KOL ISHAH:

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S VOICES IN HAZZANUT

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Number of chapters: 4

Contribution of this thesis:
My thesis provides insights into the unique challenges women face when rendering hazzanut, and suggests solutions so that women can better adapt hazzanut to their voices. I believe that my thesis can contribute to broader conversations about the role of hazzanut in today's worship, the role of women within Jewish musical tradition, and the future of women in hazzanut.

Goal of the thesis:
My goal in writing this thesis was to demonstrate that women are the future of hazzanut, and are vital transmitters of this liturgical tradition. I sought to shed light on the authenticity, virtuosity, and sensitivity with which women can render this traditional material. I also hoped to expand the notions of current vocal pedagogy by illustrating the value of vocal cross-training in ensuring that cantors remain vocally healthy and artistically versatile.

How is it divided:
This thesis is divided into an introduction and four chapters. The first two chapters are more theoretical in nature and analyze hazzanut and vocal technique. The last two chapters are more practical and contain interviews and anecdotal reflections demonstrating how the theories put forth at the beginning of my thesis can be applied.

Materials used:
In order to write this thesis, I used a variety of books, master's theses and websites as well as personal interviews and recordings of voice lessons and coachings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: "Like *women*!"

"I'm not crying, I'm *davening*!" I chuckled as I read the boldly embroidered words on the front of an infant-sized bib. I was at a Judaica store on the Upper West Side, on the hunt for a new Artscroll *siddur* (prayer book). I couldn't resist: I grabbed both the siddur and the bib and approached the check-out counter. The man at the register and I shared a grin as he tallied up my items. Sure, the bib was adorable — but there was a deep truth underneath the schtick.

Davening is a Yiddish word, officially defined as the recitation of Jewish liturgical prayers (Schachter-Shalomi 2014, xv). It is a broad definition that can encompass both meditative chant and melodious song. However, the experience of listening to a cantor truly davening *hazzanut* — and doing it well — can at times feel like listening to that cantor's soul crying out in supplication. Hazzanut, a traditional, improvisational, and soulful style of liturgical chant, enchanted me from the moment I first heard it. I watched my cantor, Jacob Mendelson, pour his heart into his prayers every Saturday morning for as long as I can remember. He is a master of hazzanut, of baring his soul before the congregation and transcending the words on the page. And as his soul cried from the *bimah*, I cried as I listened.

For over a decade, Cantor Mendelson took me under his wing and taught me, little by little, to teach my soul to sing through hazzanut. When I was 13 years old and muddling through my first Yossele Rosenblatt recitative, I had little knowledge of the rich tradition and history of hazzanut. I certainly did not realize that with every *krekhtz* and

melisma, I was venturing further into a world that for years was deeply guarded by — and indeed, only studied by — men. What Cantor Mendelson did for me, and indeed for countless other young female singers throughout his career — was more than just Jewish musical mentorship. He opened doors to us that had previously been closed; he lit a pathway for an emerging female cantorate to embrace and perform hazzanut with distinct virtuosity and expression. In this thesis I will argue that, in the face of dwindling relevance of hazzanut in today's congregational worship, the women of the cantorate are becoming a key component in reenergizing the genre and unlocking its modern potential.

When I began my studies at the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, I was thrilled that so much of my coursework centered around *nusach* and hazzanut; I was able to nurture my love of hazzanut in classes, coachings, and comprehensive exams throughout my five years in the program. It was the first time I had heard such a wide variety of people and voices davening hazzanut, and I was enthralled to hear both professors and peers interpret this timeless repertoire so beautifully. I was particularly excited to witness so many women learning and singing this material, as I had only ever heard it sung by male cantors. As I progressed through the program, I began to wonder whether the gendered nature of the history, teaching and performance of hazzanut might be a barrier to engagement with it, for both cantors and congregants alike.

As a child of the Conservative movement, I was raised in a synagogue that exposed me to hazzanut week after week for many years. Sometimes I allowed myself to "pray with my ears": I sat back and let the sound of the prayers wash over me, feeling the emotion in every word. It was hardly a passive listening experience. Rather, it was a fully

active endeavor that enabled me to access a much deeper spiritual place using the vehicle of hazzanut as a guide for my inner prayers. Other times, I was an active participant in the project of participatory hazzanut. I loved the way Cantor Mendelson would empower us during services by teaching the whole congregation how to hum chords underneath his chanting. He assembled small choirs to join him on the bimah, and taught young congregants how to emulate his iconic style of davening. Luckily enough, I fell in love with it all. However, what I failed to grasp from within my synagogue echo chamber was that many congregants today feel alienated by this performative style of worship. Not having grown up in the Reform or the Jewish camping world, I didn't have a sense of the liturgical musical styles of the larger liberal Jewish community.

I began immersing myself in Reform Judaism later in life, and was then exposed to a new world of Jewish musical accessibility and liturgical repertoire. I suddenly understood the many levels of congregational participation within Jewish musical life — and, with a tinge of sadness, I began to understand why so many people struggle to connect with hazzanut during their worship. That said, I believe that there are opportunities during even the most contemporary prayer service for reflection and contemplation. A little hazzanut might be just the musical answer to such a situation.

I believe there are moments in our liturgy, particularly on the High Holy Days, that elicit majesty, awe, and transcendence. Hazzanut is ideal for these moments. I believe that cantors can use hazzanut in a participatory way, just as Cantor Mendelson did at my synagogue. And I believe that women cantors can bring a fresh interpretation, a nuanced delivery, and a transcendent quality to these glimmers of hazzanut. This kind of

expression could gently begin to reinstitute this style of worship within our communities.

While hazzanut remains a deep love of mine, I recognize that I might not be singing it very frequently in the context of my congregational career. However, that does not mean that I am giving up on hazzanut altogether. Rather, I am all the more passionate about its importance and inclusion in today's Jewish musical discourse. It is my hope that this thesis will provide a springboard for new conversations about the role of hazzanut in today's cantorate.

I have been a devoted student of Cantor Jack Mendelson for over a decade: first as a young congregant at Temple Israel Center of White Plains, and more recently as his student in the DFSSM. One of Cantor Mendelson's famous catch-phrases is the exclamation, "like men!" He has used this expression to stamp his proverbial seal of approval onto a particularly good Shabbat *Shacharit* (morning) service, and has also proclaimed it exuberantly as a rallying cry to a class of (co-ed) cantorial students about to launch into the *Hineni* (a cantorial recitative sung on the High Holy Days). Anecdotally, I heard this phrase from the time I was 13 years old. In my head, it registered as an affirmation that I was doing good work during our coachings. It wasn't until later in my own cantorial studies that I realized what the implications of this tongue-in-cheek catch-phrase truly were. To perform hazzanut well meant performing it "like men!"

I don't believe that Cantor Mendelson believes or espouses this — certainly not in a malicious way. Indeed, there are very few people who have empowered women to sing hazzanut the way Cantor Mendelson has for me. I have had similarly positive and empowering experiences with a number of male faculty members at the Debbie Friedman

School of Sacred Music who have passed on the tradition of hazzanut to the next generation of both male and female cantors, and do so with unending devotion. These teachers have opened the door for female cantors to take this tradition and run with it. I have been blessed with another cantorial mentor who has done just that.

Cantor Faith Steinsnyder is a world-renowned performer and teacher of hazzanut. Mentored by Cantor Mendelson, she developed a skill and passion for hazzanut that distinguishes her among her contemporaries. She lends a virtuosity to her craft that is on par with the great tenor cantors of the Golden Age of hazzanut. She does so in a breathtaking soprano *tessatura* (vocal range). To hear Cantor Steinsnyder chant hazzanut is to hear new life being given to the liturgy and to this music.

