



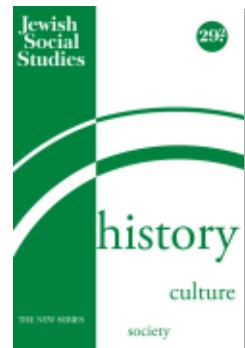
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Live Davenings: Technologies of Ritual Learning and the  
Convening of a Jewish Sacred Music Underground

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# Live Davenings: Technologies of Ritual Learning and the Convening of a Jewish Sacred Music Underground

Jeremiah Lockwood

## ABSTRACT

*Surreptitiously collected field recordings of cantors at the pulpit, made in disregard for the rules of synagogue comportment, circulated for decades among a small group of collectors in an underground economy of homemade dubbed cassettes. These secret recordings, referred to as “live davenings,” usurp the characteristic ephemerality of prayer to document a twentieth century aesthetic concept of cantorial music as an art form beyond its ritual function. In the past decade, many of these recordings have surfaced on YouTube and file sharing sites, reaching an expanded audience and exposing a new generation to a largely abandoned style of liturgical performance. Through ethnography with field recording makers, internet-savvy collectors, and the artists who use the secrets in the live davening archive to build projects of cantorial revival, this article offers an examination of a body of archival material that has not previously been the topic of any scholarly investigation.*

*Key words:* archives, cantorial music, electronic media, musical revival, secrets

**O**n a Shabbat morning in 1977, Hungarian-born Cantor Moshe Stern (1935–2023) ascended the pulpit at Congregation Beth El in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn to lead the morning service. The reverberant Moorish-style synagogue, designed as an

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ideal sonic space for vocal music performance, had served as a focal point for cantorial culture since the high point of the popularity of cantors in the 1920s. Stern began the service with the prayer *Shokhen ad* (He who abides forever), unleashing a powerful sustained F natural, followed by a muscular and resonant A flat, approaching the highest register of the tenor voice prized by connoisseurs of opera. The choir accompanying Stern consisted of men and boy sopranos. They responded to his opening phrase, singing prescribed lines from the liturgy with a dotted rhythm typical of cantorial choral music. Stern continued with a fluid, improvisatory-sounding solo phrase setting the text *Befi yesharim* (By the mouth of the upright). His solo was distinguished by a virtuosic execution of a style of highly ornamented melismatic singing commonly associated with Eastern European immigrant cantors of the early twentieth century. Stern's singing invoked a half century of prestigious cantors at Beth El, including gramophone-era stars such as Mordechai Hershman (1888–1940) and Berele Chagy (1892–1954), and perhaps the best-known cantor of the post-Holocaust period, Moshe Koussevitsky (1899–1965).<sup>1</sup>

I encountered Stern's service, which took place before my birth, in a 2022 Zoom meeting, staring at four faces framed by boxes on a screen. I was attending a class on *khazones* (a Yiddish term for cantorial art music) and synagogue prayer leading, led by musician and cantor Judith Berkson (born 1977).<sup>2</sup> In this session of Berkson's private cantorial studio, the curricular material we were studying was a recording of Stern's prayer leading on an anonymously posted YouTube channel that focuses on cantorial music and was first uploaded in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Building on exercises we had worked on in the week since our previous session, the singers in the class took turns trying to imitate Stern's ornate performance of the opening paragraph of the Shabbat morning prayer service. The location of this performance, not in a recording studio but in the synagogue itself, fostered an intimacy with the object of study, blurring the sense of technology as a mediating force. The grit of the archival field recording foreshortened the distance between the cantorial body at prayer and the responsive listening and repetition of the students, the noise of the non-professionally recorded prayer echoing the noise of our living bodies that were reanimating this archival artefact.

In a conversation with David Lefkowitz (born 1941), cantor emeritus of the Park Avenue synagogue in Manhattan, the elder cantor referred to his early congregational jobs in Brooklyn of the 1960s as having been populated by congregants who demanded "blood and guts" from their cantor.<sup>4</sup> This visceral image was meant to conjure the

virtuosic displays of vocal technique and emotional prowess that were supposed to typify the style of prayer music valued and expected by Yiddish-speaking immigrant Jews in New York and, to a lesser extent, their second-generation progeny. The perception of aesthetic value beyond ritual function in this style of cantorial performance was a persistent theme in Jewish popular culture of the early twentieth century. “Star” cantors made records on commercial labels and their performances, both in synagogues and on concert stages, were supported by extensive advertising in the Yiddish press.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the versions of prayer music heard on commercial records, cantorial prayer leading in the synagogue is characterized by its ephemerality and by the temporally bounded experience of listening as an aid in the experience of prayer. Assessing *khazones* not only by its ritual function but also as an art form and a style of mediated culture drove a subset of fans to usurp the ephemerality of prayer and to make field recordings of liturgical musicians leading services in the synagogue. The recording of Stern I studied with Berkson is one entry in the resultant underground archive of cantorial recordings often referred to as “live davenings,” or live prayers.<sup>6</sup>

As the name suggests, live davenings are bootleg recordings of cantorial prayer leading, captured surreptitiously by die-hard fans of *khazones* who took advantage of new technologies of tape recording that emerged on the consumer market in the mid 1960s. These cantorial fans were willing to break Jewish ritual law and risk being exposed for trespassing the social contract of synagogue behavior in order to preserve and collect the work of cantors. Not coincidentally, Berkson’s father, Cantor Thomas Berkson, was at the center of one important circle of amateur ethnographers in the 1960s in New York City who made bootleg recordings of some of the best-known cantors, including elder recording stars of the gramophone era who were still active at the time. Broad access to live davenings is a recent development of the internet era; this body of archival material has not previously been the topic of any scholarly investigation and appears only sporadically in the literature on Jewish music.<sup>7</sup>

Writings on cantors have focused on text and aurality as the key dualism in discussions of transmission of ritual knowledge, with text forwarded as a pragmatic modern approach to preservation and transmission, and aurality posited (perhaps at times in an unrealistic, romanticized fashion) as a site of the production of authenticity through face-to-face interactions between acolytes and mentors.<sup>8</sup> In this article I take a different approach, looking at the role of electronically mediated sound as a parallel archive to the published cantorial

anthologies that have served as the primary pedagogical material in institutionally supported seminaries in the United States. Recordings offer an entextualized source to be studied, yet one that engages conceptions of traditionalism and its boundedness to sounding bodies. At the same time, recorded sound destabilizes the locus of authority associated with musical texts, which demand specific forms of academic musical knowledge to decode, by broadening access to sounds of traditionalism outside of institutions of learning.

[37]

*Live  
Davenings*



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Commercial recordings of cantorial stars of the gramophone era, a period that coincides with the last decades of Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust, have often been discussed as a source of authentic knowledge about the sound of cantors. The “hit” records of cantorial stars of the 1920s are used as a pedagogical tool by the cantorial revivalists I discuss in this article, just as much so as live davening bootlegs. In this article, I focus on live davenings rather than commercial gramophone records for two reasons: 1. Bootleg recordings offer unique practical information about practices of prayer leading in actual ritual practice. In contrast, commercial records of cantors are typically short in length, presenting excerpts of liturgy tailored to the conventions of the recording industry, and often include the use of instrumental accompaniment that would have been forbidden in most synagogues for reasons of ritual convention. The formal qualities of live davenings as a document of synagogue practices make them uniquely valuable as a learning resource for singers who are interested in *khazones*. 2. For reasons that will be pursued in this article, live davening bootlegs have only become broadly disseminated in the internet era. The reception of live davening recordings is a new phenomenon in the area of Jewish liturgical culture that is in need of its own special historical and theoretical attention.

