other contemporary composers."[15] Magnus Davidsohn, a cantor and opera singer of the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, claimed that Lewandowski "could have utilized his music for any kind of opera air…[it] grips the devout listener as the melody [was] appropriate to that period."[16]

At the same time in France, Samuel Naumbourg composed liturgical pieces for use in the Synagogue on Rue Notre Dame de Nazareth in Paris. Rather than the German and Austrian masters who provided inspiration for Lewandowski, Naumbourg drew on the French tradition; he was clearly influenced in his compositional techniques by French Jewish opera composers Jacques Fromental HaLevy and Giacomo Meyerbeer, with whom he associated. Naumbourg's oeuvre contains pieces which imitated "the choral marches of the Grand Opera…[with] vocal fanfare and drum rhythms," as well as French folk-style melodies. In *Samuel Naumbourg: The Cantor of French Jewish Emancipation,* Cantor Eliyahu Schleifer attests to Naumbourg's success in updating traditional elements

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[14] Idelsohn, "Songs and Singers," 408.

[15] *Encyclopedia Brittanica Online,* "Louis Lewandowski," https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-Lewandowski.

[16] Jascha Nemstov, *Louis Lewandowski: Love Makes the Melody Immortal* (Hentrich & Hentrich, 2011), 37.

of Hebrew chant, asserting that Naumbourg's "music was well suited to the new times and was melodious and appealing...therefore it was wholeheartedly embraced by the Jewish communities in France and its colonies, as well as in German-speaking countries and even in Eastern Europe."[17]

Lewandowski's and Naumbourg's contemporary, Salomon Sulzer, of Vienna, was also greatly influenced by Western classical composition, but also strove to incorporate the traditional Jewish modes. Eduard Hanslick, a nineteenth century music critic, described works in Sulzer's *Schir Tzion I* as "German [in] music style, partly Haydn-Mozartian, partly more modern," while contemporary musicologist Tina Frühauf asserts that Sulzer "broke with the past [by] harmoniz[ing] [traditional] melodies largely according to the Western rules of tonality...thus compromising the modality of traditional *chazzanut*."[18] Sulzer was also immersed in the Viennese world of secular music at the time, through his relationships with composers such as Schubert and Liszt, his own secular compositions, and the throngs of non-Jewish musicians and critics who came to the synagogue just to hear him sing. It was recorded that Sulzer, along with Liszt, gave a concert for Emperor Ferdinand I, and Sulzer is purported to be Schubert's "favorite interpreter of his lied, 'Die Allmacht." However, as a result of Sulzer's public involvement in secular music, "the Jewish community of Vienna began to express its

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[17] Eliyahu Schleifer, *Samuel Naumbourg: The Cantor of French Jewish Emancipation* (Hentrich & Hentrich, 2012), 23, 53.

[18] Tina Frühauf, *Salomon Sulzer: Reformer, Cantor, Icon,* (Hentrich & Hentrich, 2012), 33, 35.

displeasure with such activities and officially prohibited them, both in public and in private circles."[19]

Sulzer was not the only *chazzan* and composer around the 18th and 19th centuries who straddled the line as a performer of secular music and as a prayer leader in the synagogue. Abraham Zevi Idelsohn describes Meyer Leon, who, in the mid-eighteenth century, rose to prominence as "singer" at Duke's Place Great Synagogue in London, where his "sweet voice and wonderful singing attract[ed] a great attendance of even gentiles."[20] Idelsohn cites James Picciotto, from his 1875 publication, *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History,* who comments on Leon's skill, writing that "Meyer Leon the humble chorister rose to be Leoni the opera singer...but he preserved strictly his religion, declining to appear on the stage on Friday nights and Festivals." Idelsohn goes on to describe Leon's career, with the help of Picciotto's accounts, stating that because of his habit of appearing on the secular concert stage, "the Board of the Synagogue did not hesitate...to reduce [Leon's] salary...hence he left the Synagogue and became a stage singer." Leon reportedly failed to make a career in the opera, and returned to the synagogue to compose music for worship.[21]

Idelsohn provides another example of the *chazzan* immersed in the secular music world in Israel Lowy, who, like Sulzer and Leon, was renowned beyond the walls of the synagogue. His early training included the study of "piano, violin, and violin-cello, as well as the classic music of Mozart and Haydn…[and] he soon became a singer,

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[19] Frühauf, *Salomon Sulzer,* 53-54.
[20] Idelsohn, "Songs and Singers," 415.
[21] Idelsohn, "Songs and Singers," 415.

especially of [their] compositions." Lowy was invited to sing the tenor part in Haydn's *Creation* by the Duke of Bavaria, and even "received special permission...to give public concerts in Nurnberg, a place where Jews were not allowed to stay overnight." Once settled in Paris, Lowy continued to give concerts of secular repertoire, and was frequently invited to make stage appearances. In regard to Lowy considering these performance opportunities, Idelsohn writes, "we do not know what it was; but something held him back from that step."[22] Whether it was a prohibition on performing outside of the synagogue, like Sulzer and Leon were subjected to, or if it was because of Lowy's own piety and dedication to his life as a *chazzan*, this trend of cantors treading the thin line between the secular and sacred musical realms did not taper off at the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, it was likely Yossele Rosenblatt who solidified this standard for cantors of the twentieth century, by famously turning down an offer to sing in the opera for $1,000 a night, in favor of his responsibilities to his congregation. As will be discussed in more depth later on in this chapter, Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker managed to straddle both worlds, departing from the traditional standards for the cantor that were continued by Rosenblatt in the twentieth century.

Yossele Rosenblatt

The tension between Rosenblatt's identity as a devout cantor and the opportunities for stardom through stage performance is explored in Samuel Rosenblatt's *Yossele Rosenblatt: The Story of His Life as Told by His Son*. Born in Ukraine, Rosenblatt

[22] Idelsohn, "Songs and Singers," 420-421.

accrued much fame in Eastern Europe, travelling as a *chazzan*, and subsequently taking positions in Pressburg, Hungary; and Hamburg, Germany, before moving to the United States in 1911.[23] Rosenblatt's fame and success continued throughout his American career, and he was extremely popular among both Jews and gentiles alike.

Many of the sources included in my research recount the story of Rosenblatt turning down the director of the Chicago Opera Association, Cleofonte Campanini, on his offer for Rosenblatt to appear on the opera stage in the title role of *La Juive* for $1,000 per performance, even with promises from Campanini that Rosenblatt would be able to keep his beard, would not perform on Shabbat, and he would even sing opposite a leading, Jewish soprano. This anecdote is frequently used in order to highlight Rosenblatt's piety, to raise him up as a cantor who would turn down wealth because of his religious convictions, setting him on a pedestal as *the* model cantor of the time. Rosenblatt's biography provides the content of a letter written to Campanini from Morris Newman, the president of the congregation where Rosenblatt was serving as cantor, in response to a letter from Campanini appealing to Newman to agree to let Rosenblatt sing in the opera. Newman declined the offer as well; he wrote, "our board agrees with you that there is no objection to this opera from a Jewish standpoint, but we feel that the Rev. Mr. Rosenblatt's sacred position in the synagogue does not permit him to enter the operatic stage."[24] This statement reveals the tension between a profession within the two musical worlds from an institutional standpoint. The Jewish community could take pride

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[23] Samuel Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt: The Story of His Life as Told by His Son*, (Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1954), 65-78.

[24] Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt*, 145.

in their star *chazanim* but within the realm of the synagogue only, not the opera stage. Samuel Rosenblatt includes an excerpt from the American Jewish Chronicle in response to his father turning down the offer from Campanini:

> Though Cantor Rosenblatt is by no means a rich man, he refused the offer of a thousand dollars a week made to him by the manager of the Chicago Opera Company, because he thought that his sacred duties as a cantor are incompatible with those of an opera singer. By refusing to accept this generous offer, Mr. Rosenblatt has not only taken an attitude which is much credit to himself, but he has also conformed with the pride of the synagogue. Cantor Rosenblatt has proven once more that one is not a cantor just because one could not become an opera singer and that there are still singers in Israel who, devoted to their religious duties, appreciate their sacred position more than wealth and worldly fame. Cantor Rosenblatt has upheld the honor of the American synagogue and what he has done is really *Kiddush ha'shem* [sanctifying God's name]. Needless to say, he has done a great service to his own colleagues by strengthening their position.[25]

This ringing endorsement of Rosenblatt from the journal solidifies Rosenblatt's place as the model cantor of the time, raising his piety and sacred duty above all else, and holding him up as a standard for other cantors who were perhaps considering a career in opera.

Samuel Rosenblatt goes on to highlight the opportunities his father did take, or make for himself, outside the realm of the synagogue. While he turned down the offer to appear in an opera company, he did find it acceptable to sing classical works, along with his own *chazzanut,* on the concert stage, thus striking a balance between his love of the art and his own personal and religious convictions. The letter from Newman to Campanini even states that the synagogue board had "no objections to [Rosenblatt] singing at concerts, whether sacred or otherwise."[26] Samuel Rosenblatt argues that the reason his father declined to sing in *La Juive* was due to the discomfort of not appearing

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[25] Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt,* 147.
[26] Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt,* 145.

on stage as himself. Singing in the context of a concert, therefore, was a way to present the music authentically and personally, as he might on the pulpit. Samuel Rosenblatt writes of his father that, "on the concert stage he could appear as he was, without costume or make-up, without the necessity of gesticulating or play-acting...he could be what he was and sing what he pleased, all of which would have been impossible in the opera."[27] The liturgical music performed on the stage differed, however, from the sacred music heard within the synagogue. I will explore Rosenblatt's performance career and the phenomenon of liturgical concert music in more depth in the following chapter.

Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker

While Rosenblatt was exalted during his time for being the pious cantor who turned down an opera career in favor of serving his congregation, Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker, just a couple of decades later would break that mold, and are now frequently held up within the Jewish community as sources of pride due to their fame and success in opera. The article from the American Jewish Chronicle may not have been accepting of the cantor crossing over into the opera world, but excerpts from Alan Levy's *The Bluebird of Happiness: The Memoirs of Jan Peerce*, and James A. Drake's *Richard Tucker: A Biography*, provide us with a different look at the career of the cantor who is also suited to the opera stage.

Both written accounts of these two men's lives are peppered with anecdotes concerning both their Jewish identity and cantorial work, as well as their careers as

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[27] Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt,* 153.

revered opera performers. While both Peerce and Tucker spent the large amount of their careers performing on the stage, their ongoing connection to their Judaism, and the influence of being brought up in the synagogue, and subsequently, their careers within the cantorate, is evident within these sources. Peerce notes that "in Judaism, the possession of a sweet voice is regarded as a 'heavenly gift' that belongs in the synagogue," however these sources show that both Peerce and Tucker strayed beyond the walls of the house of worship to hallowed performance venues such as Lincoln Center.[28] We find examples, though, in each of their stories, of displays of their piety, all the while deeply ingrained in the opera world—Peerce refusing to perform during the High Holidays, and Tucker turning down a recording opportunity with La Scala Opera under the direction of Herbert Von Karajan because of Karajan's ties to Nazi Germany. These two narratives contrast with that of Rosenblatt's, showing that for some, there is indeed room to straddle both worlds. However, the need for Tucker and Peerce to highlight their Jewishness shows that perhaps the standards to which society held cantors, based on Rosenblatt's previous example, was very present in their minds.

The New York Times obituaries for both Peerce and Tucker provide insight into how they were viewed by the public and which aspects of their lives were at the forefront of their legacies at their time of death. These obituaries highlight both Peerce and Tucker's Jewish roots, noting that they were born Jacob Perlmuth and Reuven Ticker, and both the children of Jewish immigrants. The bulk of each of these obituaries is centered around their careers on the opera stage, and is even highlighted in the headlines of

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[28] Alan Levy, *The Bluebird of Happiness: The Memoirs of Jan Peerce,* (Harper Collins, 1976), 37.

both—*Richard Tucker the Met Tenor, is Dead* and *Jan Peerce dies at Age of 80; Tenor Sang at Met 27 Years.* They include remarks of remembrance from prominent figures in the opera world such as Robert Merrill, Roberta Peters, James Levine, Marilyn Horne, and Luciano Pavarotti—it is clear that both Peerce and Tucker were beloved within the realm of classical vocal music.