Cantor Steinsnyder has blazed a trail for women such as myself to perform hazzanut with the same attention to detail, integrity of sound, and clarity of tone as has been given to this music by preceding generations of male cantors. Can women achieve *true* authenticity in the face of hundreds of years of that very authenticity being determined only by men? I believe we must. I believe that if we reimagine how we teach and perform hazzanut, we can bring about a slow shift in the Jewish musical landscape. In order for this to happen, we need to teach and hear hazzanut differently. We need to recommit ourselves to understanding the nuances of male and female singing, and we need to start flooding the market with the sound of women singing hazzanut — like *women*. If we can distinguish the stylistic elements of hazzanut from the experience of hearing only a man chanting this repertoire, we will empower an emerging generation of female cantors to breathe new life into this ancient art form.

Chapter 1: The Story and Sound of Hazzanut

The story of Eastern European hazzanut in the American cantorate begins with the wave of Jews that immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe in the late 1800's. Eastern European *hazzanim* gained notoriety in synagogues across the United States for their virtuosic singing, dramatic embellishments, and distinctive liturgical interpretations. Most of these cantors had higher voices and impressive falsetto ranges, so most of the music they performed or composed was expressly written for their voice types. Over the years, these cantors gained celebrity status and a cult following, so much so that they secured for themselves recording contracts and even Hollywood movie roles (Shandler 2009, 14). The cantorate grew beyond the confines of the walls of the synagogue and found itself living inside Kosher bakeries, in concert halls, and in peoples' living rooms. Thus, the sound of hazzanut was cemented in the American Jewish memory. And within that collective cultural memory, the overall sound of hazzanut was inextricably linked with the quintessential sound of a male tenor voice.

The long-time exclusion of women from the aural life of hazzanut is due in large part to the *halachic* prohibition which states that "*Kol b'isha erva"*: the sound of a woman's voice is sexually suggestive. This dictum has been interpreted over the years and by many halachic authorities to extend to women's participation in both secular and religious musical endeavors. Throughout Jewish musical history, however, and certainly with the development of progressive Jewish theology and practice, the musical role for

women within Judaism expanded so much so that the Reform movement invested its first female cantor in the 1970's. Even before female cantorial students were coached in hazzanut, however, there were some courageous women who were singing hazzanut in a very different context, many decades earlier.

As hazzanut was flourishing throughout Jewish America, so was Yiddish theater. It was in this cultural context that we find notable examples of the work of the *Chazantes*: the very first women who sang and recorded hazzanut. In light of the kol b'isha erva prohibition, these women were able to successfully alter their voices to imitate men — and in most cases, their voices were entirely indistinguishable from those of their male contemporaries. In the case of one such Chazante, Perele Feig, her success in imitating male cantors further contributed to her fame and mystique:

> So accurate was [Feig]'s imitation of Cantor Zevulun Kwartin's vocal style and mannerisms on her 78 rpm recording of his famous composition, *Tiher Rabi Yishmoel Atsmo*, that listeners refused to believe it was not Kwartin himself recording under a pseudonym to increase sales. These non-believers filled every hall where Perele sang, in order to convince themselves otherwise" (Kobilinsky Poserow 2007).

While the Chazantes were not allowed to function as professional cantors, their popularity led to their frequently performing hazzanut both in concert and on recordings throughout the world. As a result of time and place, the Chazantes were required to sound like men in order to sing hazzanut. Today, however, women cantors are freely learning and performing hazzanut as an integral part of their cantorial curricula — in their own voice, yet not without some remaining gendered baggage.

In order to fully understand the gendered nature of the composition and performance of hazzanut, it is important to first define the various historical and musical elements that make hazzanut such a distinctive genre. At its core, hazzanut is based upon an ordered, time-specific system of scales and prayer modes called nusach. Nusach is, as Mark Slobin defines it, "the emblem of tradition, and…somehow specifies, stipulates, or situates a musical moment" (Slobin 2002, 260). This system of chanting liturgy in precise musical prayer modes derives from the established practice of chanting the Torah in fixed musical cantillation modes. In tractate *Megilah* 32a, the Talmud "calls for the Torah's melodious intonation, stating that failure to do so shows disregard for it and the great value of its laws" (Kalib 2002, 4). From this Talmudic dictum, it was later derived that there should also be fixed musical systems for chanting the liturgy, thus necessitating and leading to the emergence of nusach. About nusach, Abraham Joshua Heschel stated that "to pray without nusach is to forfeit the active participation of the community. People may not be able to pray, but they are all able to chant" (Heschel 1966, 246-247).

Thus, nusach forms the backbone of the prayer service — providing both worshippers and prayer leaders with a rubric with which to order and express their prayers. Hazzanut, then, is the art of highly improvised, virtuosic, ornamented prayer chanting, always in accordance with and grounded in the nusach. It is not meant to detract from the original text or liturgy. Rather, it is meant to elevate it: "Chazzonus may be defined as the technique and art which serves to beautify, enhance or expand the rendition of a nusach, as well as to deepen its mood through variation, embellishment and development of its component motives" (Kalib 2002, 111). Thus, nusach and hazzanut go

hand in hand, and understanding their close relationship is central to understanding hazzanut as it functions in the context of worship.

The improvisational nature of davening hazzanut is rooted in the tradition of Eastern European synagogue music of the late 17th century, as the more reserved Western European style of prayer slowly gave way to individually chanted, more emotionally unrestrained recitation (Kalib 2002, 30). This method of recitation relies on a prayer leader's ability to freely improvise while remaining ever aware of the foundations upon which the improvisations rest:

> A pious Jew, inspired by a sacred text he is about to intone, perceives its specific mood and instinctively draws upon motives of the chant which have come down to him as traditional. Momentary inspiration moves him to create mosaic-motivic musical structures extemporaneously… and as the spirit moves him, he may place stress, embellish or combine motives on individual words or syllables which, within the flow of his chant, impress him as requiring special emphasis (ibid, 60).

Thus, while adherence to nusach is still of the utmost importance in the context of congregational worship, the piety of a prayer leader's improvisation becomes increasingly prized. This style of improvised davening grants the prayer leader unprecedented agency and creativity within the liturgical and modal confines in which he or she operates. Davening hazzanut is imbued with added significance because it enables the prayer leader to participate in one of the most sacred Jewish practices there is: text commentary. Whereas some scholarly commentary is codified in the Talmud, there is musical commentary being codified within the walls of the synagogue every single day through the practice of davening hazzanut:

> This, then, is the context of the hazzan's work; sacred music is yet another form of commentary, of interpretation and reinterpretation of the ever-present matrix a sacred text provides. The hazzan's approach is more demanding than that of the average member of the Jewish community, for his is a chosen voice, evaluated on the basis of aesthetic, rather than intellectual or everyday norms. He is expected to improvise on the spot, so as to give ever-fresh meaning to old words. (Slobin 2002, 12)

Hazzanut, then, is more than just reciting the prayers with flourish and acuity. It requires a familiarity with the liturgy, an advanced mastery of one's vocal instrument, and a high level of creativity. It is both an art and a science: a delicate balance between innovative license and fixed structure. Those who truly master hazzanut are able to strike that balance beautifully, and they do so anew every time they open up a prayer book.

The ability to improvise personal expressions of liturgy is a defining characteristic not only of hazzanut itself but also of the prayer leaders themselves. Thus, each shaliach tzibbur davened with his own distinct style of hazzanut, employing techniques in his recitation(s) that became a personal musical trademark:

> There were those of them who created selections in fixed forms, in tunes; but for the most part they founded their strength upon their free spontaneous song, improvised while conducting the service. As a result of the latter practice, certain motives and melodic curves, modulations and coloratura passages and embellishments within given modes became distinctive of their chant. And thus an individual style was created, crystallized during a lifelong improvisatory singing. (Idelsohn 2013, 296-297)

Some of the greatest performers of hazzanut, fluent in the art of liturgical improvisation, rose to prominence as a result of the beauty and fervor of their particular brand of spontaneous davening. This fame brought with it an immense pressure to perform, as well as a constant fear of disappointing the worshippers who came to witness these

cantors in action. Zavel Kwartin (1874-1953), one of the hazzanut "greats" of his generation, reflected that:

> …this also had a reciprocal effect on the hazzan himself, who felt a terrible responsibility to his listeners… In all my more than fifty years of practice as hazzan, I never stopped, day and night, to think, to improvise, to study, and to immerse myself in the inexhaustible source of melody. I tried to pour myself into every word of the prayers, to interpret them better to listeners. (Slobin 2002, 16)