The newly emerging corpus of bootleg recordings of cantors appearing online places contemporary singers in relations of intimacy with the sound of a generation of deceased cantors. For young singers, the voices of these elders represent a conception of Jewish heritage and aesthetic achievement. The relationship of the illicit archive of Thomas Berkson’s generation to the work of heritage reclamation of his daughter Judith Berkson and her peers is illustrative of the jagged synchronicities that emerge between archives and their researchers. The fact that the musical relationship between the two generations of Berkson cantors is mediated through recordings draws into question the transparency of direct intergenerational lineages. Live davenings and their use by present-day Jewish artists and ritual leaders highlights the role of sound-recording technology as a source of material

evidence that can provide the basis for conceptions of religious tradition and cultural intimacy.

The underground archive of cantorial prayer-leading recordings has found reception and extension into the present as a pedagogical resource only in non-institutional sites of American Jewish liturgical learning. Live davening bootleg recordings occupy a space that is both supplementary and oppositional to the institutional archive of textual cantorial anthologies produced by seminary-based cantorial training programs. In this article, I read cantorial archives (both public and secret) in light of Jacques Derrida's discussion of archives as sources of authority that are interlaced with vulnerability.<sup>9</sup> The secrets the archive harbors reveal traces of controversies over the correct place of aesthetics in prayer that troubled generations of cantors. Cantorial prayer leading was remade by post-Holocaust American institutions that were focused on sustainability and the nurturing of a "meltable" Judaism that would be at home in American life.<sup>10</sup> The "blood and guts" and noise of long-form cantorial improvisation at the pulpit that was prized by the Yiddish-speaking immigrant generation has largely disappeared from American synagogue life and is unfamiliar to most American Jews. This style of cantorial prayer leading has become an object of renewed attention in the present moment, made available by the mediation of bootleg recordings and the special character of the internet as a repository for cultural ephemera and a site for the discovery of secrets. Its enthusiastic reception by a small cohort of artists reflects the needs of a new generation who are energized by multiple impulses, including heritage reclamation, aesthetic exploration, and participation in a contemporary American Judaism characterized by religious innovation and transformation.

The internet has heightened already-existing tensions in the emotionally charged dyad of researcher and the archive, exponentially expanding the scope of what can be reasonably hoped to be discovered in the research process to include a vast network of secrets and moments of intimacy. The rearticulation of live davenings in the digital era is one of numerous examples of the affordances of file sharing to create previously impossible experiences of listening to ghosts.<sup>11</sup> The reclamation of voices of the dead is particularly germane to Jewish prayer leaders and artists working in heritage music genres whose work is by necessity tied to histories of loss and displacement associated with political violence, migration, and assimilation. My analysis of the live davening archive contributes to a fuller historical picture of the multiple conceptions of the Jewish sacred in America by attending to the definitive role media plays in determining what constitutes a



reliable source of knowledge about sacred sound.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the prevailing trends in American liberal synagogue music, which have embraced a sound and texture that is in close dialogue with American popular music and white Protestant church song styles, cantorial revivalists such as Judith Berkson look to a conception of tradition that is emphatically driven by mediated representations of Jewish sound drawn from archival sources.

The perception of cantorial knowledge as being at risk of loss or change under the pressure of shifting political vicissitudes has been a theme informing projects of mediatization of Jewish sacred music since the first print anthologies of cantorial melodies were published in the nineteenth century, employing the technology of musical notation.<sup>13</sup> The pedagogical role of cantorial music publishing seems to have influenced the ways in which commercial gramophone records were used by cantors. Cantors treated commercial records as a source of professional knowledge; they studied records by star cantors, imitating the sounds heard on popular discs, as demonstrated by numerous examples of “covers” of popular cantorial records on later commercial recordings. At times, critics chastised cantors for the “phonographic” quality of their prayer leading.<sup>14</sup> The phenomenon of covers of cantorial records being interpolated back into actual prayer services is a notable element in the life of the music that can be heard pervasively in the live davening archive. For example, in the recording of Stern’s service mentioned above, Stern performs a cover of “Ad heino azorunu” (Until now you have helped us), a 1926 Yossele Rosenblatt recording that had already gone through multiple interpretations by cantors including Stern’s predecessor at Beth El, Koussevitsky.

Mediatization of cantorial sound in print anthologies, commercial recordings, or live davening bootlegs serves as a kind of prosthesis, providing a technologically mediated memory aid. Mediated sound repairs lost cultural intimacy, protecting against the deterioration of tradition, the crisis that haunts the cantorial profession. Prosthesis is a double-edged metaphor in the discussion of media and Jewish sacred music. On the one hand, it suggests the possibility of radical new abilities, a doubling of the voices of the living by a choir of ghosts, offering access to sounds and meanings recovered from a revered past. At the same time, the prosthesis metaphor speaks to the fear of damaged bodies and loss, suggesting the ways in which Jewish bodies in the present are imagined as inadequate to the task of articulating authenticity.<sup>15</sup> The lachrymose narrative in cantorial culture, a subset of a larger communal discourse, has depicted a history of spiritual and aesthetic decay. In the contemporary cantorial revivalist subculture described

in this article, the conception of broken Jewish aesthetic and spiritual lineages suggests a distinctively anatomical imaginary. The pathology of inauthenticity in the present must be remedied through media—the Jewish voice at prayer cannot be articulated in the present without recourse to the extension of the voices of the living through the voices of ghosts contained in the digital archive. Even direct cantorial family lineages, a pedigree conferring artistic and spiritual legitimacy in many cantorial circles, can be transformed by new access to digital archives of previously secret Jewish liturgical recordings.<sup>16</sup>

The voices on these recordings are ghosts haunting and possessing the imagination of a cohort of Jewish artists working today at the juncture of radical art practice, heritage reclamation, and new approaches to prayer leading. Notably, the artists who constitute the diffuse community of cantorial revival are drawn from a variety of identities at the fringes of American Jewish life, including Hasidic intellectuals, avant-garde composers, leftist political activists, and secular Yiddishists. Engagement with the live davening archive is a common denominator uniting this diverse field of artists. For each cantorial revivalist, the live davening archive may represent a different kind of ghost: a representation of the sacred pre-Holocaust past; a meditative practice of self-cultivation; a signifier of ethnic authenticity in an era of anxiety over cultural appropriation; or, perhaps in Judith Berkson's case, a direct inheritance, even if it is an inheritance that is deferred and out of joint.

### **What Are Live Davenings?**

Cantorial prayer-leading services, as documented on bootleg recordings of the New York synagogue world of the mid-twentieth century, were durational performances of solo vocal music, sometimes accompanied by choirs. According to accounts in the Yiddish press, these highly performative musical rituals were a holdover from a popular style of prayer music that was heard in urban synagogues in Eastern Europe and found in Jewish immigrant communities in the US extending back to the late nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> In the space of these ritual performances, cantors drew from a range of repertoires, including their own compositions and improvisations. Some cantors were prized as “creative daveners” whose improvised fantasies and sophisticated variations on traditional motifs and modalities were carefully analyzed by fans of the music, while others focused on works composed by other cantors and were assessed primarily by their vocal prowess.<sup>18</sup>

The aesthetic power of cantors, although celebrated by fans and leveraged to raise funds for Jewish institutions, was liable to frequent condemnation by critics in terms of the corrupting influence of popularism or sensationalism on sacred sound.<sup>19</sup>