However, the obituaries do mention both singers' involvement in religious life, noting that Peerce "sang as a cantor during the Jewish High Holidays,"[29] and "at [Tucker's] death, he was still an ordained cantor who sang during High Holy Day and Seder services."[30] Tucker's obituary very briefly describes his 1963 tour of Israel, during which he gave concerts and officiated Shabbat services at the Great Synagogue of Tel Aviv. The fact that the writers of the obituaries felt it was necessary to include these details about Peerce and Tucker's careers in the cantorate and Jewish life, shows us how important it was for them to continue that aspect of their lives while fully immersed in a secular music world. It is interesting, however, to note a stark difference in the details given at the end of each obituary about the funeral arrangements—Peerce's funeral services were held at Riverside Chapel, a Jewish funeral home, while Tucker's obituary states that "a funeral service for Mr. Tucker will be held tomorrow at 10 A.M. on the Metropolitan Opera stage."[31] This contrast particularly highlights the tension that must

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[29] Harold C. Schonberg, "Jan Peerce Dies at Age of 80; Tenor Sang at Met 27 Years," *New York Times*, December 17, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/17/obituaries/jan-peerce-dies-at-age-of-80-tenor-sang-at-met-27-years.html?pagewanted=all.

[30] Donal Henahan, "Richard Tucker the Met Tenor, Is Dead," *New York Times*, January 9, 1975, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/01/09/archives/richard-tucker-the-met-tenor-is-dead-richard-tucker-met-opera-tenor.html.

[31] Henahan, "Richard Tucker."

have existed for these two men between religious life and operatic fame, as well as the effects being in the secular public eye had on them and their families.

Comparison of Classical and Cantorial Vocal Techniques

While Western classical vocal music and cantorial music fall into different genres, there are many ways in which the vocal techniques overlap in both. Rosenblatt's voice was frequently compared to that of *bel canto* opera singer Enrico Caruso, and indeed, many cantors tried to emulate his Italianate sound. However there is variation in vocal expression due to specific techniques reserved for cantorial singing, whether it is the "sob" sound of the voice, or the particular interpretation of specific cantorial modes, intervals, and motifs.

In order to show these similarities and differences between classical and cantorial vocal techniques and affectations, below, I offer an analysis of two examples of musical renderings of the *Kol Nidre* text, one by Yossele Rosenblatt,[32] and the other as sung by Jan Peerce.[33] The *Kol Nidre* text is perhaps the best known, and most anticipated part of the High Holiday liturgy for the Jewish community. Though the subject of the text itself is quite dry (it is a legal text in which the reciter nullifies his/her vows) the congregation expects to hear an impressive and moving musical rendition of it every Yom Kippur. There are similarities in both Rosenblatt and Peerce's interpretations of the musical

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[32] Edmund StAustell. "Jan Peerce Sings the Kol Nidre." YouTube Video, 5:05, September 26, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpBXGIEUDKA.

[33] eel1452. "Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt - Kol Nidre." YouTube Video, 3:44, October 5, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAKpOUBPyoM.

motifs, but there are also marked stylistic differences in their vocal techniques, thus lending a slightly different overall feel to this piece of liturgy in either rendition.

Rosenblatt and Peerce are both very sensitive in their interpretations of the text to the traditional motifs that accompany it, from the opening descending half step-descending major third, to other recognizable motifs throughout the piece. Both singers include plenty of ornamentation of these motifs, through the use of scales and *coloratura*, turns, *portamenti*, descending triplet sequences, trills, arpeggios, and sustained climactic high notes. These decorative vocal elements show off the facility and technique of the singers but also serve to create a feeling of grandeur within the piece, and at times perhaps a sense of urgency.

Where the two renditions depart from one another, however, is due to the differing overall vocal technique and tone of either singer, as well as the instrumentation of the setting. Rosenblatt approaches the singing of *Kol Nidre* from a subtler, quieter place than Peerce does, who opens almost bombastically, with a tone of authority in his voice. While Rosenblatt moves through just as much ornamentation and *coloratura* as Peerce does, it is produced in a lighter, more lyrical way; Peerce on the other hand employs the vocal technique and strength that he might use while singing an aria on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. His tone is strong and pointed, singing full-voiced almost entirely throughout the piece, with only the choir interjecting at certain moments to create contrast with introspective moments. The lightness and rawness of Rosenblatt's tone is likely due to the fact that he was not trained in classical singing, but is rather, a product of singing in the synagogue choir and being mentored by a cantor as a boy. However,

according to his son, Rosenblatt "made a careful study of the methods of tone production of that master of opera Caruso, whom he greatly admired, by playing the latter's phonograph recordings," which he fused with his own traditional, cantorial training.[34]

The presence of the choir and orchestra in Peerce's rendition is a major difference between the two interpretations. Behind Peerce's strong, dramatic tenor voice is a mixed choir and full orchestra, lending more of an operatic or concert hall feel to the piece than Rosenblatt, who sings with simple organ accompaniment. It could be argued, then, that Rosenblatt's rendition is more authentic just because of this traditional approach; although the organ would be replaced by an a cappella men's choir in a traditional service, we would certainly never hear a full orchestra in a traditional synagogue setting as we do in Peerce's recording. Were Peerce to sing this setting in a worship service, with just choir or organ, it could certainly be perceived as prayerful and authentic. The use of the orchestra in this recording of a liturgical setting, however, confuses the listener in terms of being able to distinguish between performance and prayer. Rosenblatt's interpretation is also seemingly more authentic to traditional cantorial singing due to the less refined, natural tone with which he sings, in comparison to Peerce's highly developed classical vocal production. Rosenblatt also includes the use of the *krechtz*, or a break or cry in the voice in the middle of a line he is singing, while Peerce tends to push and drop off at the end of the last note in a phrase, creating an effect frequently heard in a highly emotional aria to convey intensity or distress (think *Vesti La Giubba* from *Pagliacci*, an aria which was in Peerce's repertoire).

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[34] Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt,* 152-153.

While one rendition clearly makes use of a more operatic style and interpretation than the other, is it fair to say that one is more "prayerful" and one more "performative?" With only an audio recording it is difficult to make this judgment entirely, although in both versions, beyond the ornamentation and vocal production, there is a certain feeling that comes through, that each rendition is highly personal to either singer, no matter the style. This could be one argument in favor of both renditions conveying a sense of prayerfulness. Even hearing "*Vesti La Giubba"* can stir something inside the listener; there is emotion attached to the text. What makes the comparison of this aria with *Kol Nidre* so interesting, is that there is an absence of emotion in the text of *Kol Nidre* itself, but it could be argued that there is an emotional subtext, brought about by the larger tone of Yom Kippur, which is then brought to life in the cantor's musical offering of the *Kol Nidre* text. Might Jan Peerce's interpretation of *Kol Nidre* with full orchestra and choir perhaps be a bit jarring in the synagogue context? Yes—Rosenblatt's version would certainly be more appropriate within that setting, but I believe Peerce is able to convey the same depth of emotion that Rosenblatt does, just in a different way. Based simply on these two recordings, whether through traditional cantorial techniques, a polished, classical tone, or some combination of the two, each singer is able to deliver a deeper meaning, emotion, and prayerfulness to the text in his own way. These means of expressiveness, beyond vocal technique, can serve contemporary cantors well when considering incorporating this genre of music into their own worship services and presenting it in an authentic and individual way. Strong vocal technique, however, is an invaluable tool with which to communicate deeper meaning in any musical genre,

elevating music in worship so that it is not perceived as performance. I will, of course, further explore these ideas in subsequent chapters.

Transformation of Ritual into Performance by Means of Modern Media

As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, in reference to Jeffrey Shandler's *Jews, God, and Videotape*, the advent of technology over the last century has provided a new lens with which to view prayer and ritual. The video of Metropolitan Opera singer, and cantor, Richard Tucker appearing on a live broadcast of the Bell Telephone Hour, celebrating Spring through arts and culture, on NBC in April 1965 provides an interesting look at how ritual can undergo a transformation through media.[35] Suddenly, Richard Tucker is not viewed from afar, in costume on the opera stage, but is transported into the living rooms of thousands of viewers, singing the festival *Kiddush*, blessing the wine for Passover. The initial camera shot shows Tucker centered on a soundstage, spot lit, looking directly into the camera, dressed in suit and tie, *kippah* on his head, holding up a *Kiddush* cup. Behind him is a mixed chorus, dimly lit, wearing lilac-colored robes, conducted by Shalom Secunda, and behind Secunda stands a giant menorah sculpture.

Immediately, the attention to the staging of the program communicates the performance nature of it even though Tucker is about to recite a liturgical and ritual text. The suit and tie Tucker dons adds a sense of secular formality to the ritual, the *Kiddush* cup and *kippah*, as well as the giant, cartoonish menorah set piece, only there to remind us that it is indeed a Jewish ritual taking place during the televised event. After the first

[35] Anthony DiFlorio. "Richard Tucker: Bless the Wine at Passover 4/13/65." YouTube Video, 6:45, April 15, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sps1V3hlNAM&t=238s.

minute of the *Kiddush*, the camera pans in closer to Tucker, giving the viewers a shot of him from the torso up, almost as if he is standing at the head of their dining room table, leading the blessing at their *seder*.

Meanwhile, Secunda dramatically conducts the choir's responses within the blessing, gesticulating wildly even though the choir is no more than ten feet away from him. This style of conducting adds to the bizarreness of this entire spectacle, transporting the viewer to a choral performance, contrasting with the intimacy the close proximity of the shot of Tucker creates. Another source of discrepancy between ritual and performance is the inclusion of a full orchestra accompaniment, though we cannot see them in the camera shot. While it seems as though the program is attempting to bring Tucker into the homes of the viewers, the full choir and orchestra would certainly not fit into their living rooms; they are well out of place within that context, but right at home on a stage.

It is rather unclear, then, what the point of singing a fully orchestrated festival *Kiddush,* with mixed choir, during a televised performance might be. Immediately after Tucker concludes the blessing, the camera pans to the choir who begin a rousing rendition of *Dayeinu*, which transitions into *Eliyahu Hanavi*, and finally, *Chad Gadya*. The camera occasionally shows Tucker from a side view, and at other times, face on. The point of including these traditional *seder* songs, I would imagine, was to draw in the audience, to allow people to sing along with the great Richard Tucker in their homes, but why the *Kiddush* as well? A rendition of the *Kiddush* that is this elaborate would likely not be done in the seder at home—singing this setting on television simply allows Tucker to show off his voice and showcase the beauty of Jewish ritual to the public. The

televising of this ritual is multi-layered: the *Kiddush* is typically a home ritual, but in this context has been relocated to a soundstage as a performance, and then transported back into the home by means of cameras and the viewers' television sets. It is difficult, then, to determine whether to classify it as ritual or as performance, though more likely, it is a strange combination of the two.

The lines here become even more blurred when considering this seven-minute bit within the context of the rest of the program, the "Festival of Spring," including performances by Broadway stars and ballet dancers on the theme of Spring, as well as a selection of Easter pieces as sung by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The inclusion of a Jewish ritual within this variety show, and not simply a medley of Passover songs, seems like a conscious choice, whether by Tucker or the producers, to communicate something deeper about Judaism to the viewers—that Passover is not only about singing songs together at the *seder* table, but that there is ritual and religion involved. This choice seems to add credibility to Tucker's role as a cantor and as a beloved member of the Jewish community—a star of the secular stage to whom the Jewish people can lay claim.