Kwartin's deep feeling of responsibility to the congregants who came to hear him pray is a remarkable testament both to how seriously Kwartin took his role, as well as to how deeply his admirers respected his talents. Another cantor, Samuel Vigoda (1893-1990), expresses similar sentiments to Kwartin in his account of one particularly successful improvisatory davening experience in Zurich, Switzerland:

> At the Shir hamalos before Borchu I let myself go; I poured out my heart. Somehow it came out so that people couldn't get over it. They never heard such a Shir hamalos… it was improvised, it wasn't a set composition… After Rosh Hashana, [people who missed it] said, 'You must sing that Shir hamalos.' I didn't know what I said; I didn't remember how I did it… So what to do? I sat down and composed a Shir hamalos… and when I was through… they were very disappointed… Sometimes the improvised is much better than the one which is set. (ibid, 81)

As both Kwartin and Vigoda articulated, the element that made both listening to and davening hazzanut so exciting was the fresh energy and raw intensity of spontaneously improvised prayer. But just as some of Jewish liturgy began spontaneously and was later codified, so too were the spur-of-the-moment improvised musical hallmarks of hazzanut eventually preserved. And while each shaliach tzibbur offered his individual style of davening, there began to emerge stylistic patterns that have become emblematic of the hazzanut we continue to perform, hear, and teach today.

Earlier I described my first experiences of listening to Cantor Jack Mendelson davening hazzanut as though I were hearing his soul crying out to God. As I listened to him, I immediately wanted to learn how to daven the way he did. Over more than a decade of private study, I learned specific vocal skills and tricks that when used at specific points in a *recitative*, achieve an ethereal effect. In any given piece of hazzanut, the text might demand from the hazzan certain peaks and valleys of emotion and expression. These interpretive ideas are reflected through the cantor's particular vocal choices:

> At times a phrase might be rendered on a reciting tone; at other times, phrases could be syllabic, and at others melismatic to varying extents. At the advanced level, it often took on the effect of an inspired monologue by the *chazz'n* to the Almighty, described as *zogachtz* (from the Yiddish word, *zog'n*, which means to tell or speak). As a rule, it projected a mood of awe and devotion, piety and reverence, as well as impassioned appeal, and in texts of laudation or exaltation, dignity and majesty. The most effective renditions of this level of chazzonus typically resulted in longer recitatives, and the chazz'n's inspiration and imagination often led to moments of soaring heights of fantasy… It spoke directly to the heart of Eastern European Jew, rendering cogent expression to his prayers for the avoidance of his innermost fears, and at the same time fanned his hopes for messianic redemption, made seemingly possible — perhaps even imminent — through the perceived height of spiritual elevation. (Kalib 2002, 112)

Here Kalib describes just some of the many musical elements that distinguish the recitation of hazzanut from other types of sung prayer: reciting tones (singing many words on the same note), syllabic phrases (matching each syllable of text to its own note), and melismas (singing many notes across a single syllable). These compositional choices contribute to the transcendent vocal and emotional atmosphere that hazzanut can evoke. They also require a specific, professionalized caliber of skill and technique in order to execute them authentically, as Irene Heskes points out:

> One salient quality which had infused those once-upon-a-time "golden age" cantorial performances was that of melody illuminating words, indeed transcending them. There was vocal stamina and control, a flexibility of intonation, but with an absolute concentration upon textual content. The most dramatic of verses were sung with the intensity of prayer chant. It was the cantor's responsibility to guide and inspire spirituality, interpret, and create an aura of piety. The cantorial role was valid as the means to those ends. (Heskes 1991, 10)

How does one begin to learn these complex vocal techniques? To my knowledge, at the time of this writing, there exists no comprehensive vocal workbook or textbook that clearly instructs a singer exactly how to daven hazzanut. Hazzanut, like so many other aspects of Jewish faith and ritual, is predominantly passed down through the chain of oral tradition. Indeed, my foray into the world of hazzanut began the moment that Cantor Jack Mendelson called me into his office and instructed: "Sing after me…!" We would sit and sing in a repetitive way, call-and-response, for hours until I had confidently mastered the material enough to sing it on my own. I was pleasantly surprised in my third year of cantorial school at the DFSSM when I walked into Cantor Mendelson's High Holy Day traditional nusach course to find that he taught the class the exact same way he had taught me so many years ago in his study: in a call-and-response, sing-after-me manner. Another DFSSM faculty member, Cantor Israel Goldstein, conducts his *Shalosh Regalim* (Three Festivals) traditional nusach class in a similar way: the teacher models, and the students copy. About these traditional courses in hazzanut, Judah Cohen writes:

> Basic melodic content for these courses lay in printed compilations and photocopied handouts. Instructors, however, supplemented students' book learning with extensive stylistic modeling in class, including demonstrations of timbral colors, systems of acceleration and deceleration, hints for emphasizing important words, congregational chordal support (frequently hummed in the background), and suggestions for improvisation. (Cohen 2009, 98)

Of particular note in the context of this project is that of the four faculty members currently teaching traditional repertoire courses at the DFSSM, three are men and only one is a woman. Consequently, the current cadre of cantorial students — most of whom are women — are inheriting the tradition of hazzanut predominantly from male cantors.

One such male cantor, Noah Schall, is no longer teaching at the DFSSM. However, when serving on the faculty, he was one of the foremost instructors and arrangers of nusach and hazzanut in the country. In her 2002 Master's thesis, "Women in the Chain of Traditional Hazzanut: Building on the Work of Alter, Ganchoff, Goldstein, Schall", Cantor Galina Paliy recalls an interview with Cantor Schall in which he outlines the steps cantorial students must take in order to fully understand hazzanut and its style:

> (1) listen to the famous cantors of the Golden Age;
> (2) learn how to phrase the music;
> (3) learn the patterns that are representative of Eastern European hazzanut (through the written music);
> (4) study the intimate relationship between the words of prayer, and indeed the meaning of the text as a whole, and the music of their expression;
> (5) and learn the above through personal contact, one on one, teacher to student. (Paliy 2002, 63)

This immersive rubric for learning hazzanut is especially important and effective for cantorial students who grew up in Reform synagogues and summer camps, and who rarely, if ever, heard hazzanut rendered in worship services (with the exception of a few times a year, most likely during the High Holy Days). Paliy herself reflects on hers and others' experiences encountering hazzanut for the first time upon entering the DFSSM:

> My interviews with female students of HUC reveal the progress in their internalization of the traditional hazzanut through their years of study at HUC. I myself can testify to this internalization. Some of these women, including myself, came to HUC…without any knowledge of Eastern European hazzanut. After deep and hard work during four years they "fall in love" with this style and would like to continue this tradition in the future. This tendency is evidenced in cantorial recitals given at the HUC. Almost every female performer includes traditional pieces in her program. (ibid, 61)

I myself can attest to having witnessed similar dynamics among many of my cantorial classmates, especially other female students, during my years of study at the DFSSM. I was privileged to enter this program with hazzanut already "in my *kishkes*" — in my gut. Because I had grown up hearing this style of prayer for so many years, it made learning the material relatively easy. But as Cantor Schall articulated: in order to truly understand and learn hazzanut, the first step is to listen to it performed and to immerse oneself in those recordings.

I want women to continue to fall in love with hazzanut the way that I did, and certainly the way that Paliy describes in her explorations of women in the process of learning traditional hazzanut. I believe that especially within the DFSSM community, we have a crucial role to play in maintaining the beauty, virtuosity, and relevance of this treasured genre. In the next few chapters, I will explore how we can continually assure the future of women perpetuating the chain of traditional hazzanut through accomplishing three main objectives:

(a) gaining a more nuanced understanding of the physiological differences between male and female voices with regard to the teaching and performance of hazzanut;

(b) understanding the unique female vocal adjustments necessary to ensure both the singer's vocal health and hazzanut's sonic authenticity; and

(c) making adjustments to the repertoire itself, its performance, and its instrumentation to better support and accommodate the women who sing it.