Cantorial recordings on commercial record labels date back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Recording-star cantors such as Zawel Kwartin and Gershon Sirota sold hundreds of thousands of records annually on both sides of the Jewish Atlantic world.<sup>20</sup> The popularity of cantors as recording stars went into retreat around the time of the Great Depression as major labels cut their “ethnic” record departments, but cantors continued to be represented on record on smaller, community-focused record labels such as the Tikva and Banner recording companies.<sup>21</sup> The salience of cantorial performance as a cultural form that could convene mass audiences in synagogues and other music venues continued into the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> The experience of *listening* in the synagogue seems to have been a central aspect in the religious lives of many Jews, a form of comportment in prayer that is no longer central to synagogue life. Indeed, a participatory unison singing of metered hymns has taken hold as the controlling, normative, and desired musical frame of reference in American synagogues, a musical shift that parallels the embourgeoisement of the community.<sup>23</sup> The decades long shift in the role of the cantor away from the “star” performance model toward a role as educator and community song leader was encouraged (perhaps accelerated) by leaders of the Cantors Assembly, the union of cantors associated with the Conservative Jewish movement, and simultaneously bemoaned by pulpit cantors who embraced a decline narrative that has become an omnipresent feature in professional discourse.<sup>24</sup>

The differences between live prayer leading in the *khazones* style and the theatrically tailored representation of cantorial sound on gramophone records are significant to fans of the genre. Commercial cantorial records present an aesthetic object that takes as its theme the experience of Jewish sounds and rituals. In contrast, synagogue prayer leading has its own grammar and customs that guide the presentation of cantorial singing and inscribe the cantor’s voice into a formalized ritual dialogue with the community. The outcome of this dialogue is dictated both by the history of cantorial aesthetics and localized ritual customs and is therefore contingent, volatile, and highly charged as both an aesthetic and religious experience.

Although there is a lengthy history of discussing the aesthetics of Jewish prayer, documentation of actual prayer services on recordings does not seem to have materialized until the mid-twentieth century.

In this period, a sense of cultural loss was a pervasive topic in the Ashkenazi Jewish world. At the same time, new technologies of tape recording were entering into the consumer market. Beginning in the 1950s, an underground library began to be built of recorded prayer services made in synagogues and other venues of communal prayer during Shabbat and holiday liturgical performances. Making these recordings required the transgression of ritual prohibitions as well as trespassing unwritten norms of performance and ownership—the cantor's voice given in prayer for the community during an actual ritual, not a theatrical studio recreation, was transformed into a permanent document, depriving the prayer of its characteristic sacred ephemerality. These recordings commodified prayer into a form that could be owned, generating a theoretical commercial value from which the cantor would be excluded.

Anonymous fans began their project of collection in spite of these prohibitions, or perhaps in part because of the attraction of these transgressions. The first live davening bootlegs that I am aware of document prayer-leading services in Catskills resorts in the late 1950s by artists including Moishe Oysher and Pierre Pinchik.<sup>25</sup> The ambiguity of the sacred-secular divide in these religiously Jewish but rabbinically unregulated spaces encouraged laxity in the enforcement of ritual law. These recordings probably took advantage of public announcement systems in hotel ballrooms that may have already been wired with reel-to-reel tape recorders. The introduction of small tape recorders into the consumer market vastly accelerated the production of the live davening archive. The next phase of the documentation of cantorial prayer leading relied on individual collectors who were willing to take the personal risk of sneaking tape recorders into the sacred space of the synagogue. I will turn to a discussion of one cohort of collectors in the next section.

### 1960s Cantorial Counterculture

In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, establishing cantorial training institutions that would preserve and disseminate the endangered musical knowledge of European Jews was considered a matter of existential crisis by cantors in the US.<sup>26</sup> Vital to this mission was the creation of curricular materials. A new archive was demanded that would preserve cantorial knowledge, offering reliable testimony to students who had less access to learning traditional forms of cantorial prayer than their European-born predecessors, who typically began their

careers as cantorial choir singers.<sup>27</sup> Building on published efforts by cantors in Europe beginning in the 1840s, new texts were created in the form of cantorial compendia that aimed to anthologize the entire cycle of the Jewish liturgical calendar in western musical notation. Adolph Katchko and Israel Alter, widely respected cantors who were associated with the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), produced complete anthologized liturgical music textbooks, representing their personal sense of what constituted tradition.<sup>28</sup> Building a cantorial curriculum from a different concept, Max Wohlberg, working at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) cantorial training program, wrote textbooks that purported to teach cantorial improvisatory skill through a system of study based on modes and motifs that students were to apply to prayer texts.<sup>29</sup>

In time, these authoritative pedagogical texts came to be understood as constituting definitive cantorial knowledge, often referred to as *nusakh ha-tefilah* (the manner of prayer). As has been noted by scholars of Jewish American music Mark Slobin and Judah Cohen, the term *nusakh* is used to refer to the professional domain of knowledge of cantors. Knowledge about *nusakh* and a belief in the existence of a “correct” *nusakh* is a central tenet undergirding the cantorial role as sacred authorities of synagogue sound.<sup>30</sup> Education using the mid-twentieth century cantorial anthologies that contain a stylized version of Ashkenazi prayer melodies became the benchmark for cantorial professionalization for cantors born in the US starting with the baby boomer generation.

The pedagogy initiated by the cantorial pedagogues working at JTS and HUC-JIR shared in common an orientation toward knowledge being based in text and in note-reading as a primary form of learning. In a conversation with Cantor Thomas Berkson about his training at JTS under Wohlberg, Berkson characterized the cantorial pedagogy he encountered as poor, consisting mostly of rote memorization of the Wohlberg system of modes and motifs. Berkson felt that Wohlberg’s pedagogy did, however, foster a sense of intimacy with the prayer texts he had to memorize and pushed him to be able to improvise within a system of motivic fragments. I noted that the education he was describing was missing the experience of listening to cantorial performance. As anyone who has heard old records of *khazones* can attest, there is a repertoire of timbres, vocal effects, and emotive noises that are idiomatic to the cantorial voice and that mark cantors as a distinctive kind of vocal artist. These elements of culturally specific vocal sound that draw from the Yiddish-speaking immigrant milieu are ill suited to being documented using the tools of western musical notation.

I asked Berkson how he learned to sound like a cantor in the Eastern European tradition, if almost all of the work he had done in school involved reading. Without needing clarification about what I meant or recourse to a discussion of ideologies of the dualism of aurality and text, he referred me to his biography in Jewish music before his years at the seminary. “I told you I was a *meshoyer*,” he said referring to his years as a child choir singer for Isidore Adelman, a European-born cantor who worked in a synagogue in Pittsburgh near where Berkson grew up. “I told you I heard Moshe Taube, who you wouldn’t find a better cantor,” he said, referring to another early experience hearing the prayer leading of a renowned Polish-born cantor. In Berkson’s estimation, these childhood experiences based in listening were the source of his sensitivity to the stylistic elements of *khazones* that drove his passionate interest in the music.

At the time that Berkson was enrolled at JTS starting in 1963, he was active in a social network of intense fans of cantorial music. His close friend and interlocutor on all things relating to *khazones* was Barry Serota (d. 2009), an autodidact scholar of Jewish music who went on to found the Musique Internationale record label in 1969. Working steadily from the 1970s through the early 2000s, Serota produced dozens of records by elder cantors, working with major figures such as Moshe Ganchoff and Jacob Konigsberg (my grandfather), as well as reissuing rare early twentieth-century records.<sup>31</sup> Serota came to New York in 1963 at the age of 18 to study at JTS, but his main occupation was undertaking an obsessive personal research project into the worlds of “golden age” cantors of the phonograph era. Serota’s focus was squarely on his personal culture-building project, not on his studies, as attested by his numerous incompletes at Columbia University that kept him from being able to attend the rabbinic program at JTS, as he had originally planned. According to Berkson, Serota was constantly traveling back and forth from uptown Manhattan to Brooklyn, interviewing the widows of famed cantors and auditing services by elder cantors.

Berkson and Serota made friends with Cantor Paul Zim, a well-known performer a few years their elder who had an apartment near JTS in those days. Zim would play the younger men tapes from his collection of live davenings. The already growing underground archive of live davening recordings inspired Berkson to begin his own collection; he stressed to me that he was not the first and that he would probably not have thought up the idea on his own.