The advent of technology and its ability to transform rituals into entertainment is still an issue that exists today in the context of the contemporary Reform worship service due to the prevalence of live streamed services. In the following chapter I will examine in more depth the effect that this medium has on the aesthetics of the twenty-first century worship service, which, like the example of Tucker's televised *Kiddush*, brings prayer and ritual into people's homes by means of technology intended to entertain—yet another way in which the lines between performance and prayer have been blurred.

Chapter 3

A Picture of the Cantor in the Contemporary Synagogue

It's *Selichot* night at the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem. There is a buzz of anticipation within the congregation; the men are gathered downstairs, a sea of black and white, *kippot,* fedoras, and fur *shtreimels* on their heads. Chandeliers adorn the sanctuary, the stained glass windows above the ark are not illuminated, as it is now after dark. From the women's balcony, it feels as though we are in a great concert hall, awaiting the performance about to take place. But the lights do not dim, and the men do not take their seats. Instead, a choir, situated in front the ark, begins to hum. The attention of the congregation suddenly turns to the left side of the bima. Phones and cameras are out—as the use of technology is not prohibited during this holiday as it is with others—they are ready to preserve every note the *chazzan* will sing, or take home a photo of this cantorial celebrity—Chazzan Chaim Adler. The cantor sings as he processes out, accompanied by the choir. He wears a mitre, the traditional cap of the *chazzan*, the *atarah* of his floor-length *tallis* sparkles with rhinestones and metallic beads. The notes emanating from his mouth seem to reach the lofty ceiling of the sanctuary, and all eyes are on him as he walks up the steps to his podium. He faces the ark. The service is a mix of stunning harmonies from the choir and vocal pyrotechnics from the *chazzan*, interspersed with mumbled *davening* from the congregation. Most everyone is seated throughout the service; some men in the back still stand, swaying back and forth, shuckling, or even pacing—but all let the sound and spectacle wash over them.

Forced to take in this scene from the women's balcony, I was already somewhat distant from what was happening below. It was a prayer service, but from where I sat, in awe of it all, it was almost indistinguishable from a performance—but I was still moved and inspired. I have encountered the same feelings I had while at that *Selichot* service while sitting in the audience of the Metropolitan Opera, or Boston's Symphony Hall. A question I seek to answer in this chapter is: can spiritual experiences, particularly within the context of worship, and performance be completely separate from one another? Within the contemporary Reform synagogue, saying that a cantor is "performative" or has an "operatic sound," are seen as negative critique. However, it is likely that, like me, those same people offering that critique have had a moving experience at some point within the context of a performance. Why, then, are contemporary congregants, as well as many cantors, shying away from what they perceive as elements of performance during worship? Are there indeed performative moments that occur through the use of folk and pop genres in worship, and are those perceived differently because of the musical style? Can performative moments coexist with the generally participatory style of worship that pervades contemporary Reform services? And what are the techniques and sensitivities that would be necessary for the contemporary cantor to consider in order for this to happen effectively?

The Thin Line Between Performance and Prayer

In order to answer some of the questions above, it is necessary to elaborate on the phenomenon of liturgical concert music, which I believe has had residual effects on how

congregants still perceive certain genres of music in worship today. As mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, *chazanim* have a long history of appearing on the secular music stage. However, the trend of cantors performing elaborate compositions of c*hazzanut* in a concert setting likely have their roots in nineteenth century Europe. Abraham Zevi Idelsohn provides us in his book *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development* with the example of *chazzan* Nissi Belzer (1824-1906):

> The reason for his lengthy compositions lies in the fact that he did not write for the average service but for concert-services, for he, being a *city-chazzan*, had the task of supplying the large Jewish community of Kishinev or Berditschev with "music." As a *city-chazzan*, he used to officiate on special Sabbaths or feast and fast days only. These services were regarded as religious concerts which members of different Jewish congregations used to attend usually after they had finished the regular service in their own synagogues. The *city-chazzan* would prepare a musical program, the texts of which were selections from the ritual, though the setting was hardly acceptable to the service, inasmuch as some of these compositions would consume a half hour or more.[36]

One can infer from this example that perhaps the only access Jewish people of these towns had to musical entertainment were the concerts and services of the *chazzan.* Thus the *chazzan* would perform music of an elevated nature, with vocal acrobatics, runs and coloratura, or impressive high notes—techniques not dissimilar from those heard in opera arias. It is interesting to note the sheer length of the pieces, as described above, given that the *Shulchan Aruch* instructs cantors "not to prolong the service unduly, even on the Sabbath and Festivals, so as not to weary the congregation."[37] The idea that these pieces would usually be performed after another worship service seems to be the solution around this, further disconnecting the cantorial works from the context of prayer. Gersion

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[36] Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development,* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 305.

[37] Appel, "Sheliah Tzibbur."

Appel, a twentieth century rabbi and, incidentally, the son of a cantor, argues that the issue of the *chazzan* prolonging the service can be "especially viewed with disfavor and disapproval when the *chazzan's* intention is merely to display his voice and cantorial skills," and goes on to argue that "the decline of *chazzanut* was due in part, to the fact that *chazanim* often fancied themselves, not as *ba'alei tefillah* [prayer leaders], but rather as vocal artists and performers."[38] Giving concerts was likely the way around this standard as well; within the context of performance, the cantor was free to show off his musical prowess, and wow the congregation with his compositions—he was not obligated in that moment to be responsible for the prayer of his congregation.

This idea, as well as Idelsohn's statement that the pieces sung by Belzer would not have been acceptable within a worship service even though the texts were liturgical, highlight an attitude that still exists in regard to synagogue music today. The average congregant does not attend a worship service to hear a concert—indeed, most of the contemporary Reform Jewish population has a great deal more access to secular music and culture, whether it be through live performance, or the wealth of audio and video recordings on the internet, than previous generations. The contemporary worship service attendee might also be quick to judge a more elaborate piece of music not as "prayerful," but rather, would condemn the genre as "performative"—akin to something they would be more likely to hear at Carnegie Hall or on the Metropolitan Opera stage, but not in synagogue. Some of this has to do with the inclusion of contemporary music genres, like folk and pop, into worship, and the general attitude that contemporary worship be

[38]Appel, "Sheliah Tzibbur."

accessible and participatory for the congregants, thus completely diverging from the tradition of coming to *shul* to hear the cantor sing.

This trend likely developed in Eastern Europe around the time of Belzer as well, due to the rise of the traveling *chazzan*, when the community would flock to synagogue to hear his voice. Eventually, many of these "star *chazanim"* emigrated to America, and the idea of cantorial fame caught on, especially surrounding Yossele Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt had gained enough notoriety as a cantor in America to be offered a part on the opera stage. His rejection of the offer was also made known by various publications, spreading his name even further. After Rosenblatt turned down the opera, he launched his concert career, bringing his cantorial compositions to the wider public through performance and later through recordings. Eventually he would even appear in the first "talking picture," *The Jazz Singer.* Rosenblatt performed on stage all over the United States in hallowed music venues, and for audiences that included many music critics. He fused his interest for classical vocal music and opera repertoire with his cantorial work by including art songs, arias, and even his own compositions of *chazzanut* on the program.[39]

Just as Jeffrey Shandler argues in *Jews, God, and Videotape* that the recording of cantorial music transforms the genre altogether by transporting it to places where it otherwise would not be heard, so too does the performance of *chazzanut* on the concert stage transform the perception and understanding of liturgical, cantorial music. Music traditionally used in worship is transported to a different context; whereas Rosenblatt likely would have been facing away to sing a piece of liturgy in synagogue, in concert, he

[39] Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt,* 152-178.

is facing the audience, who is observing him, not praying along with him in their *siddurim.* The vocal techniques and pyrotechnics no longer are in service to the text but are intended to entertain and thrill those who have paid to be in attendance. This is not to say, however, that Rosenblatt would have sung his cantorial works any differently than he would have in the synagogue, but the context in which he sang them transformed and defined their purpose. At the time, people would attend vocal recitals and concerts to hear the performers sing arias and classical art songs, but now, the music of the synagogue was being sung on the stage and appreciated for its beauty.

I believe that this notion of cantorial fame and cantors performing concerts, in part, has colored later generations' perceptions of *chazzanut* or soloistic cantorial pieces—people would attend Rosenblatt's concerts or worship services to hear him sing, buy his recordings, and play them for their children who would hear a tenor voice singing trills and coloratura to Hebrew text with organ or orchestra accompaniment, thus labeling the genre as performance. Many other cantors performed on stage and made recordings, including Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker, who truly blurred the lines between performance and prayer as well-known opera singers. These trends, in addition to the Reform movement migrating to a more participatory style of worship, have, I believe, left a less than favorable perception of idea of the cantor singing a solo liturgical setting in progressive worship. There are certain perceptions that people carry with them into synagogue, whether they are aware of it or not. And for many, because of the phenomenon of cantors performing liturgical music on the stage or in recordings, in addition to the shift toward congregational folk-singing in the latter half of the twentieth

century, the cantor can easily be perceived by contemporary congregations as self-indulgent should he or she choose to sing a solo setting of a prayer, or a piece of *nusach* or *chazzanut*, simply because of the history of solo cantorial music (see Shiloah 1992, 68-70), as well as the change to frontal worship in progressive Judaism. This combination of elements often creates the illusion of a performance within worship, especially due to certain presentational and aesthetic factors that I will explore later in the chapter.

The contemporary Reform movement has not necessarily adopted the idea of cantors as their musical celebrities—as Jews in the modern world, there simply is no need to idolize our worship leaders, like past generations did with Rosenblatt, as there is easy access to a wide variety of secular celebrities from whom to find that inspiration. The cantorial fame someone like Rosenblatt enjoyed is obsolete within modern, progressive Judaism, even though many Reform cantors hold him and his contemporaries up as models of great cantorial singing, and strive to master the traditional, cantorial repertoire of that time. However, the trend of Jewish rockers and songwriters seems to be favored within the context of contemporary worship over the cantorial arts, and many cantors find themselves singing, more often than not, rock, folk, and pop settings of the liturgy. Many congregations bring in these songwriters as artists in residence for a weekend, to lead services or give concerts. They often write music in styles that are familiar to the modern, secular ear, with refrains that are catchy, or easy to clap along to. The only thing in many of these compositions that seemingly differentiates them from secular pop music is the fact that they are set to liturgical Hebrew text, though often, the writers of this music do

perform these settings outside of worship in a concert setting, or record them for their albums. But it is frequently this music that draws the congregation into worship when it is used in a service, rather than a solo piece of *nusach* or *chazzanut*, or a modal art piece sung solo by the cantor, all of which are arguably more authentic to Jewish musical tradition, yet are seen as "performative." Does accessibility, then, in the modern worship sphere, equal prayer? And if the music of contemporary worship is accessible, are any elements of performance found therein irrelevant, or is there still a perceptible difference in delivery of the singer and thus the reception of the congregation depending on how it's presented? In a Friday night service I observed for this project, the cantor included a four-minute piece after silent meditation that was in a folk-pop musical style, utilizing the appropriate vocal techniques for that genre such as belting, and it was unclear whether the community was meant to join in on the refrain or simply listen while the cantor presented this piece in a showy way. It left me wondering—are people meant to be more receptive to a long, solo piece of this nature rather than something in a more classical vein? I was curious whether others in the congregation found this musical moment meaningful, through all the affectations and performative elements, and does the genre even matter when these elements are present? I believe that there is an authentic way to present any genre of music in Jewish worship, whether it is something more accessible, or something less familiar and more challenging for the congregation to latch onto. Much of this subject will be discussed later in this chapter, based on my findings from interviews with cantors in the field today.