Chapter 2: Closing the Vocal Gender Gap

I am extremely grateful that I am not the first (and hopefully not the last) woman to embark on an exploration of the question of women in hazzanut. In particular, I am inspired by the groundbreaking work done by Pamela Kordan in her 1990 HUC-JIR Master's thesis, entitled "*Kol Chazanit*: Alternatives for Women Cantors to the Vocal Requirements and Expression of Traditional Chazanut". In it, Kordan outlines what she perceives are the physiological differences in male and female voices as they relate to some of the specific expressions that are emblematic of hazzanut performance. My work stands on the foundation of Kordan's, which I will now briefly summarize. Following this, I will expand on her work to include an exploration of the concept of "vocal cross-training". I will define this phenomenon and discuss how it can potentially serve as a crucial tool, both for closing the vocal "gender gap" and for enabling women to healthily perform hazzanut.

Before launching into Kordan's findings, it is important to first define some terms — the most important among them being *passagio*:

> Both male and female voices have a pitch range called the *zona di passággio*, often referred to as the "break." This pitch range, which varies from singer to singer, is the range in which the singer must shift back and forth between vocal registers to continue producing sound. Some singers describe it as the shift between the "chest voice" and the "head voice," and *bel canto* singers are trained to maintain an even timbre when making this shift, a process called "covering" in various schools of classical Western singing. (Adelstein 2013, 154)

The passagio is an extremely important consideration in any discussion of vocal arrangement or performance. Hazzanut is no exception to this rule — especially given its male-dominated history. Bearing this in mind, we now turn to Kordan's research which first led her to the discovery that the main difference between male and female voices is simply a matter of size:

> In general, the male singer has thicker vocal cords from top to bottom than the female singer; a man also has a naturally greater vital breath capacity than a woman. For example, a man's vocal cords will be thicker than a woman's of the same voice weight and category: i.e. lyric tenor vs. lyric soprano or dramatic tenor vs. dramatic soprano. Because the vocal cords are thicker, the male singer has to apply more sub-glottic pressure to cause the vocal cords to vibrate. Therefore a male singer singing a specific pitch in the passagio (e-flat", e", f" and f#) is producing a steady stream of breath pressure that is greater than the stream of breath pressure produced by a female singer when singing the same pitch in the passagio. Because a more intense pressure is already established in this tessitura of the voice of the male singer, it is easier for him to repeat syllables on a particular pitch in this tessitura… It is also noted that the back of the throat of the female singer is much more open than the male singer's throat as she passes through the passagio into the head register and therefore, must force an artificial closure of that throat position in order to produce clear, repeated diction in that tessitura, distorting the healthy, natural vocal mechanism and producing an unpleasant or unpleasing sound. (Kordan 1990, 32-33)

As I stated previously, repeating syllables on a particular pitch is one of the stylistic hallmarks of the composition and performance of traditional hazzanut. Already we see evidence that, due to the physiological differences between the male and female voice, the stylistic and vocal demands of hazzanut are easier for men than for women to sing.

In her above definition of passagio, Rachel Adelstein mentions a process called "covering" by which singers maintain evenness of tone when shifting from one voice register to the next. She notes that classically-trained singers are specifically taught to

make this shift smoothly. As Kordan notes, however, “covering” is a naturally-occurring phenomenon in male voices, but does not occur naturally in the female voice:

> …the male singer has the natural acoustical phenomenon called the “covered tone” which occurs as the male voice passes through the passagio, an effect that a female singer does not have. The female voice passes, if properly produced, from the middle register to the head register with much less of an aural effect, and with less subglottic pressure. In order to speak in that tessitura the female singer must create additional pressure against her vocal cords, often producing a harsh, white or open quality which can sound strained and unnatural to the listener. (ibid, 33)

Kordan’s research confirms what so many women have found to be true in practice: when women try to produce sound in a similar manner to men, it can potentially sound strained, unnatural, or unpleasant. This becomes all the more relevant when discussing hazzanut, which was primarily written for men who are high-voiced tenors. Hazzanut was composed in a vocal range that, if sung exactly at pitch, will only sound pleasing to the listener when sung by tenors. Women who attempt to sing in such a range do not sound quite as pleasant:

> When a man is singing high notes full voice, if he relaxes his diaphragmatic lean, or loses his support for a second, he does what we call cracking. Cracking is breaking from full voice back to an unsupported sound. An unsupported sound where the breath releases and passes through the vocal cords without any resistance of any kind in the support system produces what we call the *falsetto*. A falsetto is simply the fluttering of the edges of the vocal cords without any equalization process or resistance in the support system at all. If a woman loses, for a moment, her breath lean, a variety of things can happen because the female voice is, by nature, produced by singing with more of the edges of the vocal cords vibrating, rather than, as in the male voice, more pressure against a larger area of the vocal cords. If she cracks, she can produce a shrill, thin sound, she might even shriek, or her voice will stop singing altogether. In the male voice, however, if he cracks he will crack into a falsetto and he will continue singing in the falsetto function. (ibid, 36)

A basic understanding of male vocal function here is crucial not only to understanding vocal performance in general, but also to understanding hazzanut as a genre. Hazzanut is so tailored to the tenor tessitura that even the act of the voice "cracking" into its *falsetto* range is in and of itself a vocal technique that has become emblematic of the sound of hazzanut. In cantorial parlance, this "cracking" is known as a *krekhtz,* or "sob". Kordan provides technical language to describe these early soul-crying sounds that so enchanted me when I was a young congregant first listening to hazzanut at synagogue:

> This register break that occurs when a man shifts from the falsetto into the normal or modal register creates the effect that we call the "krechtz" or "sob". This abrupt and very audible vocal effect, used effectively and extensively by the great Ashkenazic Cantors and equally by many of the great Italian opera singers of the same historical period, including Enrico Caruso and Benjamino Gigli, is not a vocal effect that works successfully either functionally or expressively, in the female voice… A woman has to set up an artificial or unnatural breath pressure condition to approximate this dramatic shift downward from the head register into the middle register, for a "sob" effect. (ibid, 39)

When I was first learning how to achieve the "sob" effect that Kordan describes here, I was told that it was akin to "yodeling": a quick drop from head register down to middle range, or sometimes even down to chest voice. It is worth mentioning here that when I began my early vocal studies with Cantor Mendelson, it was well before I had pursued any classical vocal training. This, I believe, actually worked to my benefit. I quickly became comfortable with a flexibility of voice, a quickness of register shift, and a slight nasality in tone that worked very well when imitating styles of hazzanut I was studying. As Kordan posits, however, these qualities run counter to much of what classical vocalists are taught.. In order for operatically-trained singers to imitate these unique vocal qualities, they sometimes find themselves "unlearning" the things they had spent years

cultivating in Western classical vocal study. This, too, contributes to the particular difficulties women may encounter with this material.

With regard to the use of women's voices, Kordan and I are split in opinion:

> Women do not, however, sing in the chest voice as a general rule, because the expressive possibilities in that part of the female voice are extremely limited. Even in Broadway singing, where "belting" is a commonly used singing technique for women, the majority of the expressive vocal writing for the female voice is still found in the head voice. (ibid, 39-40)

It is at this point that my thesis fundamentally differs from Kordan's. I believe that in order for women to sing Jewish music well as a whole — not just hazzanut, but especially hazzanut — they need to develop a healthy level of comfort and technique singing in their lower and middle ranges, as well as in a more "Broadway", belting style. For cantorial singing in general, this has two benefits: congregational accessibility of range, and overall flexibility of vocal style. With regard to singing hazzanut, vocal flexibility is key toward not only achieving authenticity in sound, but also accessibility of sound. This is where vocal cross-training comes into the picture.