1963 was also the year of the introduction of the first portable Phillips tape recorder onto the consumer market.<sup>32</sup> Berkson told me

that he acquired a Phillips tape recorder for about \$75 (equivalent to approximately \$700 today). This electronic consumer product was approximately 5 by 8 inches in size, an unwieldy object that was difficult to conceal and that required a system of straps to keep in place underneath the collector's suit jacket. A small microphone wired to the recorder would then be held in place in the lapel, an accoutrement reminiscent of a Cold War-era spy. Berkson told me that sometimes collectors would be called up to the bimah for an aliyah, an honorary blessing of the Torah, and would have to take pains not to move suddenly, accidentally revealing their hidden apparatus.

According to Berkson, he himself never made any field recordings, and he instead recruited friends who were rabbinic or cantorial students to do the work. In this way, he was able to acquire deeply desired recordings while preserving his own self-conception of appropriate Jewish conduct. Although he did not tell me their names, apparently all of the collectors in Berkson's circle were men, as JTS only admitted male students into its rabbinic and cantorial programs at that time. Berkson did not specifically cite his field recording activities as supplementary or oppositional to the pedagogy at the cantorial program at JTS, but the fact that this group was made up entirely of students at the school suggests that making live davenings addressed a perceived deficit in the official cantorial archive the institution presented. Berkson's coconspirators, especially Serota, shared his consuming passion for the music of prayer; they listened to and discussed their field recordings incessantly. Cantorial performance seems to have been the primary basis for their homosocial friendship group. Talking today about his collection of hundreds of tapes of now-dead cantors, Berkson can immediately call to mind favorite moments, particularly inspired vocal passages, flights of improvisatory fancy, just like fans of other genres of recorded music.

I asked Berkson if any of his collector friends were ever exposed for making recordings in synagogue. He said that this never happened. Berkson further remarked that the people in the major cantorial synagogues in Borough Park, the neighborhood in Brooklyn that in the 1960s boasted three major sites of cantorial performance, were aware that recordings were sometimes made. He felt that there was awareness of the fact that collection efforts were underway, even if any overt signs of breaking the laws of Shabbat would have been cause for scandal. Cantorial fandom was part of the culture of Brooklyn synagogues such as Temple Emanu-El, Beth El, and Anshe Sfard that boasted world-renowned cantors, such as Moshe and David Koussevitsky. An obsessive fan making recordings would perhaps not have been shockingly

out of place in these contexts of cantorial performance. Anecdotally, I remember my grandmother, Geta Konigsberg, mentioning to me in passing, and without any explicit expression of ethical judgment, that sometimes “students” would record my grandfather, Cantor Jacob Konigsberg, while he was leading services. Several live davening recordings of Konigsberg have appeared online in recent years, to the delight of my family. As I recently learned, Berkson and Serota made surreptitious recordings at Temple Hope of Israel, my grandfather’s synagogue in the Bronx.

While the congregants at Orthodox synagogues in Brooklyn and the Bronx in the 1960s may not have been vigilantly on guard against collectors, the attitude toward surreptitious field recording at the institutions of cantorial education seems to have been actively condemnatory. Cantor Robert Kieval (1946–2022) related to me that Serota sometimes came to HUC-JIR, where Kieval was a student, to audit classes given by Israel Alter, the renowned cantor and anthologist. On one occasion, it was exposed that Serota was tape recording the musical examples Alter was singing for his students. In response, Alter physically lifted Serota from his seat and pushed him out the door of the classroom.<sup>33</sup> The unexpected aggression of this incident is representative of an attitude of protectionism around cantorial knowledge that adhered among elder cantors in this period. The institutional knowledge of the cantorate was a trade secret to be protected and shared only with legitimate students who were dedicated to the system and willing to pay tuition. In turn, certification as a cantor would usher former students into lucrative professional careers as pulpit cantors.

Live davening recordings tender a different concept of Jewish vocal music than what is contained in the institutionally sanctioned cantorial anthologies. While cantorial anthologies are characterized by identifying a controlling melodic-modal concept that can be systematized and reproduced, the cantorial voices captured on field recordings are hectically diverse and offer a variety of distinctive musical pieces and improvisation. The variety of melodic materials heard on live davenings are unified by a cantorial vocal approach and performance aesthetic not by a uniform body of melodies or motifs. The key shared elements that emerge from a perusal of live davenings are a vocabulary of idiomatic ornamentation, dynamic extremes, shifts in range with frequent octave-wide swoops into the upper register, and an approach to vocal timbre that is dramatic in its deployment of noises that thematize emotion through imitation of the sounds of distress, at moments bordering on the sound of crying. The timbre sequence, performative stance, and distinctive cantorial vocal noises

that are heard across the field of the live davening archive are notably absent from the concept of cantorial sound that is prevalent in the contemporary American synagogue.<sup>34</sup>

During the five years of his studies at JTS, Berkson and his fellow collectors amassed an archive of over 100 tapes of live performance of cantorial prayer services. At the moment, it is difficult to get an exact sense of the number of live davenings that were documented in this period by Berkson and his cohort of collectors. After his death, Serota's music collection was gifted by his mother, Blanche Serota, to the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Judaica Sound Archive. FAU has digitized most of Serota's commercial releases on Musique Internationale and made them available on the archive's online site, but his live davening bootlegs, which are rumored to number in the hundreds, are conspicuously absent. According to Berkson, perhaps Serota's secret collection is still stored in a broom closet at the JTS that he kept as a personal storage space.<sup>35</sup>

Berkson has been extremely reluctant to share his tapes with anyone. As he explained to me, his collection activities were tinged by an element of competition with other collectors and he was reticent to let people know exactly what he had. I speculate that he may have other reasons for keeping his collection private. The sense of shame or inhibition about public discussion of recording prayer is well-captured in a record review written by Cantor Sherwood Goffin for *Musica Judaica*. Goffin's review discusses an extremely unusual, perhaps unique, example of a commercial release of a live Shabbat service recorded by Cantor Charles Bloch at Temple Ansche Chesed in Manhattan and issued as an LP on a community supported vanity label in 1983.<sup>36</sup> As Goffin writes:

I personally cannot agree that taping an actual service should be encouraged or even condoned. And yet it cannot be denied that such a recording is a valuable and treasured vehicle from which to learn and to find inspiration. One need only ask any cantor or lover of *chazzanut* [cantorial music] to see the overwhelming joy of anticipation he would display to be offered, once again, the lost opportunity to hear actual performances of the great cantors of the past generation.<sup>37</sup>

Writing in the 1980s, Goffin was almost certainly aware of the live davening archive circulating in New York among his fans and colleagues. And yet he writes as if such recordings were merely a topic of fantasy and repressed gratification for cantors and lovers of the music. For all intents and purposes, the live davening collection was completely

underground, circulating on dubbed cassette copies traded between fans of the music, its existence publicly unacknowledged.<sup>38</sup>

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### The Archive Animated

In the past two decades, pieces of the live davening archive have begun to emerge in public via the new medium of the internet. Major collections such as those belonging to Berkson and Serota are still mostly inaccessible, but other collectors have shared their recordings or have died, and their collections fell into new hands. Basic details about the extent of the live davening archive are only beginning to come into focus. Although the exact lines of transmission regarding the identity of the original collectors remain unclear, there are now dozens of live davenings available for download or streaming audio both on private file-sharing sites as well as on the social media behemoth YouTube. The latter website has facilitated an ease of access to live davenings that has rendered a palpable, measurable influence on music scenes and prayer-leading practices. While a culture of secrecy, competition, and shame rendered the live davening archive partly invisible for decades, the internet era is particularly well suited to discourses predicated on anonymity.