In order to further examine and understand the contemporary Reform worship service, it is helpful to explore some of Richard Schechner's concepts of performance theory, which I mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter. Schechner distinguishes between "ritual" and "theater" and the concepts of "efficacy" and "entertainment," which relate to the former terms respectively. He argues that "efficacy and entertainment are not so much opposed to each other; rather they form the poles of a continuum." Therefore, it is often difficult to distinguish between the two, as elements (see Schechner's chart below) can cross over into either realm.[40]

EFFICACY Ritual	⟷	ENTERTAINMENT Theater
results		fun
link to an absent Other		Only for those here
symbolic time		emphasis now
performer possessed, in trance		performer knows what s/he's doing
audience participates		audience watches
audience believes		audience appreciates
criticism discouraged		criticism flourishes
collective creativity		individual creativity

Schechner explains that:

> A performance is called theater or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom, and under what circumstances. If the performance's purpose is to effect transformations—to be efficacious—then the other qualities listed under the heading "efficacy" will most probably also be present, and the performance is a ritual. And vice versa regarding the qualities listed under "entertainment." No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment.[41]

Why then are we so apt to categorize our worship experiences as being either "prayerful" (ritual), or "performative" (theater)? An element contemporary prayer leaders are often

[40] Schechner, *Performance Theory,* 130.
[41] Schechner, *Performance Theory,* 130.

concerned with when crafting prayer is the idea of participation. As shown above, Schechner notes the distinction between the audience participating and the audience watching, or in the case of the synagogue service, the terminology of "audience" can be substituted with "congregation." In fact, we often discourage the use of the word "audience" in regard to the worship service, and eliminate behaviors that an audience attending a performance might exhibit, like applause.

Schechner's idea that the elements of ritual and theater live on a spectrum is useful when considering the contemporary, Reform worship service. Prayer leaders today may be overly concerned with the ritual end of the spectrum with regard to participation, often programming settings of prayers that are familiar, easy for the average synagogue-goer to sing along to—there tends to be the belief that if the congregation is not actively participating in the worship by singing, clapping, etc., they are otherwise not engaged. However, if we consider a particularly gripping moment or song in a theatrical production, the audience is not visibly participating, yet they are still actively involved, there is still something pulling them along, drawing them in. Why are many prayer leaders often hesitant or afraid to recreate this type of moment in contemporary worship? We have an opportunity to create moments like these, in which we are somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of the congregation participating versus simply watching. What the prayer leader needs to achieve in order to effectively do this will be the subject of discussion in the concluding chapter.

Cantor William Sharlin points out in his article "When the Chazzan 'Turned Around,'" that this issue did not come into existence until clergy transformed the worship

service into a frontal affair, breaking the notion of privacy the prayer leader had when he faced the ark, back turned to the congregation. He describes this mode of prayer-leading as paradoxical—the *chazzan* was surrounded by worshippers, but he himself was involved in his own isolated prayer experience. Sharlin argues that this "state of privacy...enabled him to release his innermost thoughts and feelings...[thus] reveal[ing] the deeper part of [him]self."[42] Sharlin believes that the expressive nature of *chazzanut* could not have been developed had the cantor been facing the congregation. When the *chazzan* sings an elaborate piece of cantorial music facing away from the community, it is more likely to be perceived as prayerful and authentic, whereas if he or she were facing the congregation, it could be perceived as performative, theatrical, or even self-indulgent—the cantor is now able to take in the reactions of the congregation, and the congregation, now able to be seen, has an expectation placed upon them *to* react or participate.

This is where the distinction between performance and prayer in this setting becomes even more difficult to define. In a theater setting, the stage is lit, but where the audience sits is darkened—even though the performance is frontal, the attendees are anonymous, the performers cannot discern the effect the performance is having on them save for audible reactions. In a frontal worship service, the congregation is exposed, there is no difference in lighting, they feel expected to participate, and prayer-leaders, therefore, must engage them. This is likely why moments during a frontal worship service that do not directly require the congregation's participation can feel awkward to

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[42] William Sharlin, "Music of the Synagogue: When the Chazzan 'Turned Around,' *The Conference Journal* 4 (1962), 43.

many attendees. It is easy to connect the idea of sitting and observing a performance to what is happening in that moment of worship, yet the elements missing from a traditional performance setting make the experience confusing. It is neither here nor there; the congregation can feel lost and unsure of what they are meant to do or how to react, or worst of all, they disconnect altogether. Thus the prayer-leader's attempt to avoid this disengagement is marked by overcompensation, an unnecessary hand-holding throughout the worship service, to make desperately sure that at no point do we lose them. Sharlin acknowledges this challenge of the self-consciousness of the congregation brought about by frontal worship. He does not see the possibility of the prayer leader turning away once again, as this would be even more alienating and confusing to contemporary congregations who have acclimated to frontal worship. Rather, he challenges leaders of worship to "find seclusion and true prayer by turning around without moving at all," opening the door once again for the congregation to be comfortable with the notion of individual privacy during prayer.

To do this, contemporary prayer leaders must increase and encourage liturgical literacy, allowing the congregation to detach from dependence on service leaders to completely guide everyone through worship. This would allow the congregation more freedom to actively pray and participate but also room to meditate, and to take in the sounds and aesthetics in a spiritual way, not a forced, frontal one. Cantor Daniel Singer described his experience with worship at the beginning of his career at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue: "all of the congregants who did come didn't even open their books. They were looking at the program, they were reading all the notes in HaShavua [...] here I am

trying to get them to learn this entire service that I've created [and] they're used to just sitting there and looking at a program."[43] Singer and his rabbinic partner, who were brought into the synagogue to enact change and revitalize the congregation, made drastic changes in order to increase liturgical literacy. "We want people to learn to pray, to open their books, and read the prayers in Hebrew, or transliteration," he says. "There's a regularity of what we've done from the beginning, maintaining the standard that we are going to be doing all of the liturgy. [...] The whole objective is to raise up the religiosity and the preservation of the tradition, literacy, and liturgy—we don't do directions from the bima—please rise, please sit—we don't do *iyyunim*."[44] Cantor Singer even remarked that at this point, the congregation is so attuned to their new *minhagim*, that they will even begin singing without him, or continue to sing even if he drops out. While this manner of worship might not be effective in every congregation, it is an example of how a community that was detached from the *siddur* and the liturgy is now immersed and educated in it; it does not feel foreign, and the clergy do not need to guide them through each part of the service.

The model described above revived the idea of the cantor as *shaliach tzibbur,* the messenger of the congregation, not a service-leader simply acting as a worship guide. The contemporary Reform cantor is in a unique position, differing from that of the traditional or Orthodox *chazzan*, in that they also serve as clergy, as pastoral caregivers, as teachers. The Reform cantor develops different kinds of relationships with his or her congregants, and has the power to establish trust. This trust is invaluable to the cantor in

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[43] Daniel Singer (cantor), interview with the author, November 13, 2018.
[44] Singer, interview.

terms of being able to introduce new, or old but less familiar, musical elements in worship, to challenge the congregation, and to foster openness to these things, but that trust so often goes unused in the contemporary worship service, for the reasons I've discussed previously. Cantor Mark Childs relates the role of the cantor more to a recitalist performing as themselves than someone performing a role in an opera production, but points out a key difference:

> It's *us* who's standing on the bima, and hopefully you're more in relationship to your congregation than a performer is to the audience that comes and then leaves. As a *chazzan* you're in relationship with the people that you're singing with, in front of. And that's the idea of a *shaliach tzibbur*, and that's a huge difference from a stage performer or recitalist—if you're one of those, you're not a *shaliach tzibbur*.

He goes on to describe how this relationship allows the cantor to "develop [...] trust with your congregation, so even if you present something they may not latch onto right away, they'll give you the benefit of the doubt."[45] Cantor Gerald Cohen also brought up the idea of the trust one must develop with the community as the messenger of the congregation:

> [It] has to do with your relationship with your congregation, that people trust you to take them on the trip that you're going to take them… you're their *shaliach tzibbur*—you're the person that they trust to lead them through a service that's going to be meaningful for them.[46]

Just as any relationship that fosters trust, that trust between the cantor and the congregation leaves room for experimentation, but also a feeling of safety—that if the prayer leader lets go of the hand of the congregation for a time, they will still be right there to continue to guide them, all the while leaving space for independent exploration on the part of the congregation. In a way, this is almost like a parent-child

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[45] Mark Childs (cantor), interview with the author, October 23, 2018.
[46] Gerald Cohen (cantor), interview with the author, November 13, 2018.

relationship—the prayer leader needs to allow the congregation room to grow on their own, they need to find ways to point the congregation in the right direction without excessive hand-holding. The *shaliach tzibbur* has the power to hold the needs of the congregation through communal singing and worship, but to also take them to places they did not know they could reach through the means of thoughtfully crafted and expressive solo moments in the service. Cantor Cohen also commented that "these days you can't have a meaningful service where you just sing at them for an hour, but if you [...] get to that point where you do something special for those five minutes, and they know that it's coming from your heart and you have that relationship with them," then they will be open to what you are bringing to them within the worship experience.

Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller emphasizes that the relationship required to build trust with your congregation begins with the relationship between the cantor and clergy partner/s, so that "we're all coming from the same place and we trust each other and are working from the spirit of 'what's best for the larger whole of spiritual expression, of worship, of communal worship.'" In her view, this collegial partnership is required in order to introduce something new or different to the congregation:

> Relationship has to come first, and out of that the artistry comes, when thinking about how to best serve the prayer. If/when you suggest something that's brand new, ask how can you integrate it within the service so that it can really speak and people can be open to it. [Another thing is] You need to continue to reflect and plan and not just let it ride... if you want to have the creative spark it's going to come when you're thinking intentionally [...] about what you can do to create a moment that is helpful and moving… and then work together to make it so. It all has to work in the context of prayer, within a trusting relationship amongst the worship leaders.[47]

[47] Benjie Ellen Schiller (cantor), interview with the author, November 8, 2018.

This relationship between clergy partners is not limited to collaboration, however. Cantor Singer described the roles he and his rabbinic partner take on in terms of crafting worship, that this idea of trust between them manifests itself in the rabbi allowing Cantor Singer to plan and lead the musical and liturgical aspects of the service himself, while the rabbi takes ownership over writing and delivering a sermon each week. Cantor Singer explains their reasoning behind this mutual choice: "the *chazzan* traditionally was always the worship leader. The *chazzan* is the one who opens the gates of heaven. Not the rabbi. We separate our roles completely in that respect."[48] In this case, the freedom these clergy partners allow each other to bring their individual strengths is their example of a trusting clergy partnership; they know each other's strengths and capitalize on them to create effective worship for their community. The examples above demonstrate that the trust clergy teams must build is highly individualized depending on the clergy and the community, but the fact remains that there must be trust between the leaders on the bima in order for new, exciting things in worship to happen, to continue to evaluate the success of it, and to consider both the needs of the congregation as well as to present something they didn't know they wanted or needed, but that can have great impact.

Use of Classical Vocal Technique in Contemporary Worship

Often, the perception that solo vocal music in a prayer setting is "performative" is based in associations with Western classical music. Many people connect a classical sound with opera and stage performance and have a difficult time separating their

[48] Singer, interview.

experiences as an audience member from their experience as a worshiper when that style is used in the synagogue. The classical sound is most frequently heard within the context of worship during the High Holidays, when the sense of awe and gravitas can more easily carry an elevated musical aesthetic. There are, however, considerations for the classically trained cantor when thinking about vocal production and style in the modern, Reform worship service.

Cantor Daniel Singer highlights a clear difference between singing on the opera stage and singing in a Reform service: "in opera you have to project without a mic over an orchestra and it's what we are trained to do—vocal production has to change when using a microphone." He explains that he makes a conscious choice when deciding how to sing a certain setting in his worship service, saying that, "there are times when I let it rip, but I have to be judicial about when I use full voice or vibrato."[49] Cantor Galit Dadoun Cohen elaborates further on this idea as she understands it for herself:

> In worship it will have to have a content of...it would have to have a point. But it depends, like when I sing the Shalom Rav of Ben Steinberg, which happens sometimes, then yes, I will sing that classically, but it's only because, again, only if it has a purpose, and not often. [...] I really try to sing in a way that encourages [the congregation] to participate and to sing along, and I'll only pick [maybe] one moment in the service when I'm like, okay, now I'm singing. And I don't know that I'll pick a classical piece; sometimes for me it's the Debbie Friedman "V'shamru"—that's my moment, and you could sing along if you want, but it's my solo there, and even if you're singing I'm still singing like I'm a soloist.[50]

Cantor Schiller expresses a similar way of thinking about vocal style in presenting liturgical settings in worship:

> We're becoming more and more removed from this solo, this more dramatic, more esoteric repertoire, so we really need to set it up so that when we offer this

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[49] Singer, interview.