I first encountered vocal cross-training during my studies with Jeffrie Allen, a vocal coach in New York City. At the time of this writing, Allen currently teaches about a quarter of the current cohort of cantorial students on the HUC New York campus (and even some faculty). Jeffrie has garnered a strong following as a result of the "total vocal makeovers" he has achieved in his students in just a short time. I can attest that within a few months of weekly lessons, I was using my voice with greater skill, health, and understanding than ever before. The feedback I have received from cantorial faculty throughout my vocal studies continuously affirms the positive impact of Jeffrie's

instruction on my overall progress. The most valuable learning I have gleaned in my lessons has been how to successfully and healthily use my voice to navigate flexibly between among registers and styles in accordance with the material I am singing or the specific sound I am trying to create. The technical term for this skill is called vocal cross-training.

Cross-training is defined as "exercising muscles differently than how they are normally used in order to promote optimal performance levels and mitigate against injuries" (Jones 2017). Any singer will readily observe that singing is truly a full-body workout. As with any workout, singing requires that great attention be paid to warming up, using proper form and technique in order to avoid injury, and doing everything possible to stay in good health and take care of one's body (or, in this case, instrument). The athleticism of singing is rooted in a number of factors such as diaphragmatic breath control, slight engagement of the lower abdominal muscles, and strengthening one's overall posture. However, vocal cross-training specifically focuses on exercising two main muscles of the larynx: the thyroarytenoids and the cricothyroids (Jones 2017), which I will henceforth refer to as the TA and CT muscles, respectively. These muscles play a large part in one's ability to sing within and move between different registers:

> When singing in TA-muscle dominant production (sometimes called 'chest register', 'belt', or 'chest-mix'), the vocal folds become thick and short, the full fold length vibrates, and they remain firmly touching for a longer period of time. When singing in CT-muscle dominant production (sometimes called 'head register', 'head-mix', or 'falsetto' for men), the vocal folds become thin and stretched, only the upper fold edges vibrate, and they remain touching for a shorter period of time. (ibid)

Understanding how these two laryngeal muscles relate to vocal register and production has been crucial in my own understanding of my instrument. In my voice lessons, I have learned to become aware of and physically manipulate the position of my larynx in order to flexibly and smoothly move through my vocal registers. Mastering this technique has improved my tone. When a singer's tone is perceived as unpleasant or not matching a certain musical style or composition, the cause could be a lack of awareness of one's vocal registers. Therefore, "it makes sense to cross-train registers to avoid imbalance between head register (CT dominant) and chest register (TA dominant), as this could ultimately lead to technical problems and decreased vocal flexibility… Cross-training the body and voice is an important component not only for vocal fitness, but also for marketability" (Leborgne 2014, 249).

Leborgne's point about marketability is of particular note for cantorial students. In order to meet a variety of musical needs within any given synagogue, cantors need to be vocally flexible. Those with a classical background frequently encounter problems when singing more contemporary material during worship, teaching children's songs in classroom settings, or accompanying themselves on guitar. Conversely, singers such as myself with a more folk-pop contemporary background are required to cultivate a more classical-sounding, operatic tone in order to accommodate virtuosic repertoire, sing a wider range of liturgical material, and ensure overall vocal health and stamina. Joyce Rosenzweig, Artist-in-Residence at the DFSSM, agrees that vocal versatility is crucial for today's cantorial students. She observes:

> Some of the best singers in the world have vocal flexibility! Take Dawn Upshaw, for example. She can sing an art song and make you weep and be so intimate and expressive. She can sing opera. She can sing blues, jazz, whatever. Folk stuff. She's done it all. Why can't you have a technique that is versatile? It doesn't have to be so rigid. Don't just produce one type of sound. It's all music. It's all exciting. It's like being an actor: you live in personas. You take on roles. You're responding to texts and prayer in all these different musical forms. And today more than any time, cantors are called upon to wear all these different hats and have mastery over many forms. And it's essential to have technique that is secure, yet flexible enough to respond and make excitement and deep feeling happen in different styles. Ultimately, it's all the same. Yes, there's little differences. but the more you understand music, phrasing, coloring of text… the more you realize that it's all the same. (Rosenzweig 2018)

In an age in which cantors are expected to be adept at multiple styles of singing, it is all the more important to cultivate a flexibility of vocal delivery. Vocal cross-training is what enables singers to do so in a healthy, technically sound manner. This vocal flexibility is accomplished primarily by manipulating the larynx:

> Since we know that classically trained singers, in order to produce a strong, full, self-amplified tone, tend to lower the larynx, widen the pharynx (the "open throat"), open the mouth, and lift the soft palate when they sing, cross training here would mean slightly raising the larynx, narrowing the pharynx and mouth opening, and allowing access to the nasopharynx by lowering the soft palate. The resultant sound would be more [contemporary] in nature-a stronger [bright] than [dark], twangy, and possessing a wide range of harmonics. On the other hand, [contemporary singers] would cross train by producing more classical-like resonance. (Edwin 2008)

When I first engaged in vocal cross-training, I was fearful that I would sound as though I were trying to "sound like someone I'm not". Singing with a lowered larynx and using a warmer, more "operatic" tone truly felt like using a muscle I never knew I possessed. It took a long time for me to embrace these new sounds as being part of my voice, as opposed to my sense that I sounded like a separate singer altogether. However, after

working these new muscles continuously and gaining more comfort in the versatility of my voice, I now feel like I can confidently approach any style of music and make it my own. Indeed, my voice teacher often quotes his own voice teacher, Aaron Hagan, as saying: “Once you know what you’re doing, you can do anything you want!”

How might vocal cross-training address the issues inherent when women sing traditional hazzanut? Robert Edwin argues that engaging fully in vocal cross-training can entirely eliminate the concept of gendered singing altogether. He explains:

> …many historic voice training traditions encourage separate techniques for males and females that may be based more on gender and cultural bias than on good voice pedagogy. If the pedagogic point is to have men singing "like men" (low) and women singing "like women" (high), then only voice techniques that reinforce such a mind set may be employed (i.e., no falsetto for men and no chest voice for women). So, what happens to one's voice pedagogy if one tries cross training exercises while simultaneously deleting pre-scientific, gender biased, culturally prejudiced, and fairly confusing terminology; and replacing it with anatomic, physiologic, and acoustic language that more accurately describes the assorted functions of the singing system? (ibid)

In order to answer his own question, Edwin assembled a master class at a gathering of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. He demonstrated in real-time how the application of vocal cross-training can completely shift the way we approach singing — not only its instruction, but also its performance. He describes his approach:

> Let's try a grand and simplistic experiment today! Let's see if we can make a multitude of vocalized sounds — cross training, if you will — without putting traditional labels on those sounds. For example, if I start speaking in my upper register or falsetto voice [which I did], you might query why I am speaking 'like a woman'. If I speak or sing in that voice exclusively, you might label me a female impersonator or perhaps a countertenor. You may even go so far as to question my sexual orientation. Conversely, if a woman speaks or sings assertively in her lower register or chest voice, she might be accused of 'sounding like a man’. Questions of voice often lead to questions of gender identity, and in our still

> strongly tribal and rigid society, certain pejoratives may, unfortunately, come too quickly to the tongue. So, let's all vocalize now with the mind set that we are engaging muscles which produce sounds, muscles that are shared by both males and females. (ibid)

At the outset, Edwin establishes an equality of sound and instrument among the men and women in the class. By setting a tone of communal vocalization without gendered categorizations, he pares the exercise down to exactly what it is on face value: a group of humans using exactly the same muscles to produce exactly the same sounds. He continues:

> To begin, we'll do a triad or three in our CT or cricothyroid-dominant muscle group. Men, the issue is not that you will be 'sounding like women', but rather that you will be exercising an often ignored part of your voice. The late, great voice pedagogue, Oren Brown, said it is especially critical for men to use the falsetto for ongoing vocal health. I'll start the triads at middle C (C^sub 4^). Use your CT-dominant vocal fold posture and, with the proper frame of mind, there will be nothing 'false' about the sounds you musical men are making with the musical women. As we sing, you should notice the sounds from the men and women will be quite similar. [We sing and it is true.] Now, let's just have the men sing. Then, let’s just hear the women. Can you see and hear how vocal gender can blur? Once again, let's all sing together. (ibid)

By blurring the “vocal gender” of the group, Edwin demonstrates that the quality of the sound being created by the group is exactly the same. The gendered labels and sonic categories are manmade, and are entirely separate entities from the sound itself. In a way, Edwin achieves here what R. Murray Shafer calls a “schizophonic phenomenon”: the experience of separating a sound from its original source (Shandler 2009, 17).