David Schwartz is a 53-year-old American-born Orthodox Jewish man, a lawyer and part-time cantor who lives in Rehovot, Israel. Schwartz's file sharing site titled "Chazzanut For All," hosted on the Mediafire file-sharing platform, has been in existence since the mid 2010s.<sup>39</sup> The web page contains over 200 folders of music, the majority containing live davening bootlegs. These recordings offer representations of some of the best-known cantors who were still working in the second half of the twentieth century, including Moshe Koussevitsky, Leibele Waldman, Samuel Vigoda, and numerous others. I first got in touch with Schwartz by phone through a mutual friend and asked him if there was any attendant controversy around these recordings that were made in obvious contravariance to normative conceptions of Jewish law. He told me that there was little or no push back to live davenings, because, in his view "the rabbis have already won."<sup>40</sup> Schwartz seemed to imply that pushback against the explicit aestheticization of prayer that has been frequently leveraged against cantors was the result of a power conflict over authority in the synagogue. In his view, rabbis had clearly triumphed, as indicated by the diminished role of cantors in the Jewish world writ large and the almost complete absence of a professionalized cantorate in the Orthodox milieu.

In a recent conversation, Schwartz gave me more details about his collection. Schwartz is too young by several decades to have made any of the recordings that he has made available on his webpage. He has put together his collection over a lifetime spent in transnational Orthodox Jewish circles, getting his hands on second and third generation cassette dubs of recordings that had been circulating among fans for years. Schwartz is privy to many myths about how the recordings were made. Among the stories are rumors that collectors paid non-Jewish people and bought them tickets for High Holidays services to record the services. Schwartz explained that religious norms were much laxer in the 1970s, even in Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods such as Borough Park, and that “you could get away with it in some sections of the synagogue.”<sup>41</sup> Schwartz believes that recordings he has of Moshe Koussevitsky were made by members of the choir, which included members who were professional musicians and not necessarily Orthodox.

Schwartz had his only notable experience of pushback against live davenings as a student at Yeshiva University in the 1990s, during the period when he first began collecting old tapes. A fellow student yelled at him for collecting objects that document a desecration of Shabbat. In more recent years, he has experienced hardly any opprobrium. Schwartz mentioned one halakhic ruling about live davenings by a rabbi named Hershel Schachter to the effect that the recordings were only forbidden if you were listening to the original tape made on Shabbat, when using electronic devices is a forbidden form of labor.<sup>42</sup> Thus, listening to a dubbed cassette copy or digital transfer made on a regular workday is no longer a forbidden act. As this legal workaround suggests, in the face of a disappearing body of knowledge of cantorial prayer-leading traditions there seems to be little will to scrutinize the origins of these heterodox media objects, even in the context of an ever-increasing conservative Orthodoxy. Recently, Yanky Lemmer, a well-known cantor with a background in the Belz Hasidic community, publicly thanked Schwartz in an Instagram post memorializing Stern.<sup>43</sup> Lemmer cited Schwartz’s live davening collection as an important educational source, suggesting a thaw in the reticence some cantorial fans and practitioners in the Orthodox community demonstrate around public acknowledgment of live davenings.

As mentioned above, YouTube is the premiere source for mid-twentieth century cantorial bootlegs, particularly the YouTube channel Cantorial Legends. Run by a Hasidic man who lives in Brooklyn, this user profile page contains hundreds of cantorial recordings, including dozens of live davening bootlegs.<sup>44</sup> The presence of these

recordings on YouTube have made live davenings an immediately accessible resource, carried around in the pocket of anyone with a smart phone.<sup>45</sup>

The impact of the new availability of live davenings was a persistent topic in my ethnography with cantors in the Hasidic community of Brooklyn that I performed as part of my thesis research and book project. For young cantors in the Hasidic community, gramophone-era cantorial records are the basis for new musical practices that offer them the musical substance to establish new identities as artists. Gramophone records offer a grounding in classic repertoire and in the characteristic vocal techniques and intonation of Ashkenazi Jewish sacred vocal music, but they do not constitute a full cycle of cantorial knowledge that can be applied in synagogue ritual. The Hasidic community supports no institutions of musical learning for cantors, or otherwise. While there are semi-professional *bal tefiles* (prayer leaders) associated with many Hasidic communities, *khazones* as a professionalized Jewish art-music bears an uncertain profile associated with forms of Judaism that are considered less stringent and is not a mainstream style in the community. Hasidic singers who are interested in performing *khazones* must look outside of their own communal sphere to self-construct a curriculum for their musical ambitions.

For young Hasidic cantors who seek to bring their passion for the cantorial “golden age” of the early twentieth century into prayer-leading contexts, live davening bootlegs are an important resource for information about what melodic modal approaches and vocal techniques their cantorial heroes deployed in their work at the pulpit. These recordings demonstrate the creative and improvisatory domains of cantorial performance, skills that some of the more ambitious cantorial revivalists are seeking to master. Live davenings grant access to actual synagogue performance, a crucial difference that marks them as distinct from gramophone records, which are also revered as objects of heritage and pedagogy. Live davenings invite acolyte cantors into the feeling world of elder cantors for whom synagogue ritual was a premiere forum for artistic performance.

Yanky Lemmer, one of the best-known cantors in the Brooklyn Hasidic scene, commented in a conversation about his affection for the work of “Benzion Miller, or like Moshe Stern back in the day. You hear their live davenings and I get goose bumps fifteen times throughout *shakhris* [the morning service].” These recordings are also a source of retrospective anxiety about the diminished popularity of the creative cantorial prayer leading he values. He noted further that if he followed his impulse to sing in this kind of

long-form improvisational style at his pulpit position at the prestigious Lincoln Square Synagogue in Manhattan, “well I know I’d have no audience.”<sup>46</sup>

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Beyond the Hasidic cantorial revival, live davenings have begun to resonate in other Jewish musical scenes at the fringes of the institutional life of the community. In the unregulated and independent cantorial training studio run by Judith Berkson, a group of four students worked during the early months of 2022. All four, including myself, are professional artists, mostly in their 30s and 40s, working in Jewish and broader worlds of music and the arts. The participants in these sessions were Hadar Ahuvia, an Israeli-born choreographer and prayer leader whose work focuses on the construction of a post-Zionist Israeli identity in part through grappling with Ashkenazi heritage; Anat Spiegel, also born in Israel, an experimental composer and vocalist whose recent works have reflected a deepening relationship with Yiddish culture; and Aani Kisslinger, the youngest of the group, a Bronx-born trombonist and song writer who is active in the New York music scene. Berkson, like the students she attracts, moves in multiple worlds of musical activity; her fields of expertise include serial composition, an idiosyncratic approach to the German lied canon, and a background as a performer in jazz and rock-oriented projects. She is also the cantor of Congregation Beth Shalom, a Conservative synagogue in Santa Clarita, California. I offer this brief overview of the careers of the participants in her class to sketch out the range of identities and political and aesthetic commitments that engage *khazones* as an object of study. Anecdotally, I have found that *khazones* is increasingly a theme in Yiddishist and leftist Jewish circles in which historically informed performance, histories of Jewish aesthetics, and attention to issues of identity are major points of discussion. Klezkanada, the flagship klezmer revitalization movement music-learning camp and community happening, included a focus on cantorial music among its offerings in 2022.<sup>47</sup>

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In Berkson’s Zoom class, she offered several different pedagogic strategies. The first weeks of the class were devoted to interval studies. Students were guided through improvisation on tones of the minor modality commonly associated with the beginning of the Shabbat morning service in Ashkenazi liturgy. These exercises were intended to promote a conception of the relationship between different pitches but through the prism of a Jewish vocal music practice. After these introductory sessions, Berkson moved in a direction that represented her engagement with the two archives of cantorial music under discussion: the textual anthologies used by the

cantorial training seminaries and the live davening archive. Berkson led us through exercises related to the motif concepts derived from Wohlberg's pedagogical theory and Katchko's anthology. She offered the students a set of motifs and instructed us to apply them to associated prayer texts. These exercises are derived from the kinds of training her father experienced as a student at JTS and that he presumably taught her.