[50] Galit Dadoun Cohen (cantor), interview with the author, October 9, 2018.

> repertoire we can do so effectively and be true to what it is. Other than occasional moments in the service...within the liturgy, I'm most likely not singing with my full capacity. I'm thinking volume, I'm thinking color, I'm thinking drama, I'm thinking range of dynamics [...] I am in relationship with the *kehila* (community) for all of the service, and try to adapt my vocal approach for any given moment in this dialogue of prayer.[51]

Part of the pull away from the use of this repertoire is in service to a more communal feel of worship that communities are implementing. In order for the ordinary synagogue-goer to be able to participate musically, there needs to be the inclusion of liturgical settings that are accessible and easy to catch onto for non-musicians. The result, therefore, is many classically trained cantors finding themselves learning to sing and incorporate different genres into worship that encourage participation from the community. "What cantors have to do musically is insane," remarks Cantor Daniel Mutlu, "I don't want to say it's a demand for mastery in all styles, but it's an expectation that you're going to be able to sing a crazy *Kol Nidre* or *Avinu Malkeinu* and then be able to turn around and sing a tender, congregational folk moment—and then sing something that's completely pop or Broadway." He goes on: "there's kind of a reason why there are specialized singers for all those things, but there's a demand on cantors to do it all, and it's really hard...and takes a great deal of thought and practice in honing that skill."[52]

For some cantors, fighting the preconceived notions of the classical voice as well as becoming adept in singing other genres while staying true to oneself and one's training and musical background can prove challenging. Cantor Jennifer Bern Vogel describes part of the process of hiring a new rabbi at her congregation and the thoughts it brought

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[51] Schiller, interview.

[52] Daniel Mutlu (cantor), interview with the author, October 30, 2018.

up for her: “We had to provide a description [...] of the style of services. …The president wrote, ‘she has an operatic style.’ [She pauses] ...You know, it’s this struggle between trying to maintain a healthy voice, and an authentic voice, *and* do different styles, contemporary styles.”[53] Many singers strive to master one type of vocal style throughout their training, which becomes their authentic way to sing and communicate through music. The challenge of contemporary worship is that cantors, as singers, are often forced to branch out stylistically—all the while striving to maintain a healthy instrument—and need to find their authentic voice within genres that may feel foreign. “We’re most often singing pop or folk,” Cantor Mutlu points out, and goes on to caution cantors against “sing[ing] those genres classically” as to avoid a disconnect for the congregation within the different style.[54]

Cantor Mark Childs views his classical vocal studies as an invaluable foundation to the variety of styles he incorporates into worship:

> Classical training opens up so many more possibilities toward repertoire… there’s amazing, great repertoire written for a classical voice. It’s more challenging. But you can also access every other kind of repertoire as well, so I think classical training broadens your potential opportunities for repertoire and how you’re going to program any particular service.

He not only emphasizes the potential for singing a broad range of styles, but also makes the case for the use of a cantor’s foundational vocal techniques, asserting that, “[cantors] can take on challenging pieces that lift the congregation up through [their] efforts.”[55] The congregation is able to perceive the amount of time, work, and dedication the cantor puts

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[53] Jennifer Bern Vogel (cantor), interview with the author, October 16, 2018.
[54] Mutlu, interview.
[55] Childs, interview.

into a particularly challenging piece to be able to do it well, and to use it in a way that furthers the communication of the text or message it is meant to convey. There is an element of genuineness when a more classical, solo piece is presented in worship in this way, which I believe fosters more openness to it from the community. The cantor has to fight against perceptions of singing for self-fulfillment, or from a place of ego, which will be the topic of discussion later in this chapter.

Cantor Bob Abelson, now 88-years-old, enjoyed a career on the opera stage as well as serving as a cantor on the pulpit, and continues to teach in the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. He acknowledges that there are certainly elements of classical singing and music which carry over into the traditional cantorial arts, but there are marked stylistic differences that contribute to presenting certain pieces of repertoire in a true, authentic way: "what helps in the classical voice...what came out of the classical music is harmony and phrasing. Even though the style is different [between classical and cantorial music] there's still the musical phrase, and it resonates in the body, and that's what affects you when you sing." In describing the difference between straight classical singing and the added element of cantorial style, he says:

> It's to know the difference between singing Bach, Mozart, and singing Rosenblatt or Katchko. When Katchko writes a melody, it's different from a melody of Schumann, which is beautiful, but there are certain things… it's like an Italian style—when you listen to Pavarotti for example, it's different from listening to an American tenor [sing in Italian]. When the style is right, there's something extra.[56]

[56] Robert Abelson (cantor), interview with the author, February 21, 2018.

As Cantor Mutlu pointed out, it is a large task to attain mastery in all styles and incorporate them into a prayer service, but, as cantors, we do need to consider how, individually, these styles can come from our authentic selves. Similarly, we must consider how to present liturgical settings that make use of classical vocal techniques in a way that opens up our community to receive them—so that the fact that we are offering them from a place deep in our heart or soul is tangible. Cantor Bern Vogel expressed it nicely: "it's about the essence and the soulfulness you give to it, and communicating the *ikar*, the real essence of what the prayer is." If the vocal style is in service of the text, or our larger message to the congregation, our singing has the ability to be a powerful tool of deep communication.

The Aesthetics of Worship

Just like the transformation of ritual by means of video technology, as explored in Richard Tucker's televised *Kiddush* in the previous chapter, contemporary worship is also undergoing a similar transformation as many congregations have adopted the use of live streaming. While live streaming worship opens up wonderful opportunities for those who are homebound to be able to feel like part of the community, it can have certain effects on the way contemporary worship is perceived, and even consumed. First of all, it gives congregants who might otherwise go to services the chance to stay home, or even watch it at a later time if the stream is archived, which can serve to detach them from the community, even if their perception from watching the livestream is that they are still a part of it. They are presented with a completely different experience watching on the

screen at home than they would were they actually in attendance. Most synagogues film the services from a fixed camera with a full view of the *bima*, and the viewer sees the clergy or service participants from more of a distance, as they might several rows back in the pews, or it might give the feeling of being seated in a balcony if the camera is angled down slightly. This already provides a completely different way of taking in the visual aspects of worship one might experience from within the sanctuary.

For another way in which video transforms the worship experience, it is helpful to examine live streamed services of a synagogue that produces their video in a much more polished manner than other synagogues' live streams. Instead of a fixed shot, there is a professionally-operated camera, panning to different shots and angles throughout the service, whether it is the full view of the *bima*, clergy team, and musicians, a particular piece of decor in the elaborate sanctuary, or a close-up of the member of clergy who is speaking or singing at any given point in the service. While the intention of this is likely to give the viewer a full experience of worship at the synagogue in an aesthetically pleasing manner, it does not match the actual live, in-person experience a worshipper might have. The carefully produced video is reminiscent of a PBS *Great Performances* filming of a live opera or concert performance, and, I believe, does in fact blur the line as to whether one is watching a worship service or a performance.

Like a produced recording of a stage performance, in a highly produced livestreamed service, facial expressions or gestures meant to be conveyed to people sitting in the audience or the pews are viewed close-up, appearing less natural than they might from further away. Facial expressions that are consistent with pop singing, to

signify that the singer is feeling the music, feeling the prayer (furrowed brow, closed eyes, etc.), in my opinion, feel even less authentic through this medium. The plastered-on smiles to encourage the congregation to participate have a similar effect through the close-up video shot. Perhaps they read better from the seats in the sanctuary, but close up it gives the impression of performance and a facade. However, the shots from the back of the sanctuary, on the balcony level, feel very removed, a bird's eye view in a sense; it allows the viewer to observe the entire spectacle of the service, yet they now feel even further away while watching from their computer or television screen at home.

There were several other moments in the services I observed that could be considered "performative" regardless of whether it was seen in person or on the live stream. The service began with the clergy filing onto the bima, accompanied by music; there did not appear to be any interaction with congregants before the service, much like performers in a show taking their places on stage for the opening scene. The interactions between the clergy at times felt forced; for example, in one service that I observed, as the rabbi gave his *iyyunim*, he addressed the cantor, rather than the congregation. There was a sort of dialogue between them, almost as if they were performers in a duo act. This mode of communication from the rabbi appeared to put pressure on the cantor to look interested in what the rabbi was saying, in order for the community to see them in positive relationship (whether they are or not). The clergy could very well have wonderful working relationships, but the forced nature of the interaction on the *bima* left me, and likely some service attendees, wondering whether that was the case.

Observing these services brought up a number of questions for me: Is there pressure to convey a certain image and amount of polish within worship to uphold your integrity as a member of clergy, and is it obvious to the congregation when clergy are trying too hard? The clergy feel they have a reputation to uphold and can easily get caught up in the details, trying to be absolutely certain that the way they desire to come across to the community is perceptible, however it seems that this contributes to a sense of inauthenticity for the observer. Oftentimes it does not appear that clergy are being themselves, but rather what they think they need to be or how they need to come across to be effective. This adds an element of performance, especially when viewed on the live stream, as elements of the presentation the worship leaders employ to perpetuate the image they want to uphold, become more pronounced and obvious in a close-up shot of the video, even though they may (or may not) be more effective from within the sanctuary. What, then, does that do to the viewer's perception of the service, the clergy, the entire aesthetic? On one hand, the close proximity of the live stream shot gives the viewer a false sense of closeness to the clergy—they are seemingly in a more personal relationship with them than the attendee in the pew who is farther away. But the closeness also gives away any element of theatricality intended to be communicated in a large space in order to engage the *kahal* in worship.

Whether as seen on the live stream or in person, there was a clear desire from the service leaders and musicians to create a polished service. But to me, at times, it crossed the line into too much polish. As clergy, we want what we present within the worship service to be high quality, but how far can we take it without it coming across as

inauthentic? Can being ourselves and acting naturally, but poised, be just as effective? What are clergy trying to communicate to their congregation through an extremely polished service? One cantor with whom I spoke described their feelings about the trend of an overly produced style of worship service: “you have to break the wall, otherwise it becomes like you’re watching something in a movie, it’s too perfect, [like] putting the needle on the record and it sounds canned, it sounds like Broadway, it sounds like Disney.”

This perfection, I believe, does a disservice to our congregation. We develop human connections with our congregants outside of worship—we should be the same person they know off the *bima* as we are on. If we are leading and praying as ourselves, awkward moments and transitions included, it is much more palatable an experience in my opinion. The congregation sees who we are—human beings. In speaking about her relationship with her Rabbinic partner on the *bima*, Cantor Jennifer Bern Vogel noted that, “what happens on the *bima* [...] is so important in terms of not just the singing, not just the reading, but the whole interaction, and respect, the laughter, and allowing one another to be human.”[57] We make mistakes, we are not always perfect—why try to give the illusion that we are? As role models for our congregants it is our duty to be as authentically us as possible, being aware of our strengths and weaknesses, adjusting as necessary but not taking it so far as to come across as performing or acting.

[57] Bern Vogel, interview.

The Authentic Prayer Leader

There is however, a small element of acting involved in coming across as your genuine self, as counterintuitive as that might sound. The mark of a good actor is usually that you cannot tell that they're acting, even though you know that it's a human being who is quite separate from the role they are playing assuming a character. A good actor truly inhabits a character, they *are* that character. While the role of clergy is essentially part of who we are, it is still a role that we play in a sense, but one that we must present authentically. We may not always be feeling our best, or have the most positive relationship with our clergy partners, or there could be a variety of other factors getting in our way of being truly present for any given service, but we must find ways to work around them for the sake of our congregants. Coming across as anything other than genuine cannot be an option however.