This concept of separating a sound from its original source is at the heart of my argument that women can lend sonic authenticity to our interpretations of traditional hazzanut. It is not so much that women are attempting to sound “like men”. Rather, we

are using exactly the same muscles to create exactly the same sounds in order to achieve the same vocal effects. The authenticity, therefore, should be derived from within the sounds themselves, rather than from the owner of the body making those sounds. Joyce Rosenzweig put it best when she asserted that “the art of hazzanut is not contingent upon whether or not men are singing it!” (Rosenzweig, 2018)

I believe that the lessons that can be gleaned from Edwin’s vocal master class would be particularly useful in debunking the deep-seated theory that the vocal and aural authenticity of hazzanut lies solely within the man’s voice. As Edwin emphasizes, it is not about the gender of the singer, but rather it is about the physical processes through which a genderless sound is produced:

> The tonal difference between male and female, hopefully, will be blurred. This is the reality of genderless listening to vocal fold and resonance activity. Women, the issue is not that you are sounding 'like men'. Rather, it is that you are exercising an often underused part of your voice. You are utilizing proactively your TA vocal fold muscles, which act in concert with and in opposition to your CT vocal fold muscles, much like your biceps and triceps work to allow for full arm motion. (Edwin 2008)

When it comes to hazzanut, the value of “genderless listening” can not be overstated, especially in light of a growing female cantorate who will be continually exposed to this genre and learning how to perform it.

The benefit of vocal cross-training is not only for the health and versatility of the singer, but also for the listener. Our congregants have been conditioned to associate the sound of hazzanut with the male voices who have performed it. As Rachel Adelstein observes: “No matter how skilled a particular female cantor may be at hazzanut, she is still competing against nearly a century of accumulated cultural memory of male

voices” (Adelstein 2013, 157). It would be extremely powerful for the Jewish musical life of our community were an emerging female cantorate able to reshape how we hear hazzanut: not as a masculine sound, but rather as a sound that *used to* be masculine but is now multi vocal. In our teaching and performance of hazzanut, vocal cross-training is one step toward making that dream a reality.

Chapter 3: From Theory to Practice

As the premier cantorial training institution in America, the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music at HUC-JIR sets the gold standard for the education and training of today's progressive cantors. In continuing to train students in the art of hazzanut, the DFSSM makes a strong statement that chanting hazzanut is not only an essential skill in every cantor's toolbox, but that it is also an important skill for cantors to cultivate, regardless of gender. Within the DFSSM, women have been immersed in hazzanut and required to reckon with this very gendered genre as a central part of their cantorial school experience:

> Although the school held a view of chazanut as a general, ungendered liturgical expression of Judaism, women actively pointed out that much of it had been written by men, for male voices. Women, with only recent access to the tradition, needed to effect a method of "translation" to adapt chazanut for their own voices. They addressed this situation by distinguishing between the essential nature of the sung material and the characteristics of the singer, thus underlining the notion of the cantor as "messenger" of a broadly conceived Jewish musical sound, and consequently providing a space for change within a tightly held tradition. (Cohen 2009, 202)

The DFSSM, therefore, has also become the Jewish music world's foremost laboratory in adapting hazzanut to an emerging female cantorate. As Judah Cohen mentions in his book, "*The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor: Musical Authority, Cultural Investment*", this adaptation happens quite frequently. Many female cantorial students encounter and adapt to the problems posed while learning hazzanut as a matter of daily academic and musical survival within the cantorial program:

> Faced with an extensive chazanut literature, female cantors and students often discussed general idiomatic modifications that could help fit cantorial works to their voices more effectively. These repertoire modifications, applied according to individual needs, appeared to have a basis in similar practices already in use by male students… Women described adjusting tonal centers also, though the perceived "difference" between female and male vocal ranges and techniques required additional considerations. These changes furthered a multi-faceted quest to communicate text effectively to a congregation: the ultimate goal of the cantor. Owning a "female" voice, and knowing its qualities intimately, therefore factored significantly into the general complex of personal traits that helped all students determine choices of repertoire and delivery. (Cohen 2009, 202)

As Cohen observes, some of the modification women make in order to sing hazzanut are quite individual. However, throughout the course of my research I have sought to identify some universal best practices that might assist women in adapting hazzanut and its performance demands to their voices. Some of these practices have been documented extensively, while others I will explore anecdotally based on my own personal experience and interviews with teachers and colleagues. It is my hope that the female cantorate can and will build on these practices in order to ensure that the future of womens' hazzanut is bright both within and outside of the DFSSM.

In this chapter, I will explore two main areas in which to apply these practices:

(a) Adjustments women could make in order to sing hazzanut effectively, and

(b) Adjustments accompanists could make in order to underscore hazzanut appropriately.

In focusing on these two practical areas, perhaps the culture of women singing hazzanut within the DFSSM might move to a different place. And perhaps, as more and more female graduates of the DFSSM continue to make their voices heard across the country and around the world, we might find ourselves at the forefront of a broader shift in thinking about the place that hazzanut occupies in today's Jewish musical landscape.

As I've previously mentioned, one of the inherent challenges of singing hazzanut is the limited vocal range in which most of the compositions in this genre were composed. Part of what makes the sound of hazzanut so distinctive is that the music sits in a particular range for a particular type of voice.

> Compositions by male cantors, as described at the [cantorial school], took advantage of distinct ranges typified as "normal" in the male voice — each associated with different timbres, effects, and emotions. The sensitive use of these registers to explicate a given text … served as a sign of quality in a cantorial composition. At the same time, students and faculty viewed such vocal knowledge as gender-specific: female voices had their own index of vocal ranges laid out differently from male ranges. Understanding how male and female registral attributes correspond with each other thus proved crucial to the female cantorate: once women could gain facility with recognizing male vocal ranges, they could substitute idiomatic *female* vocal techniques to achieve a similar interpretation and feel. (Cohen 2009, 204)

Given that the current landscape of hazzanut is so overwhelmingly male and tenor, the most important consideration for a female cantor adapting a piece of hazzanut is determining the most appropriate key in which to sing the piece. Therefore, knowing one's own vocal limitations as well as one's optimal range of notes is essential.

> "Key", a term use technically to denote a composition's tonal center (nearly all written repertoire at the School employed Western key signatures), helped students and faculty relate cantorial works to each individual's vocal topography. Sometimes members of the community used the term to describe an appropriate match between a composition's pitch level and a student's voice… In other cases, "key" referenced the specific placement of a composition within a singer's vocal range. (ibid 203)

When I prepared my fourth-year High Holy Day traditional practicum, one of the first things Cantor Faith Steinsnyder encouraged me to do was to find the key that worked best for me and remain in that key for the entire practicum. Engaging in that process

helped me figure out my own range and gain a more intimate understanding of my voice. Additionally, I was able to see expanded possibilities for expressing the text that I hadn't previously considered when singing the material in its original key. As Cantor Steinsnyder advised: "The most expressive key for the cantor's voice comes first!" (Steinsnyder, 2018) Once I identified my perfect key, the material became much easier to learn, to sing, and to express. My experience is one of many in which students were encouraged to sing this material in a lower key in order to better express the text:

> To ameliorate the situation, soprano cantors and cantorial students occasionally transposed Traditional pieces downward because, "that's where it speaks the best. Because you have to get the text out there. And I can't really speak text very well around an f and an e. It just doesn't work for me." (Cohen 2009, 205)

Speaking the text and expressing its meaning is the ultimate role of a cantor, especially regarding the proper expression of hazzanut. For this reason, women especially need to be mindful of the keys we choose as we engage with this material.