Berkson also turned our attention to live davening bootlegs. We worked with three recordings, live Shabbat morning services led by Stern and David Koussevitsky, and a live radio performance by Perele Feig, a woman performer of cantorial music who was active in New York in the 1950s and 60s. While restrictions on performance in synagogues due to her gender kept Feig from a pulpit position like her male peers, Feig was heard in live performance of liturgical music through regular appearances on WEVD, the Yiddish radio station.<sup>48</sup> Listening to these recordings, Berkson guided the group through a regimen of detailed listening and precise repetition of small details of performance. The class took up a project of embodied transcription, bypassing written notes and proceeding directly to imitative singing of passages from these live recordings.<sup>49</sup>

While it is too early to foresee what forms of creative practice or prayer leading will emerge from the encounters with the live davening archive fostered by Berkson's class, it was clear to me that imitative repetition of the sounds on these records had a physical impact on my own singing that encouraged reproduction of sound structures and vocal affects of the cantors being studied. I was also struck by the creative response to the live davening archive from the other participants. Kisslinger made a recording based on the Feig live performance bootleg that documented a process of close listening, yielding a thoughtful recreation of intonation, pronunciation of Yiddish-inflected Hebrew, and vocal affect based on the source material. In a recent composition titled "Di rayze aheym" (The journey home), based on the Yiddish poetry of Irena Klipfish, Spiegel incorporated vocal ideas that echo the muscular coloratura singing of *khazones* and the dramatic emotionalism of cantorial prayer-leading performance. These manifestations of archival delving are inclined toward the revitalization of cantorial repertoires either through prayer leading or the creation of new Jewish affective culture tied to Yiddish heritage and the sounds of *khazones*. Parallels between the work of these artists and their peers in the Hasidic cantorial revival scene demonstrate the potentials of the pedagogical use of the live davening archive to cultivate cantorial affects and skills.

## Conclusion

Live davenings have found a productive place in a new scene of musical life that is a product of the digital era. Surreptitiously captured voices of cantors have awaited their reception until the coming of the internet. The form and content of live davenings are foreign to the listening practices associated with commercial recordings with their expectations of high-fidelity sound reproduction and smooth professionalism, but they are excellently suited to the intimacy of internet media habits characterized by isolation and obsessive repetition. The vastness of the networks of memory that have been opened by the internet have created new resources that can be claimed as constitutive of tradition and a representation of the past. In the words of Friedrich Kittler, “the realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture.”<sup>50</sup> The affordances of digital file sharing and social media have created a setting in which the potentials for intermundane collaborations are vastly expanded.<sup>51</sup>

As Amanda Weidman and others have discussed, the perception that aurality is a source of “purity”—in contrast to the presumed corruption of recorded sound—is an ontology that emerged in tandem with new technologies of sound reproduction; the gramophone recording created a perception of a dualism distinguishing the authentic and the real.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, recordings that document sounds of the past have granted a material form to the idea that cultural purity is a product of temporal remove. Old recordings are a talisman of the reality of tradition, even as they simultaneously corrupt tradition through processes of commodification. Tensions over the rightful place of aurality and media in constructing the cantorial voice indicate a point of rupture between conflicting conceptions of what the cantorial voice should sound like and what it signifies. For the users of the live davening archive, aurality and electronic reproduction are collapsed upon one another, with recordings taking on an authoritative status as a reliable stand-in for the generation of dead cantors and as a remediation against cultural amnesia.

Technologies of sound reproduction and consumption reflect and create changes in “regimes of listening,” the historically situated practices that control what sounds are considered musical, and conversely what sounds are confined to the realm of noise.<sup>53</sup> At the time live davenings were captured, social norms and technological constraints offered extremely limited opportunities for the recordings to be heard and understood as valuable—instead the recordings were considered shameful, something to be hidden. Current internet-based listening

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practices have inflected the conception of what constitutes a viable source of information in ways that create opportunity for the live davening archive to flourish. Today, an endless stream of unfiltered and noisy amateur sound and video are central parts of cultural production and consumption. Live davenings fit into this crowd-sourced distribution paradigm, which is in fact supported and powered by the most powerful international media corporations.

The live davening archive was originally constructed by a multi-generational underground distribution network, the work of outsider collectors who flew in the face of Jewish religious convention.<sup>54</sup> The archive later underwent digitization and proliferation onto streaming audio and file-sharing networks that are constructed anonymously. The use of the live davening archive as a source of tradition defies the authority of conventional power holders and institutions of American Jewish life. Furthermore, the goal of acquiring skills in prayer leading associated with the *khazones* style is an outsider practice. The ritual and musical experiences associated with *khazones* are largely excluded from the institutional forms of Jewish prayer in the present day due to changing norms of musical style and bodily comportment in the synagogue.<sup>55</sup> American cantors today are rarely called upon to improvise or otherwise produce long form musical interpretations of prayer texts. The sound of cantorial prayer leading, characterized broadly by a heterophonic counterpoint of cantorial soloist and a congregation of bodies at prayer who interlace practices of listening with their own practice of textual chant, is no longer a constituent element of the American synagogue sound space.

Jewish artists in the current moment are living through a period of intense speculation about the appropriate and ethical implementation of identity in the making of art. Such questions are articulated differently in the Hasidic scene than among secular leftists, for example, but are recognizable across Jewish identity groups as responses to a shared cultural moment. The voices of cantors on bootleg recordings speak to a deeply desired inquest into the truth about what a Jewish voice should sound like and what Jewish practices of the sacred consisted of in the past. The seemingly clear transmission from a temporal remove meets a perceived absence in the present—the sound of the contemporary synagogue is characterized by musical repertoires of recent vintage that do not satisfy the exploratory artists who are attracted to *khazones*. In contrast, the cantorial voices on live davenings speak as through a séance, weathered and scratched but presenting an image of uncanny accuracy in its representation of experience.

The pedagogical function of live davenings was predicted and intended by its initial collectors. This vital purpose was indefinitely postponed due to the vagaries of its status as a source of shame on the one hand, and as jealously guarded status-yielding objects of obsessive collection on the other. It was not until the era of the internet that the dispersed group of cantorial aficionados could convene a mass affect community. The normalization of consuming media in contexts of anonymity created the material conditions in which the live davening archive could receive its new reception as an object of study. The recording activities of the initial collectors bears an antinomian prophetic stamp. Collectors understood that the intimacy and aesthetic vibrancy of the cantorial voice was on the cusp of disappearing and that only through a forbidden practice of technological invasion could it be preserved. The practice of sound collection reads as a betrayal of the holiness of the synagogue, and, perhaps, as a secret wish fulfillment of a desire for the replacement of cantorial prayer by its aesthetic surrogate through technological reproduction—the bootleg recordings moved the cantorial voice in a final and permanent manner out of the arena of lived ephemerality and into the realm of electronic mimesis, completing the process of mediatization begun at the beginning of the twentieth century through the initiation of the gramophone cantorial recordings. The shameful, secretive prophecy of collectors foretold the doom of *khazones* as an embodied ritual practice and predicted the need of sound reproduction as a bridge across time. This prophecy has been fulfilled through the use of live davenings as the material basis for renewed practices of cantorial art music.