Cantor Singer relates the idea of knowing how to act, but for the purpose of coming across as your natural self, to his experience in voice acting. "The whole objective," he says, "is to make it sound like you're not reading anything, to make it sound like you're just natural [...] You're just a regular human being up there, you're not posing as a clergy person—there's an authenticity that I think people want to have from their clergy people."[58] Cantor Childs elaborates on the same issue:

> You don't want to be seen as somebody who's acting, or inauthentic, or just turning it on or turning it off [...] you have to have those things but they have to be authentic, they have to be who you are. Because congregations know, congregants know, people know if you're just acting. They might be impressed at first but that doesn't go very far when you need to connect with them as a human being. You

[58] Singer, interview.

> can't just be an entertainer—[...] part of your job is to be an entertainer, but there needs to be a *neshama* [soul] that connects with people and cares for people.[59]

This point of connection was overwhelmingly the main difference, identified by my interview subjects, between performing on stage and leading worship on the *bima*. Cantor Bern Vogel noted:

> Being on stage, especially being in a different character [...] there's obviously a fourth wall, and there isn't in the congregation. The cantor's connection with the *kahal* or congregation is focused and intense, helping to structure the mood and timbre of prayer liturgy. While theatre can also elicit immediate response and is sometimes also spiritual, a cantor leading worship functions as a divine vessel of communication.[60]

As a performer on stage, there is some element of connection with your audience, but you are not usually encouraging them to join in, nor do you know whether you will ever see them again in any other context. Cantor Dadoun Cohen explains this further:

> [The] first noticeable difference for me (between performing on stage and leading worship) was that you are singing *with* your *kahal*, even though they don't [always] participate. When I saw those families of all my little fourth graders and they were in the *kahal*, it was an extremely different experience from singing on the big stage, where, you know, it's dark out there, you don't know who's there, and *here,* when I look out, I'm like, oh here's so and so… seeing, interacting, there's a dialogue with the person, where in opera you don't know who's there, [...] it doesn't matter.[61]

Cantor Abelson, however, brought up some similarities between singing on the *bima* and singing on the stage. In his view, "[when] you're doing a piece that everybody does, you've heard it a thousand times—you've got to make it as though you've never heard it." He goes on, "when you perform, either in opera or in the pulpit, it should be as if you've just thought of it and it's coming out of your thoughts...it's like it's not been

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[59] Childs, interview.
[60] Bern Vogel, interview.
[61] Dadoun Cohen, interview.

written, which is like a good actor too." In regards to this, Cantor Mutlu asserts that preparation is key in achieving this sort of genuine spontaneity and spirituality. He described this to me through an experience he had performing as the tenor soloist in Handel's *Messiah*, knowing that a New York Times reviewer would be in the audience:

> I drilled that solo over and over and over again because I wanted to leave nothing to chance. And when I got onto the stage I had a complete out of body experience, and I sang the solo but it was an extremely spiritual experience, because what I felt like I was doing was really sharing the performance with the audience, very much in the same way which I would do in synagogue. You have to prepare for an incredibly long time so that you're not buried in your music, so that you can execute the phrase the way you know it has to be executed, and so in a way the best prayer is performative. People often think that performance means there's no emotion behind it and it's all for show, and they confuse performance with ego, and if [...] you're self-gratifying in the way that you sing, that's not performance per se, that's just egotistical singing. In terms of preparation you realize if you want to effectively move the congregation and communicate to them you have to have that same level of preparation and involvement, and as cantors that's hard—we sing a lot of music and get a lot of stuff thrown at us… [but] that way you connect more.[62]

As prayer leaders we are often concerned with connecting to the congregation, or helping them connect to God or access a feeling of spirituality. I believe to do this it is important to allow ourselves room to connect spiritually as well, and to give ourselves opportunities to have moving experiences when we sing, like the one Cantor Mutlu described in a non-worship setting. I asked Cantor Abelson whether he had had moments like this himself, either on the *bima* or on the stage:

> There are very few moments and they occur once in a while, and you suddenly are connecting with God or something, a magic moment, and it happens in praying. It's happened sometimes on the holidays, and some Shabbats, where suddenly you feel you've hit a moment for yourself where you're connecting. [...] In opera, sometimes in a performance you're so involved, you can almost cry, you have to be in control, it's hard, but it's better than being phony.[63]

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[62] Mutlu, interview.

[63] Abelson, interview.

For Cantor Abelson, the authenticity one must find as a prayer leader or as a performer on the stage are one in the same, and it is in these moments of being your true self, and communicating a message through text and music that have the power to connect or move you, or the recipient of your musical offering, toward a spiritual place. When we are less concerned with how we look, with how we sound, with how the service is being presented, with how we are perceived as clergy, we open ourselves up to so much more. Cantor Schiller reflected on her ideas about presentation versus the task of the cantor of communicating a message to the *kahal*: "there needs to be some sense of humility—it's not about my bringing this gorgeous or dramatic piece. Rather, there [are] moments to 'call out' to God, to one another, to oneself, through song, [...] the music [is] the tool to express what can exist in a way beyond [what] the words [can]."[64]

We are on the *bima* to pray, to help others to pray, to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, and to communicate a message. When prayer leaders approach worship from this place, I find the experience to be much more effective and meaningful. It always feels obvious to me when the prayer leaders are simply trying too hard, or are coming from a place of concern for self-image, and as a worshiper, it creates a sense of discomfort and I find that I can't connect in the moment. As Cantor Mutlu pointed out, cantors frequently have a lot on their plate—it is not always easy to invest the time and preparation into crafting a worship service. But it is essential that as prayer leaders we find some point of connection, whether to the text, through the music, through some deeper meaning, no matter how last-minute the service outline is put together. This is the

[64] Schiller, interview.

individual work the cantor or prayer leader must do. We cannot lose sight of why this is the profession we chose, but also of who we are, and how we can bring the best of the abilities we already have to our work and to our congregants, to make a difference in their lives through relationships, prayer, and music. Cantor Dadoun Cohen beautifully captures the work we do that transcends even who we are, whether as cantor or performer, saying:

> You're trying to connect with a message that's bigger than yours, and in opera there's also that vehicle, like the art form is the vehicle, and in both cases you are the vessel. Here you are, *hineni hei'ani mi-ma'as* [here I am, poor in deeds], am I good enough to deliver these people's prayers? Or be a vessel that's delivering something? In opera you're delivering the expression of those genius composers that's the pinnacle of the human expression as far as we are all concerned, like Bach and Mozart, Verdi, Puccini—those guys have made it through the test of time...and [their] creation, *you* are the vessel of delivering that. [...] We (cantors) are the *k'lei kodesh*—Judaism has the same words—we are the vessel to deliver this, [...] this ethereal, larger-than-us message.[65]

[65] Dadoun Cohen, interview.

Chapter 4

Prayer, Performance, Repertoire, and the Future of the Reform Cantorate

Fusing Contemporary Trends with Tradition

In previous centuries, the Western classical genre was considered the pinnacle of musical culture in many societies, and this was reflected in music written for the synagogue in order to elevate Jewish culture, as this thesis has explored thus far. While there were simultaneously folk music traditions in various Western cultures, this "popular" music was typically not heard within the synagogue. In the past century, however, the popular genres have included jazz, rock, folk, and pop, all of which are evident in contemporary worship trends. The transition to these genres in worship were often critiqued, even as far back as 1931, as seen in the film short *Chazn afn Probe* (A Cantor on Trial) featuring American-born Golden Age cantor Louis "Leibele" Waldman. The end of the short shows a search committee discussing the traditional cantorial candidates they have auditioned for the position at their synagogue (all previously played by Waldman), but they cannot decide on any of them. Waldman's final character's manager enters, billing Waldman as a cantor with "pep and jazz," the cantor who will "give you a *Kol Nidre* with a two-step melody...a *hallel* as a ragtime melody." Waldman comes in, clean-shaven, donning a suit and fedora, smile plastered on his face, hands clasped in front of his chest, elbows flapping, and hips bouncing. He proceeds with singing a ragtime rendition of *Yismach Moshe* complete with choreography and "boop boop be dos;" he even gets the entire committee dancing around their table.

This parody was clearly serving to critique the idea of the introduction of popular musical genres into Jewish services, poking fun in order to show that they belonged on the stage—not in worship. However, decades later, these styles have become popular in Reform worship today largely because they sound familiar, are a part of the vernacular, and lend themselves to easy congregational participation. Whereas popular music genres were not used in services because they were viewed as "performative" or not fit for prayer for most of the twentieth century, the prevalence of these genres in worship today often causes the use of classical or traditional settings of the past to stand out as "performative," which has led to a decrease in solo, cantorial repertoire in Reform services.

Throughout this investigation into prayer service leadership, I have been struck by how much of the musical content of the services I witnessed was predominantly pop-style settings, with hardly any use of *nusach* or the modes. Did the lack of any "traditional" Jewish sound contribute to the sense of authenticity I felt was missing while I observed these services? The inclusion of all pop and folk music felt to me as though I could be at a concert (likely what Waldman and the writers of *Chazn afn Probe* were trying to convey); what was inherently Jewish about it other than the liturgy? Yes, people were singing together and participating in worship, but I believe we are doing a disservice by not including the traditional elements, or styles of the past, interwoven through popular, contemporary modalities. We are a people of a long, rich, and diverse history, and to disregard that completely in favor of popular trends, I believe, is a real shame. A discussion of what constitutes "traditional Jewish music" is another topic altogether, but

for the purposes of this writing, I refer to traditional, *Ashkenazi* modal *nusach* and *chazzanut*. While this genre is somewhat different, though not altogether detached, from the classical Western styles I have addressed in previous chapters, the soloistic nature of this type of music in the worship service provides a similar sense of performance as does a classical, liturgical art song.

Cantor Gerald Cohen advocates for the inclusion of traditional Jewish music or art pieces within the context of worship, but within certain parameters:

> In services, people want participatory music, and most services I lead are a combination of participatory and traditional. But there are some times when I do things that are more "performative," and if done in the right spirit it can have more emotional impact on congregants than singing a simple tune. If you do something like that at the right time, figure out where it will go in the service, and it's something which will really move people, I think it can have greater emotional impact than some of the congregational music, [...] it's making sure that you're somehow priming it in the right way so that people are feeling receptive to having something more listening than participating.[66]

Oftentimes, more soloistic settings are used as a sermon anthem, or as a meditative moment coming out of silent prayer. By Cantor Cohen's guidelines, I believe that if done intentionally, a solo, cantorial piece can be effective in a variety of places in the service, contributing to a sense of prayerfulness, rather than being perceived as "performative." An example of this can be seen in a video clip from Cantor Daniel Mutlu's installation service at Central Synagogue. Cantor Mutlu used his facility in singing *chazzanut* to bring a Golden Age setting of *Kol Adonai* (Psalm 29), which he transcribed from a recording of Joseph Shlisky, to *Kabbalat Shabbat*—something that is not the norm for that community. Knowing this, rather than simply beginning to sing the setting, Cantor

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[66] Cohen, interview.

Mutlu, with the musicians underscoring with modal improvisation, opens by explicitly stating, “this setting will be a little different for Central Synagogue,” and explains where it comes from, why it’s meaningful for him, and why he chose to share it at that service.[67] The setting of the psalm text itself is only about two minutes, just enough for the congregation to get a good taste of the style, but not too much to overwhelm. On the final chord of the setting Cantor Mutlu begins to strum his guitar, and while the video clip cuts off at this point, it is clear that he is transitioning to *L’cha Dodi*, which, no doubt, the congregation knows. By setting up a style that is unfamiliar to the community in an open and honest way, he primes them to be receptive to this esoteric setting that communicates the spiritual essence of *Kabbalat Shabbat*—it invites them in. Through the seamless transition from his solo to a congregational melody to welcome the Shabbat bride, the community is offered the reward, in a sense, of joining together in song, after taking the moment to simply *be* and receive a masterfully sung piece of liturgy. Cantor Mutlu explained to me his intention behind that moment in the service:

> I feel deep down that if these pieces are presented in the right way, people will like them. Now, that doesn’t mean that they’re going to subsist on a diet only of that, but if it’s done well, it’s hard for people not to see the value of it. And I was thinking in my mind that in order to further sell it it has to flow and the energy has to flow into something familiar.[68]

While Cantor Mutlu expressed to me that he does not incorporate moments like this in services regularly, and that he was encouraged by his clergy partners to include a piece of *chazzanut* at his installation in order to introduce that part of himself to the congregation,

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[67] Central Synagogue. “Installation of Cantor Mutlu: Kol Adonai,” YouTube Video, 3:24, January 30, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyHOswwGC-Q.