Returning to Kordan's thesis with expressive keys in mind, I now arrive at another point of departure from the premise she sets forth. Kordan claims:

> The widest spectrum of expressive possibilities for the female voice lies within the parameters of the head voice. Needless to say, the chest voice can be used for a special effect on occasion, but the head voice, certainly throughout the hundreds of years of operatic development, has proven to endow the female singer with the most variety of expressive possibilities. (Kordan 1990, 40)

Kordan's assertion, while certainly true for her as well as for other operatic soprano voices, does not hold true for every female cantor. In today's cantorial landscape in which congregational participation is valued so highly, women would be better served utilizing and becoming more comfortable in their middle range. Because hazzanut as a genre is

itself more performative, it is all the more important that it be rendered in a key that sounds accessible — even if the music itself might not "feel" accessible. Performing hazzanut in a higher soprano register might add yet another barrier to engagement for a congregation. As Judah Cohen observed during a visit to the DFSSM:

> The middle range also gained a reputation as the most "accessible" for congregational participation. Noted one student: "[W]hat with congregations being the way they are and wanting to sing every single thing with you, I think most of us women find ourselves pitching [i.e., transposing] things down anyway; so that they can sing with us" (Interview). (Cohen 2009, 206).

I spend a lot of time singing in my middle range, not only because I find that it works better for congregational participation. In my experience, I have a much wider range of expressive capabilities in my middle range, especially when it comes to singing hazzanut. The fluid melismas, quick register shifts, and emotive qualities that are emblematic of hazzanut live comfortably in my middle range, and I find it much more difficult to achieve these authentic sounds while singing in higher registers. When I set out to write this thesis, I had a feeling that I was not alone in this sentiment. As I suspected, most of the female students and faculty interviewed during Judah Cohen's visit to the DFSSM felt similarly about using the middle range when singing hazzanut:

> The middle vocal register, in comparison, appeared much more desirable for general congregational usage, and served as a kind of "standard" range for delivering chazzanut. Female students and faculty considered it timbrally more compatible with a "*parlando*" [speech-like] style, facilitating effective textual communication. If a significant part of a cantorial work coincided with a woman's vocal "break", bringing it down into a middle range that offered greater verbal clarity could produce the most effective solution. (Cohen 2009, 206)

There are additional issues to consider when evaluating whether or not to sing in a higher vocal register that have less to do with range and more to do with aesthetics. Certainly the aesthetics of singing in a higher register are gendered in nature. The same high range of notes will sound very different depending on whether a man or a woman is singing.

> In general, this area constituted a particularly emotional range for male cantors: cantorial compositions typically used the upper registers to emphasize and "paint" words considered most important in a given text, such as the divine name, references to the heavens, and implications of urgency or splendor. Traveling toward and away from the upper range increased and decreased the intensity of a recitative respectively. Male and female voices, however, sounded differently when singing in this range. (Cohen 2009, 204)

While it is true that higher notes do carry many expressive, word-painting qualities, it is important to keep in mind that these qualities significantly depend on the cantor's delivery. Whereas male tenors at HUC were prized for their impressive falsetto ranges and were typically regarded as aesthetically pleasing when singing hazzanut, women encountered potential pitfalls when singing in higher ranges. Cohen recounts hearing one female faculty member of the DFSSM caution that a woman's high range has the potential to

> …infantilize a female singer and broadcast negative female stereotypes (childishness, naïveté, or uncontrolled sexuality depending upon the timbral color). Such perceptions…detracted from the prayer declamation, and inappropriately highlighted the singer. Women thus needed to view the upper range with some caution, as carelessness or overuse could threaten the environment and spirit of a religious service. (Cohen 2009, 206)

These potentially negative aural implications of a woman's high range make it all the more imperative for women to embrace singing in their lower and middle ranges,

especially when singing material that carries with it so much gendered baggage. Were women encouraged to expand their vocal ranges and gain more comfort using their lower and middle ranges for the purposes of greater musical expression and congregational accessibility, the genre of hazzanut would benefit greatly from the additional warmth, color, and depth that women's voices would contribute.

Instrumental accompaniment is another important consideration for adapting hazzanut so that it can be effectively expressed in the female voice. Hazzanut is not only expressed by the voice of the cantor singing it, but also by the pianist or organist accompanying it. Accompanied recitatives are relatively foreign to me; the hazzanut I grew up listening to within the walls of my Conservative synagogue was always sung acapella. Upon arriving at the DFSSM, I was exposed to a vast repertoire of composed cantorial pieces: some with piano, some with organ, and others with fully written out choir parts.

Arguably, there is no person better acquainted with the instrumental adaptation of hazzanut to the female voice than Joyce Rosenzweig, Artist-in-Residence at the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music for more than three decades. As one of the world's foremost experts in synagogue music and its accompaniment, she has her finger on the pulse of the past, present, and future of Jewish music. Joyce has accompanied me on the piano during countless prayer services and practica during my years of study at the DFSSM. I have selected Joyce to be my recital accompanist because I have observed that she is particularly skilled in adjusting her style of accompaniment in order to best support

and compliment women in singing hazzanut. I asked her to expand on her methodology — specifically, what does she do differently on the piano when accompanying a woman?

> I tend not to play as much in the mid-low range of the piano. Below middle C tends to be "thicker" — so no chords in that area of the piano that would make the sound thicker. I play in higher registers. I balance it with some lower octaves, but if it gets too thick in the middle it throws off the balance between piano and voice. So I tend to stay in the "higher-than-middle-C" range. And if the music asks for the piano to echo the voice, then I echo in a higher range. You have to play in a soprano timbre in the piano, as well. But you also have to support the vocalist, so I'd never play only in the top part of the piano. You want to always feel balanced, so there's a feeling of support and depth of sound, but not growly, and never muddying the voice. The register stuff is really important, though, because the piano has a "muddy region", around an octave and a half below middle C. (Rosenzweig, 2018)

These considerations are especially important when adapting scores written for men. If adjustments are made only by the singer and not by the accompanist, a woman's voice risks being "muddied" by an accompaniment intended specifically for a tenor's voice. Since the most important element of hazzanut is expressing the text, it is crucial that the voice interpreting the text be allowed to shine and be supported by the instrumentation.

During the course of our conversation, Rosenzweig encouraged me to reach out to Cantor David Lefkowitz for his insights on this topic. A long-time faculty member of the DFSSM and a prolific composer himself, Lefkowitz recognizes the problems inherent in women performing hazzanut not written expressly for their voices:

> The biggest issue that concerns me centers around music that was written for male cantors, and was nicely arranged and balanced for mixed choirs and/or accompaniment. Suddenly, bringing the cantor up one octave, and using the same background does not work well. Truthfully, these usually need rearranging - for both the choral and the keyboard - in order to properly support the positioning of the female voice. There are some generalizations for rewriting these, but certainly no fixed solutions. (Lefkowitz, 2018)

While Cantor Lefkowitz recognizes that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to rearranging compositions of hazzanut, he emphasized the crucial value of transposing this material to better conform to female vocal ranges. He lauded the work of Cantor Faith Steinsnyder, who has been modeling this practice extensively throughout her career, both as a pulpit cantor and as a faculty member at the DFSSM:

> Faith Steinsnyder has long, and *so* wisely, advised women to lower the keys of traditional hazzanut. This especially deals with both the issue of high-tessitura hazzanut (perhaps sounding "shrill" an octave up) -- and, the fact that diction for changing syllables, consonants and vowels is complicated in very high passages, and not the usual aspect in beautiful high female singing! So, we really *need* to adapt the music, and it definitely *can* be done successfully. Lowering the key helps considerably, *but* -- we need to preserve and keep the female vocal range intact by adding high notes and passages wisely, and in female vocal style! Yet this should complement the composition as well as the individual voice. It takes practice and time to know how to do this with efficiency; however it can make such a difference in both the effectiveness of female hazzanut and in the healthy development of one's voice! (ibid)

As one of the world’s foremost interpreters of hazzanut, Cantor Faith Steinsnyder has indeed established herself as an authority — not only of the genre itself, but also of adapting it to an ever-growing female cantorate. As with Rosenzweig, she has identified similar best practices for accompanying hazzanut effectively in a woman’s voice, based on years of experience teaching and rendering this material with an authenticity and unique beauty all her own. As the only woman teaching traditional hazzanut on the faculty of the DFSSM, she is especially well-versed in the specific techniques that both pianists and organists might use when collaborating with female singers:

> Play the accompaniment an octave higher than written, with a lighter hand, saving *forte* moments for interludes and thinning out the rolling bass. Tacit during coloratura or extremely minimal accompaniment under melismas! With organ —

> try different stops and settings to find the best echo colors. Transpositions will demand different voicing in the accompaniment. (Steinsnyder, 2018)

Like Rosenzweig, Steinsnyder recognizes the value of a higher instrumental octave in supporting and complimenting a woman's vocal timbre. She also focuses on specific stylistic elements of hazzanut and how these can best be elevated in the accompaniment. Specifically, the accompaniment needs to be as minimal as possible in order to bring out the colors and depth in a woman's voice. Having been trained in hazzanut by Cantor Jack Mendelson, she is also able to intuit the most effective method of accompaniment based on her familiarity with this unique style of worship.