Throughout the twentieth century, cantors have engaged in a discourse of decline and imminent doom for their field. The impulse to create the live davening archive was directly shaped by this decline narrative and was imagined as a bulwark against forgetting and cultural loss by its architects. These recordings legitimate the decline narrative, by offering proof of cultural practices that have changed and reorganized authority over Jewish prayer away from the cantor. At the same time, live davenings create the material conditions for cantorial practices to be renewed. As suggested by the case of Thomas Berkson, the live davening archivists understood their work as pedagogical, even if the only intended audience was themselves. The materiality of the live davening and its controversial focus on the aesthetic aspect of prayer predicts the future use of the archive by Jewish artists. The significance of the transmission potentials of the live davening archive is heightened by the fact that one of the key voices claiming this legacy is Berkson's own daughter, Judith Berkson. Her unique

bivalent identity as both cantorial traditionalist and radical avant-garde composer is emblematic of the transformative potentials of media to inflect and transform musical lineages.

Rather than functioning as a story of linear transmission within families or between teachers and students, the live davening archive highlights the prosthetic qualities of Jewish musical life, with the cantorial voice now ensconced in the realm of the digital and heritage defined through electronic media. This prosthesis is now implemented as a means toward the goal of reorienting the experience of Jewish prayer music toward the cultural intimacy and Jewish sonic particularism that the current generation of Jewish artists has identified as a problematic absence. In our moment, when perennial questions about how the vastness of Jewish historical experience can be articulated through music are being reoriented through the matrix of identity discourse and the politic of justice, live davenings appear to the users of the archive as a ghostly promise of encounter with the past and as a premonition of a deeply desired and tremblingly anticipated future.

## Notes

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- 1 Adina Weisel, “History,” Young Israel Beth-El of Borough Park, accessed Mar. 30, 2024, <https://www.yibethel.org/history>; Y. S. Gold, “BDE: Cantor Moshe Stern, a Legendary Voice in Boro Park of Yore,” BoroPark24, Apr. 23, 2023, <https://www.boropark24.com/news/bde-cantor-moshe-stern-a-legendary-voice-in-boro-park-of-yore>.
- 2 I use the YIVO system of transliteration for the term *khazonot* (alternatively appearing in the literature as *hazzanut* or *chazzanut*) because it reflects the Hebrew phonology of Ashkenazi Jews and to signal the Yiddish cultural milieu of the cantors and musicians discussed in this article.
- 3 Cantorial Legends, “Cantor Moshe Stern Live His Last Shabbos in Beth El Shacharis and Musaf (Leon Berger and Choir),” Apr. 26, 2012, video, 1:51:40, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2UGhGKvu0Y&ab\\_channel=CantorialLegends](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2UGhGKvu0Y&ab_channel=CantorialLegends).
- 4 David Lefkowitz, Interview by Author, July 2022.
- 5 Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Chicago, 1989), 51–93; Jeffrey Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (New York, 2009), 13–55.

- 6 Davening is a Yinglish composite of *daven*, Yiddish for “prayer,” with an English gerund ending. Davening is used both as verb and noun with a meaning beyond signifying prayer in general, to describe the professional cantor’s work as prayer leader and performer at the pulpit. [57]
- 7 An important exception is Judah Cohen’s mention of bootleg prayer recordings as a supplementary pedagogical tool used in training Reform Jewish cantors; Judah Cohen, *The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor* (Bloomington, IN, 2009), 132, 264 n. 34.
- 8 Edwin Seroussi, “The Jewish Liturgical Music Printing Revolution: A Preliminary Assessment,” in *Textual Transmission in Contemporary Jewish Cultures*, ed. Avriel Bar-Levav and Uzi Rehman (New York, 2020), 100–36; Judah M. Cohen, “Embodying Musical Heritage in a New-Old Profession: American Jewish Cantorial Schools, 1904–1939,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 11, no. 1 (2017): 25–52; Philip Vilas Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity* (Oxford, 2008).
- 9 Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, 1996), 39.
- 10 Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit, 1989), 30–68.
- 11 Aditi Deo, “Technological Conversations with the Past: Musicians, Connoisseurs, and the Audio Archive for Khayal,” *Indian Theater Journal* 4 (2020): 77–94.
- 12 My approach to the discussion of live davening recordings draws on the discipline of sounds studies, attending to the ways in which the senses are shaped by the affordances of technology and social contexts; Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York, 2008); Jacque Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, 2004); and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC, 2003).
- 13 Seroussi, “Jewish Liturgical Music.”
- 14 Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape*, 25.
- 15 Sarah S. Jai, “The Prosthetic Imagination: Enabling and Disabling the Prosthesis Trope,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 24, no. 1 (1999): 31–54; Peter Szendy, *Phantom Limbs: On Musical Bodies*, trans. Will Bishop (New York, 2016).
- 16 Veronika Seidlová, “The Social Life of Jewish Music Records from 1948 Czechoslovakia by Hazzan Josef Weiss,” *Urban People* 24, no. 2 (2022): 225–62. Through a discussion of an old cantorial record that has reentered the life of a dead cantor’s descendants as a result of online archives, Seidlová documents changes in contemporary sacred music aesthetics and practices that run counter to the mainstream of contemporary Jewish Orthodoxy.
- 17 See Jonathan Sarna, *People Walk on Their Heads: Moses Weinberger’s Jews and Judaism in New York* (New York, 1982), 98–106 for a condemnatory account of cantors as purveyors of religious corruption in the immigrant scene in New York in the 1880s.

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- 18 Pinchos Jassinowsky, "In der velt fun khazones un idisher negina," *Der morgn zhurnal*, Jan. 23, 1948; interviews with elder cantors Noah Schall, Jacob Mendelson, and Robert Kieval conducted by the author, 2021–23.
- 19 B. Shelvin, "Di tsukunft fun khazones in amerike," in *Di geshikhte fun khazones*, ed. Aaron Rosen (New York, 1924), 77–78; A. Zeldin, "A natsionale shand," *Der tog*, Sept. 18, 1924, p. 5.
- 20 Zevulun Kwartin, *Mayn leben* (Philadelphia, 1952); Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Urbana, IL, 1989), 3–26.
- 21 Roger Bennett and Josh Kun, *And You Shall Know Us by the Trail of Our Vinyl: The Jewish Past as Told by the Records We Have Loved* (New York, 2008); "Songs for the Jewish-American Jet Set: The Tikva Records Story 1950–1973," Idelsohn Society for Musical Preservation, 2011.
- 22 Sarah G. Golden, "Richard Tucker in Chicago," *Chicago Jewish History* 38, no. 3 (2014): 1–6.
- 23 Jeremiah Lockwood and Ari Kelman, "From Aesthetics to Experience: How Changing Conceptions of Prayer Changed the Sound of Jewish Worship," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 30, no. 1 (2020): 26–62.
- 24 See Israel Goldfarb, "An Analysis of the Hazanic Styles of Kwartin, Roitman, and Rosenblatt," in *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference-Convention of the Cantors Assembly of America* (New York, 1954), 24–26, at 26 for an institutional proclamation about the changed role of cantorial prayer leading in the post-World War synagogue. For an overview of the professional cantorial decline narrative, see Wayne R. Allen, *The Cantor: From the Mishnah to Modernity* (Eugene, OR, 2019), 261–68.
- 25 Cantorial Legends, "Cantor Moshe Oysher Live Shacharis Pesach 1956 in the Pine Hotel 1," Apr. 11, 2012, video, 46:52, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKyA\\_qtyop8&ab\\_channel=CantorialLegends](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKyA_qtyop8&ab_channel=CantorialLegends).
- 26 Judah Cohen, "Music Institutions and the Transmission of Tradition," *Ethnomusicology* 53, no. 2 (2009): 308–25; Joseph Feuer, ed., *50 yorige yuval zshurnal aroysgegeben fun agudas hakhazonim d'artzos habris v'kanada* (New York, 1947). The *50 yorige yuval zshurnal* was published without page numbers, perhaps because of the bilingual format of the book, with Yiddish and English sections oriented in opposite directions. In the book's Yiddish-language section, Feuer's introduction makes explicit the connection between the Holocaust and the need for the establishment of a cantorial seminary school.
- 27 Extensive biographical data about cantors and their educations is available in Yiddish lexicons. The start of a typical cantorial career typically entailed working as an apprentice with regionally well-known cantors as a *meshoyer* (choir singer). See the biographical compendia in Rosen, *Di geshikhte fun khazones*, and Elias Zaludkovsky, *Kultur-treger fun di idische lituriye* (Detroit, 1931). For a fictionalized account of cantorial choirs, see Michl Gelbart, *Fun meshoyerim lebn* (New York, 1942).