[68] Mutlu, interview.

I believe that we can use this model regardless of whether it is a bigger occasion or a regular Friday night. We simply have to be thoughtful about what piece of liturgy we wish to highlight and which setting will communicate the message we want to convey to the congregation about that text. It is less about using classical art song or *chazzanut* settings to showcase them, or to prevent them from being lost altogether, but about showing how these musical styles can be particularly effective in the right moment, dispelling any preconceived notions about their "performative" nature.

Cantor Jacob Mendelson has gone beyond simply incorporating *chazzanut* into one moment of a worship service, and has created "a monthly egalitarian minyan celebrating *chazzanut* in a modern, musical setting," that he has named "*Nachalah*." He includes a brief description on his website of his intention behind creating this minyan:

> Nachalah is dedicated to the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, the beautification of the commandment to pray. Cantor Mendelson respects and embraces new musical forms in our worship experience, but not at the expense of our sacred traditions. He hopes this minyan will begin to balance the scales between tradition and change. Musical instruments will be used, fusing ancient and modern *tefillah* (prayer), by using *nusach* (musical modality of the prayers) and *hazzanut*. Special guests will include renowned members of the cantorial, klezmer and jazz communities.[69]

A study of the music used to promote the minyan is instructive, in that it provides an audio example that encapsulates the philosophy of the prayer setting in sonic form. To advertise their services, *Nachalah* uses an audio clip of Cantor Mendelson singing Adolf Katchko's virtuosic "*Sham'ah Tismach Tzion*," with his son, Cantor Daniel Mendelson. The audio clip reveals the ways in which he approaches the weaving of solo or duet

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[69] Cantor Jack Mendelson. "Nachalah-Where Tradition Lives," Accessed January 2, 2019, https://cantorjackmendelson.com/nachalah-where-tradition-lives.

settings of *chazzanut* with congregational, contemporary tunes. Cantor Mendelson and his son carefully express the text through their singing, through the use of a variety of vocal colors and dynamics, and through classical and cantorial vocal techniques, all the while underscored by piano and flute. Like the previous example from Cantor Mutlu, Cantor Mendelson, too, segues directly from the end of the duet into a congregational setting; it is almost a release for the congregation after taking in the masterful artistry and expression from the two Mendelsons. The service provides an update to traditional, Orthodox services, adding the use of musical instruments, an element which contemporary, Reform synagogue attendees are likely used to hearing in services. Cantor Mendelson also plays around with the Orthodox model of the cantor singing *chazzanut* and the congregation responding with their individual *davening*, by following the *chazzanut* with the Reform practice of singing a tune communally. This art of weaving elements of the familiar with the less familiar creates something new from something old, all in the service of liturgy, prayer, and community, and leaves any sense of performance behind.

Beyond creating an alternative service that highlights traditional music, or at least finding ways to incorporate traditional settings into a more mainstream worship service, there are other ways in which cantors, especially classically trained cantors, can influence the inclusion of a variety of traditional or classical and contemporary styles. One way is producing new music for the Reform worship service. Cantors Benjie Ellen Schiller and Gerald Cohen are both cantors with backgrounds in classical composition and lend their knowledge of the cantorate as well as their musical training to the settings they produce.

For each of them, the beginning of the compositional process is influenced by their connection to their cantorate and to their Judaism; their understanding of liturgy informs the way in which they approach a text they wish to set to music. Cantor Schiller explains:

> What guides me the most is my process of communing with the words [...] I'm thinking about how the words sing...I'm thinking how the words scan and can be sung in a way that brings out the inherent syntax and phrasing and sound of the text, to enhance rather than fight these words and make [the meaning of the text] crystal clear... Biblical trope isn't meant to fight the words—it's meant to bring clarity and meaning to them![70]

Many of Cantor Schiller's compositions have an art song quality to them, so it is unsurprising when she states, "because I'm a vocalist, a singer, a cantor, I am most often writing for the voice [and] writing instrumental music to support the voice." She acknowledges: "if I am writing something for the liturgical context, I am certainly thinking in a utilitarian context—can people learn this tune? Will they be able to sing the words to this melody? How will the piece function within the flow of the liturgy?"[71] The process is very similar for Cantor Cohen:

> I choose a text and then I try to get into its soul...either by singing things, playing things, and usually what happens is I'll be trying different things and something strikes me, "oh, I've got something here—this is right." And then for me a lot of it is also that the text sets up its own structure as to how the piece is going to go. The text itself structures the piece and how I'm going to develop the musical ideas—such as having refrains, or how to build to a climax, or other elements like that.[72]

Cantor Schiller and Cantor Cohen are noteworthy not only for their compositional skills, but for their deep knowledge of, and respect for, the liturgy. These cantors use the text as their launching pad, rather than attempting to retrofit the prayer texts into a

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[70] Schiller, interview.
[71] Schiller, interview.
[72] Cohen, interview.

melody that they have already created. Cantors especially have the ability to compose liturgical settings not only from their knowledge of text, but from their knowledge of the history of Jewish music, of liturgical music trends, the modes, and of cantorial improvisation. Cantor Cohen explains this further: "when I compose something, I'm trying to get the energy of an improvisation, the immediacy of an improvisation, but then at the same time to notate it precisely, so that way I'm channeling the improvisation for whoever is going to perform it."[73] He credits this aspect of his composition to his ability to improvise *nusach* within the modes, which he does weekly in his worship services. He then calls upon his musical and compositional expertise to bolster the improvisatory melodies, remarking that, "writing a piano part as an accompaniment to a cantorial piece or art song, and getting it so that what you write really gets at what you're trying to do, [then] creating a piano texture that really supports the emotions and energy of what you're trying to get" are extremely important parts of the compositional process for him.[74]

The thought put into the creation of a fully-composed setting with instrumental accompaniment is what sets the works by these cantor-composers apart from other contemporary songwriters who may compose a melody and simply provide lead sheet accompaniment for the performer to realize. This, too, lends a sense of improvisation—the accompaniment may not be the same one time to the next—but unless the accompanist is fluent liturgically and truly masterful in their craft, there is an intentionality that often is left out. However, these thoughtfully, fully-composed works

[73] Cohen, interview.
[74] Cohen, interview.

often struggle to find their way into the contemporary worship service in their intended form. It is easy to shy away from an art song style setting for fear of presenting it in a "performative" way. However, it is important to consider the intentionality and spirituality that comes from the composer in the process of creating these works, and as the "performer," to be able to access some of what the composer put in. Cantor Schiller details more of her creative process of composing liturgical music:

> It's about being at one with the words, but I've realized over time that this aspect of getting inside the words is kind of like prayer for me. It's a spiritual practice. I take my thinking mind out of the picture; [...] how would the words sing to me as I pray them? How does a composer decide whether to repeat a given text or melody? It's not a random decision, but more of an emotional choice. Sometimes the compositional task is mathematical, you've got to fit a number of syllables into a phrase... When I'm writing a liturgical piece I'm always thinking about what the congregation might be able to understand and sing...I'm thinking about modes, time of year, how to express a moment in time…[75]

Cantors have the ability to discern the elements that went into crafting a liturgical setting, and the power to communicate them to the congregation in a way that helps people to understand them in some way as well. This means of communicating liturgical text set to music in a worship setting transcends the entire issue of performance versus prayer—if the composer was intentional in setting the text, and if our rendering of it is intentional in how we fuse the composer's interpretation with our own understanding, then its use in worship can be effective, no matter the genre. Composers like Cantor Schiller and Cantor Cohen set us up for this success in the thought they put into their compositions, relying on their cantorial studies to include elements of our tradition, while framing them for the contemporary ear in a musically sophisticated way.

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[75] Schiller, interview.

Shaping the Direction of Contemporary Reform Worship

Addressing the styles of liturgical settings that can enhance contemporary and future worship, Cantor Schiller shared with me her experience of where we've been and where we can go:

> What we had thirty years ago was a ton of [solo, art] music, yet there was a big, empty space between the choir and the cantor and the congregation—there was very little dialogue, very little participation...we didn't have any joining in... [it was] a very passive congregation. And now we've gone the other direction fully. I wish, but we're not there, we're not there...[thinks about my question of how we can incorporate a variety of genres into worship]...I think part of the answer comes from a piece like [Gerald Cohen's] *Adonai Roi*, a setting with richness and a variety of color, that portrays the text with sensitivity, yet is simple and can be done in a variety of ways,...we need to think of creating more of those pieces.[76]

There exists already a wealth of liturgical settings to draw from, many of which include the elements Cantor Schiller mentions. The task is to find them, cultivate them, and introduce them in ways that engage the contemporary congregation. In terms of musical selection, Cantor Mark Childs likens the role of the cantor to that of a curator:

> There is so much music written out there for any given piece of liturgy, and we have to be curators, and we have to decide for our congregation what's worthwhile and what's not. The congregation trusts our tastes to curate the repertoire. Your taste has to be in sync with your congregation's...you want to challenge them, you want to offer something that's going to help them grow, because if you just go into the comfort zone it'll burn them out, you out...you want to grow as a cantor and bring your congregation along in that growth, and give them the ability to discern what's good and what's not. Why does this piece work with this text, or why should it be retired forever.[77]

Of course, cantors can think beyond their role as curators to an opportunity as creators of new music that utilizes their vocal abilities and appeals to the congregation in a prayerful way. Not every cantor, however, is so fortunate to be adept in musical

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[76] Schiller, interview.
[77] Childs, interview.

composition, but they still have the ability to shape the way contemporary, Reform music continues during their time in the field. One way in which cantors can have their hand in the direction of synagogue music the way they envision it is to collaborate with songwriters and composers. Cantor Childs emphasizes the important role cantors can play by commissioning works, asserting that "there has to be money in Jewish music—cantors, specifically, or congregants, who will financially feed our composers and songwriters to continue what they're doing."[78] The power of music in the synagogue is so important; those in positions of leadership cannot settle on mediocrity because it is more affordable. Cantors will have to continue to empower talented composers and songwriters to hone their craft and contribute meaningful compositions to Jewish worship, and supporting them financially is a part of this. Cantor Daniel Singer sees the creation of new music as an integral part of preserving the cantorate: "I think [composing] would be [best] for the cantorate to be focused on now, [we can] create or commission new music, work with somebody who's talented and create new things that the future will look back on the cantorate and say, 'wow, the cantorate was being incredibly creative during this time' [...] We can chart the future."[79] Cantor Jennifer Bern Vogel expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "I hope that [cantors] can maintain and carry on elements of traditional *chazzanut* and Classical Reform standards, while embracing contemporary styles as we encourage our young composers, in an effort to educate our congregations with the full spectrum of our rich Jewish music heritage. As Cantors, one

[78] Childs, interview.
[79] Singer, interview.

of our greatest challenges is to open and willing to present all styles of music."[80] By partnering with talented composers and songwriters, cantors have the opportunity to transition traditional synagogue music from "performative" to prayerful, and to strike a balance between solo and communal moments in worship.