The same can not be said for Shani Ben Or, a joint rabbinic and cantorial student at HUC-JIR who was raised in the Israeli Reform movement. Ben Or arrived at the DFSSM not having grown up with hazzanut. When she was exposed to *nusach* during worship, it was always chanted acapella. "Growing up with unaccompanied prayer changes things in terms of your personal needs and taste," she reflected, "…I'm used to the sound of acapella chanting" (Ben Or, 2018). Ben Or is currently serving as the cantorial intern at Central Synagogue in New York City, where she frequently collaborates with musicians in creating and executing worship services. When it came to performing nusach and hazzanut, she needed to articulate a clear vision to her accompanists at the outset:

> I really prefer that the accompaniment be more modified and stripped down. When I'm working with an accompanist, most of my feedback centers around where *not* to play. For me, it's about the essence of the text. I want the text to stand out, which it does because it's naked with no accompaniment underneath it. There's a real power in that vulnerability. So my main focus is where the

> instrumentation needs to drop off, in order to really elevate the text in that moment. (ibid)

Ben Or, Rosenzweig and Steinsnyder are in effect saying the same thing: When it comes to instrumental accompaniment supporting women's hazzanut, less is more. When I asked Ben Or when she *does* value some instrumental support, she clarified:

> It's really important to have the accompaniment there when you want to establish a modal shift in the nusach. Never from the top of a phrase, though. The phrase begins, and *then* you hit it with the instruments. But only after you establish it vocally. Pianists have a tendency to fill the void, but they don't have to play in everything. There's power in that musical support coming in after you've done the vocal work first. (ibid)

Although she was exposed to hazzanut later in life, Ben Or arrived at many of the same conclusions as the other Jewish music professionals I interviewed: The strength of this type of accompaniment is in its minimalism and in its ability to support the voice and elevate the text.

The style of accompanied hazzanut described in this chapter is decidedly not the hazzanut my grandparents played on their Victrola in the 1950's. Women's hazzanut can indeed sound authentic, haunting, and beautiful. Perhaps its instrumentation, when slightly pared down and utilized in just the right places, can lead to, rather than detract from, congregational accessibility. Perhaps this musical instrumentation can help us reimagine the role that hazzanut can play in our synagogues, both now and in the future.

Chapter Four: Sing a New Song

How does women's hazzanut, in the way in which I've described it, actually sound? My upcoming senior recital will attempt to answer that question by transforming the findings of my research into a musical form. I will illustrate in real time the processes by which women can adapt hazzanut so that their voices best express the text, and its musical style. I will try to model some of the musical and stylistic practices that I have highlighted throughout this thesis. In my recital, I intend to include accessible moments that invite both active and passive congregational participation. As part of my preparation, I am particularly excited to collaborate with a composer on a new setting of *Ahavat Olam* that will be premiered at my recital. In partnership with Steve Cohen, an accomplished composer and arranger, I have the unique opportunity to commission a piece of music written expressly for my voice. The piece will also include a four-part choir, and piano accompaniment. I hope our collaboration will provide a model for other cantors and composers to engage in similar projects, embracing new liturgical compositions that strike just the right balance between the old and the new.

When I was accepted to the DFSSM five years ago, I embarked on my path to the cantorate with an ambitious mission: I wanted to contribute to an effort toward preserving hazzanut for future generations of cantors and congregations in America. Fundamentally, the passion at the core of my mission has not changed. However, my relationship with hazzanut has shifted dramatically since my HUC audition. I now know that there is a time and place for hazzanut, yet I realize this music need not be used all the time. I recognize

the value of many styles of music in expressing liturgical texts. I have expanded my repertoire, my prayer practice, and my voice. I can now approach hazzanut from a place of greater knowledge and reverence.

This thesis started as an outgrowth of my affinity for and interest in hazzanut and has since transformed into something much bigger. The research I conducted over the last year has had a lasting impact on my emerging cantorate. I believe that the theoretical and practical applications of this project can have a profound impact on the female cantorate as a whole. What began as a personal passion has now become a professional mission, and I am energized by the conversations that I hope will result from this work. It is my hope that this thesis will inspire others to also adopt a new approach to hazzanut with a deepened understanding, nuanced appreciation, and perhaps a renewed acceptance of the role of hazzanut within worship.

My explorations of male and female vocal production illustrated the importance of adjusting our expectations of the way we hear men's and women's voices rendering traditional cantorial material. In my own work, I have been empowered to sound more "like me" and less "like men". Were all women empowered in such a way, hazzanut would be given new life with each new rendition. I still immerse myself in recordings of the great male cantors, yet I no longer feel the need to copy them precisely in order to successfully sing the material. This project has given me permission to express liturgical texts in my own voice, in a style that continues to develop, yet is still thoroughly emblematic of hazzanut.

My research in the area of vocal technique has sharpened my awareness of the ways in which I use my vocal range most effectively. I hope that more women will take the initiative to find their optimal keys, and that they will insist on singing traditional material in the range that best express the text and suits their own unique voices.

I believe that the study of vocal cross-training is a key component in ensuring that cantors maintain vocal health, versatility, and accessibility throughout their careers. Training women cantors to sing in a variety of styles, including hazzanut, is an important step towards developing the future of the female cantorate. I am especially excited by the idea of women employing vocal cross-training in order to sing hazzanut, and I hope that my research into this method will expand our deeply-held notions of vocal pedagogy.

I am inspired by the crucial role that instrumental accompaniment can play in ushering in a new era of women's hazzanut. The interviews I conducted reinforced the importance of an accompanist's sensitivity when collaborating with female cantors. I believe the information I have compiled outlining best practices for this type of cantorial accompaniment will serve as a valuable guide for cantors and instrumentalists alike when approaching this material. I especially look forward to demonstrating these practices during my recital, and hopefully inspiring others to incorporate these ideas in innovative ways.

The DFSSM community is in a particularly privileged position to inspire innovation within the Jewish music world at large. I believe we have a valuable opportunity to harness the unique beauty of women's voices and use it to reenergize

hazzanut for a modern cantorate. In my conversations with Joyce Rosenzweig, she expressed similar sentiments:

> We're invested in training men AND women's voices. We recognize that there is a difference between the two. Through years of teaching and experimentation, we're ready to address these differences now. We believe that hazzanut has a real place. We're not just teaching it at the DFSSM because we have to. We value it. It's got utmost importance, so we are taking it seriously from a vocal and performance standpoint. Imagine how successful it could actually be, revamping hazzanut for women! We're really ready for a revolution. (Rosenzweig 2018)

I hope that this thesis can be a springboard for a small, slow growing Jewish musical revolution that empowers women to take ownership of this beautiful, adaptable tradition. I believe we can start teaching hazzanut differently, continue rendering it beautifully yet idiomatically (befitting the female voice) and composing it with sensitivity. It is my ultimate hope that years from now there will be a little girl sitting in a big sanctuary, transfixed and transported by the singular sound of a woman chanting hazzanut. Maybe one day, that little girl will find herself sitting in her cantor's office, listening to a woman's voice encouraging her: "Sing after me…"

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