- 28 Adolph Katchko, *Services for Sabbath Eve and Morning* (New York, 1951); Israel Alter, *The Sabbath Service: The Complete Musical Liturgy for the Hazzan* (New York, 1968).
- 29 Max Wohlberg, “The History of the Musical Modes of the Ashkenazic Synagogue and Their Usage,” *Cantors Assembly Proceedings* (June–July 1954): 36–42; Boaz Tarsi, “Observations on Practices of Nusachot in America,” *Asian Music* 33, no. 2 (2002): 175–219.
- 30 Slobin, *Chosen Voices*; Cohen, *Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor*.
- 31 See “FAU Libraries Accepts Generous Gift in Memory of Barry Serota,” Recorded Sound Archives Florida Atlantic University Libraries, July 21, 2011, <https://rsa.fau.edu/blog/gi/fau-libraries-accepts-generous-gift-in-memory-of-barry-serota/>.
- 32 See “First Phillips Tape Recorder, 1963,” Philips, Jan. 1, 2019, <https://www.philips.com/a-w/about/news/media-library/20190101-First-Philips-cassette-recorder-1963.html>.
- 33 Robert Kieval, Interview by Author, Summer 2021.
- 34 “Timbre sequence” is a term I borrow from German ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik who employs it to describe elements of sound that do not fit neatly into the binary categories of rhythm or pitch but are nonetheless structural in the construction of musical meaning, not merely “ornamental.” In a discussion of African diaspora musics, Kubik writes that timbre sequence “form the non-Western repertoire of the blues”; Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Jackson, MS, 1999), 55.
- 35 Alethea Perez, “JSA at FAU Libraries Receives Gift in Memory of Barry Serota,” Recorded Sound Archives Florida Atlantic University Libraries, Oct. 14, 2011, <https://rsa.fau.edu/blog/preserving-restoration/jsa-at-fau-libraries-receives-gift-in-memory-of-barry-serota-2/>.
- 36 Charles Bloch, “Cantor Charles Bloch Recorded Live at Temple Ansche Chesed, New York City,” 1983, HS-6100, Recorded Sound Archives of Florida Atlantic University Libraries, <https://rsa.fau.edu/album/40051>. The album liner notes by Jewish music scholar Issachar Miron state that the record is “a genuine souvenir, an act of spiritual experience ‘directly and live’ from his synagogue pulpit, to his worshipper and listener.”
- 37 Sherwood Goffin, “Review: Live at Temple Anshe Chesed, New York City, by Charles Bloch,” *Musica Judaica* 5, no. 1 (1982–83): 99–101.
- 38 Another important exception to this prohibition on live recordings of prayers is the *Selikhos*, a late-night penitential prayer service held each night the week before Rosh Hashanah. The first *Selikhos* service is conducted late Saturday night, at a time that is not marked as a festival and therefore not under the prescription against use of electricity. This has opened up the *Selikhos* as a musically marked performance, with the use of amplification and recording equipment sometimes being used. The lack of specific prohibitions has resulted in the production and commercial release of numerous recordings of cantors leading *Selikhos* prayer services, recorded during actual prayer, much like live davenings, though typically with higher sound production standards.

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- 39 CantorEsq, “Chazzanut For All,” MediaFire, accessed Dec. 9, 2022, <https://www.mediafire.com/?u8j92uzbihc3o&fbclid=IwAR3s0o3RiKcsPIZC3aPCh1y8wiQNmjvEJJ94Fu8Xd-gJuBlwTyTUzE15vgs#u8j92uzbihc3o>.
- 40 Daniel Schwartz, Interview by Author, Feb. 2019.
- 41 Daniel Schwartz, Interview by Author, Nov. 2022.
- 42 Rabbi Schachter (born 1941) is an American Orthodox rabbi, an adviser to the Orthodox Union, a dean at Yeshiva University, and a prolific commentator on issues pertaining to technology and modern life. I was not able to locate the halakhic ruling that Schwartz was referring to in lists of his responsa. “Rabbi Hershel Schachter: Special Topics,” Torahweb, accessed Jan. 20, 2023, [https://www.torahweb.org/author/rsch\\_dt\\_special.html](https://www.torahweb.org/author/rsch_dt_special.html).
- 43 Yaakov Lemmer, @yaakov\_lemmer, “That’s It,” Instagram, Apr. 20, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CrQwNplLx5U/>.
- 44 The man who runs the Cantorial Legends YouTube channel prefers to remain anonymous. Another Hasidic cantorial aficionado, who owns an important live davening collection spoke to me and provided valuable insights and information, also requested anonymity.
- 45 Jeremiah Lockwood, *Golden Ages: Hasidic Singers and Cantorial Revival in the Digital Era* (Oakland, CA, 2024).
- 46 Yanki Lemmer, Interview by Author, July 10, 2018.
- 47 Both Judith Berkson and I were on the faculty of Klezkanada in 2022.
- 48 Arianne Brown, “The Khazntes—The Life Story of Sophie Kurtzer, Bas Sheva, Sheindele the Khaznte, Perele Feig, Goldie Malavsky and Frayedele Oysher,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 32 (2007): 51–79; Henry Sapoznik, “The Promiscuous World of Jewish Music Series, Lecture 18: Kol Isha: The Pioneering Women Cantors 1923–1975,” Sept. 14, 2020, Public lecture, Zoom; Jeremiah Lockwood, “Memories of Perele Feig,” Milken Center Conversations, Mar. 23, 2022.
- 49 I develop the theme of “embodied transcription” in my research on Hasidic cantorial revivalists. I argue that Hasidic cantorial revivalists are an example of a broader movement toward the use of archival sources as the basis for performance that is a dynamic of heritage-based art forms in the digital era. I refer to this embodied research reportage as “animating the archive.” Lockwood, *Golden Ages*, 42–45.
- 50 Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, 1999 [1986]), 13.
- 51 Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, “Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,” *TDR* 54, no. 1 (2010): 14–38.
- 52 Amanda J. Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham, NC, 2006), 243; Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, “His Master’s Voice? Exploring Qawwali and ‘Gramophone Culture’ in South Asia,” *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (1999): 63–98.

- 53 Sophia Rosenfeld, “On Being Heard: A Case for Paying Attention to the Historical Ear,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 316–34; Szendy, *Listen*.
- 54 See Blake Atwood, *Underground: The Secret Life of Videocassettes in Iran* (Cambridge, MA, 2021) for a discussion of underground distribution networks.
- 55 Lockwood and Kelman, “From Aesthetics to Experience.”

[61]

*Live  
Davenings*



Jeremiah  
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JEREMIAH LOCKWOOD is a scholar and musician, working in the fields of Jewish Studies, Performance Studies, and ethnomusicology. His work engages with issues arising from peering into the archive and imagining the power of “lost” forms of expression to articulate keenly felt needs in the present. He is currently a fellow at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Research at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Golden Ages: Hasidic Singers and Cantorial Revival in the Digital Era* (University of California, 2024). [drjeremiahlockwood@gmail.com](mailto:drjeremiahlockwood@gmail.com)