Cantor Rosalie Boxt was thinking about the potential for strong relationships between cantors and composers or songwriters when she piloted the *Kesher Shir* program in 2010. The basis of the relationship-building within the small group of cantors and songwriters was centered around text study, discussion about their visions for music and worship, as well as musical collaboration, without expectation of producing a final, musical product. When asked what contributions the participants made to one another in this collaborative effort, Cantor Boxt said that "the cantors brought huge volumes of knowledge that the singer-songwriters didn't have or didn't have access to" in terms of text and liturgy and the traditional modes, and that "the cantors in the room [...] learned a lot from the singer-songwriters about their process and about how much the singer-songwriters value content" in their compositions. While many of these songwriters were familiar with liturgical texts, Hebrew, or the Jewish modes, they simply had not studied them as in-depth as the cantors who had more education and training in these areas, which is why Cantor Boxt felt this collaboration and relationship building could yield significant possibilities. Cantor Boxt had selected participants in the first cohort that she knew would be open to the experience, which resulted in a group of what she described as musically "sophisticated people in the room," and explained that there was

[80] Bern Vogel, interview.

an openness "from cantors of learning from compositional experts." She told me that part of the impetus to start the project were some of the misconceptions she had heard from colleagues about prominent, Jewish singer-songwriters, mostly from people who didn't know them well. She said that there were "assum[ptions] that there was some sort of lack of integrity, [which] was patently untrue," and she pointed out that some of these songwriters like Dan Nichols and Josh Nelson, have backgrounds and training in classical vocal or instrumental performance. Additionally, Cantor Boxt remarked that certain singer-songwriters "have talked about why cantors are crucial." She goes on, "they are our biggest cheerleaders about why cantors are so necessary, and [these songwriters] can speak to their experiences on the road, and what's it's like to partner with a cantor who's extraordinary." She has observed that "there's a real healthy respect from the songwriting community, who sees the fullness of the landscape, and can see that there's plenty of room for all of us."[81]

Just like many congregants have misconceptions about classical, solo singing in worship, as I addressed in previous chapters, so, too, do many cantors have misconceptions about singer-songwriters and contemporary folk or pop settings of our liturgy. This shift in genre is linked to the shift from solo settings to primarily communal singing in worship, a trend that frequently leaves classically-trained cantors wondering whether their wealth of musical expertise can be utilized fully. However, the fact is that whether cantor or singer-songwriter, the continuity and involvement of the Jewish people is what matters most, and all involved can work together to achieve this through music.

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[81] Rosalie Boxt (cantor), interview with the author, December 13, 2018.

Cantors have the opportunity to empower emerging composers and singer-songwriters, working with them, studying with them, and sharing insight they have gained from their extensive and specialized education. Songwriters, on the other hand, often possess compositional and musical skills beyond many cantors' capabilities. In regard to the opportunity for commissioning new works for the synagogue and collaborative efforts between cantors and composers, Cantor Boxt believes that "cantors in general, regardless of whether [they] come from a songleading background or classical background, and whether it's through school or through experiences, have come to recognize that there's richness and opportunity if there's open-heartedness and relationships are established well."[82] Cantors have the ability to educate young songwriters about the liturgy and cantorial arts, elevating their compositions beyond a catchy tune, while being sensitive to the elements that a congregant might experience as "performative." A question we must consider is this: how can new compositions bring people in through contemporary modalities, yet still communicate thousands of years of our people's history and utilize the musical expertise of the cantor singing it? Is there a time when the line between communal singing and "performative" moments is blurred, and cantors can navigate seamlessly between the two within the worship service? What is most important today is working together to create thoughtful, meaningful synagogue music that allows both the contemporary, Jewish songwriter and the cantor to communicate their message and draw people into prayer and community, done so in a way that is not perceived as "performative," but conveyed with authenticity and integrity. This collaboration opens up

[82] Boxt, interview.

the possibilities of creating new music of depth and sophistication that appeals to both the musical skills and sensitivities of the cantor singing it, and to the tastes and needs of the congregation during worship.

The Power of the Contemporary Reform Cantor

In my interviews with cantors, I have observed an anxiety regarding the continued relevance of the cantorate, given the pull toward communal folk and contemporary music in the synagogue. Many of the cantors interviewed expressed their concerns about the dearth of solo and choral repertoire, and music that plays to the strengths of the classically trained cantor, but also their apprehension about worship turning into a completely communal, folk- or pop-based affair. These reflections are surely valuable and have been documented throughout this thesis, however, in order to gain a slightly different perspective that would enrich our understanding of the cantorate, I concluded the interviews by asking the cantors to express their hopes for the future of synagogue music and worship. Many were eager to highlight the unique skills that trained cantors can bring to this area, especially when considering the possibilities to collaborate with synagogue musicians and composers. It became clear to me that often these musical and vocal skills that cantors spend years developing in cantorial school are frequently downplayed because they can be misconstrued as "performative." But these skills are invaluable in being able to craft and offer more meaningful worship, beyond simply leading a communal, folk-style service—something someone who does not have any

cantorial training could do. Cantor Bob Abelson's hopes for the future specifically relate to this distinction:

> I hope that we maintain the cantorate. I know a lot of singers, they could sight read this stuff and memorize it in a minute, but when you come out of this school [HUC-JIR DFSSM], you're a cantor—it's a subtlety. And we've got to maintain that. And it's not going to be maintained by being songleaders, it's going to be maintained by having a unique take on text and on style. I mean the rabbi has the chance to speak and give his [views], you know, a cantor should [...] express what he means through music.[83]

Cantor Singer feels similarly that the education we receive as cantors is a powerful tool within worship and in being able to shape the direction of the Reform movement. His comment relates specifically to cantor-composers, but can be applied to cantors working with a songwriter on a commissioned work as well: "we can write music that has meaning that brings out the *nusach,* that brings out the words [...]—we have the capacity in the learning and knowledge, a basis of knowledge. We can be the people who are driving the movement, [our compositions] can show our value—the value of cantors—and we can be featured [through thoughtful, liturgical compositions]."[84]

Cantor Galit Dadoun Cohen approaches her vision for the future slightly differently:

> My hopes are not rooted in music—music is the vessel. My hope is that Judaism doesn't die. That's my hope. I hope that people will continue to feel engaged with Judaism and that people will feel a little of the burden that I feel so heavily. [...] I want Jews to care about one another and I want Jews to care about Judaism, and I want Jews to practice Judaism. What can I do musically to make that happen? I will do it.[85]

Cantor Mark Childs views music in synagogue life in a similar vein:

> My hope is that music will continue to be an entree for Jews to get involved, and that music will be seen as a vehicle for worship that is indispensable, that

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[83] Abelson, interview.
[84] Singer, interview.
[85] Dadoun Cohen, interview.

> congregations will continue to see music as one of many important tools to inspire people to fulfill their lives through the synagogue. And it really takes serious practitioners of that art [cantors] to make congregations realize how important music is to the life of the Jew and the Jewish community [...] and to show congregations just how rich our musical tradition is and continues to be.[86]

As cantors, we are tasked with thinking about a holistic view of music within Jewish life; we are serving many needs, many backgrounds and tastes. Cantors can try new things, revive old trends—and fuse the two—finding ways to balance the needs of the community with highlighting the unique contributions we can make as cantors, or specifically, classically trained cantors. Our depth of musical knowledge and skills do not have to be siloed or kept hidden, for fear of being perceived as "performative" by the congregation. We can find ways for the pendulum to swing back and settle somewhere in the middle—there is room for many different contributors to each bring their unique skill set to enhance worship and to draw people into Jewish life and prayer. I believe that just because the pendulum has been on one side for a time does not mean that classically trained cantors will no longer be relevant. But there must be an intentional effort to fuse the worship trends of the past and present for the sake of the continuation of Judaism and a rich, musical culture to go with it.

The Sacred Drama of Prayer

So is worship really so far removed from performance? This thesis has explored "performative" elements of the worship service, many of which often come with a negative connotation. What makes these moments or elements stick out in a service is

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[86] Childs, interview.

that they frequently contrast with the contemporary elements that have become mainstream in Reform worship, or they lack some sense of sincerity or authenticity as perceived by those observing or participating in the worship service. In order to downplay "performative" moments in worship, service-leaders and cantors would do well to consider crafting the worship service from a holistic point-of-view.

Rabbi, and professor of liturgy, Dr. Lawrence Hoffman often describes worship as a "sacred drama," a term that closely links elements of performance and prayer. He views our liturgical texts as more than simply a book to be studied, and even likens the *siddur* to a script of a play.[87] In an interview with *The New York Jewish Week* he explains further:

> I liken ritual to the Jewish sacred drama of the centuries; not the kind of drama you watch but a drama you're drawn into. In a synagogue or *seder* your *siddur* or *Haggadah* becomes your sacred script; these are your 'lines,' the ongoing saga of the Jewish people. If you suspend your disbelief and get into the story, it comes alive for you. [...] Ritual moves you through the poetry, the music, the other 'characters' around you—everything, because if it is done right it is delivered in exclamation points, not just commas and periods.[88]

In this sense, the worship service can be viewed as a spectacle similar to that of a stage production—all the elements working together to create an experience for those who choose to come and be a part of it. Rabbi Hoffman named these specific elements, as well as the importance music plays in worship, during his HUC-JIR Founders' Day Address in 2003:

> Jewish prayer, then, is a ritualized sacred drama, the drama of the Jewish people, authored by Jews throughout time, including ourselves, and performed with music, special dress, choreography, and words. For decades, the New York campus has been blessed with a School of Sacred Music. It has traditionally been seen as a separate entity unto itself, as if liturgy is one thing and music another.

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[87] Lecture (date)

[88] Jonathan Mark, "Rabbi Hoffman and the Sacred Dramas," *New York Jewish Week,* October 23, 2018, https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/rabbi-hoffman-and-the-sacred-dramas.

> All that is changing now. The School of Sacred Music has yet to fulfill its ultimate destiny, but as liturgy becomes identified as ritual, so that prayer is no longer seen as a book, our SSM will make music a full partner in the Jewish People's spiritual renaissance.[89]

The similarities to the elements that make up a stage production in his description of worship are quite apparent. There are visual elements—ritual objects, the ark, a raised platform or *bima*, floral arrangements, a projector screen—all setting the stage and tone for what is about to take place there. There is a cast of characters: the clergy, musicians, board members, a b'nai mitzvah child, their family. There are words and a score to which they are set, music which has the power to transform the words of the "script," changing the way the drama is played out one time to the next. The attire worn by the clergy or the congregation can signify what day or time of the year the drama is taking place. However, there is not an audience for this drama; the congregation is a part of it all, an interactive, no fourth wall, production. Rabbi Hoffman also stated in his address that "ritual is not just outward show, it is the way we demonstrate to ourselves and others what we care about most."[90] The sacred drama of worship is not something communities put on simply for the sake of entertainment or spectacle, although those elements do often draw people in initially. The sacred drama, however, is *for* the community, something in which they can play a part, or interpret the "script" or overarching themes for themselves. Clergy act as the directors and stage managers, making the decisions and shaping the way the drama plays out, but they do so for the sake of the community.

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[89] Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, "Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman, New York Address, 'Searching for a Second Course." Accessed January 6, 2019, http://huc.edu/news/2003/04/01/dr-lawrence-hoffman-new-york-address-searching-second-course

[90] Hebrew Union College, "Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman."

The dramatic elements in worship serve to create meaningful worship for the congregation, to elevate their prayer experience. Certain “performative” elements of worship do not have to be seen as negative, but clergy must be thoughtful and intentional about their incorporation into worship services. We can start by conceptualizing worship as though it is a production of sorts, considering all the elements involved that make it what it is; visual elements, spoken words, various musical genres, all working together with thought and purpose to communicate deeper meaning and to inspire the congregation in prayer. This “production” of worship cannot be “performed” through a facade, which inhibits true connection to the community; we must inject our own authenticity into “performative” moments and elements of worship, so that they don’t actually seem “performative” at all. Our connection to what we are doing and to our community, no matter what we sing or how we sing it, will enable our congregation to experience meaningful worship, and in turn, deepen their connection to prayer and to the community.

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