

Cantors at the Pulpit

The Limits of Revivalist Aesthetics

When I first reached out to Yanky Lemmer about visiting Lincoln Square Synagogue, the prestigious Modern Orthodox synagogue where he has held the cantorial pulpit position since 2013, Lemmer warned me that the service would be “light on khazones.”

The first time I heard Lemmer at Lincoln Square on a Shabbos morning in 2015, I was struck immediately by the fineness of his tenor voice and the confidence of his coloratura singing. As Lemmer launched into *V'chulam mekablim*, his vocal mannerisms recalled the idiomatic phrasing of gramophone-era cantors. I felt as though I was privileged to hear Mordechai Hershman singing in 1927. The sound of his prayer leading was an uncanny and deeply affecting experience for me. I got choked up listening to him, moved by the powerful timbre of his voice, the wealth of associations conjured by his musical references to classic recordings, and by the vivid sense that his voice offered a musical translation of the Hebrew prayer texts.

I wondered if the other bodies in the room resonated to his voice in the same way that mine did. This question, about the generalizability of my own experience of listening and the emotional response to the prayer leading of cantorial revivalists, is one that troubles me and that I have no evidence from my research to offer certain testimony about. What I have been able to ascertain is that Lemmer does not stay within the musical domain of his khazones expertise during prayer leading, but rather embraces a variety of musical styles over the course of a service. According to Lemmer and other cantors I have spoken to, musical choices they make during prayer leading reflect the reality that their chosen musical genre is not loved or understood and must be limited and substituted with sounds drawn from other styles of music.

As Lemmer reached the *Kedusha*, usually one of the musically marked elements of a cantorial prayer leading service, he launched into a melody that surprised me. The melody he used was a contrafact, a commonly used technique in Jewish liturgical contexts in which a melody from one song is used for a different lyric text. In Jewish prayer leading, contrafacta serve as an opportunity to engage with popular or aesthetically desirable genres in the context of the service. The melody Lemmer used for the *Kedusha* prayer was taken from Josh Groban's 2003 hit "You Raise Me Up," a song that has remained popular in the adult contemporary category of light radio friendly fare for close to two decades. Rather than being an outlier for an Orthodox cantor to sing this sentimental mainstream pop song, the melody is in fact a popular choice in Orthodox communities and is often sung at weddings, frequently as a contrafact for the prayer text *Mi Adir* from the marriage ceremony liturgy.¹

Lemmer's performance of the pop song was impactful and activated his clear and strong upper register. The kinds of ornamentation he used in the song were far removed from cantorial coloratura, showing that he possesses other forms of musical skill. His approach sounded stylistically idiomatic to the source recording, recalling the vocal quality of Groban or pop R&B singers such as Michael Bolton. The stylistic chasm between this rendition of the *Kedusha* and the *V'chulam Mekablum* he had sung just minutes earlier outlined the multiple worlds of sound that Lemmer is expected to be able to traverse in his pulpit position. Both "You Raise Me Up" and his finely detailed nusakh, which he had learned from Noah Schall, are showcases for musical skill and register as emotional labor, offering two different conceptions of the kinds of aesthetic that are required of a cantor.

Nusakh-based chant intimates a sense of the cantor as a musical expert who can effectively reference sounds of the Jewish communal past. Improvisatory play with nusakh melodies invokes Jewish heritage through reference to old records of the cantorial golden age and makes room for creativity, within a tightly bounded set of parameters. The contrafact Lemmer sang for the *Kedusha* sent a different kind of message about the cantor and congregation. Singing pop melodies also presents Lemmer as a musical expert, but one whose domain of knowledge includes contemporary commercial music with no explicit connection to Jewish culture, other than that it is enjoyed by Jewish people. Lemmer's job requires that he be able to channel the musical desires of his congregants and fulfill their urge to participate in the musical life of bourgeois America, even in the particularistic Jewish space of the synagogue. While Yanky's mastery of older forms of Jewish prayer music are considered to be a prerequisite for employment as a cantor, it may in fact be his willingness to embrace pop genres that is key to his success as a pulpit cantor.

The multiple musical competencies demanded of a cantor and a perceived diminished compatibility of nusakh with the musical interests of American Jews have been noted by ethnographers of the American synagogue music for the past four decades. Mark Slobin's research with cantors in the 1980s, focused on

Conservative cantors but with all denominations of American Judaism represented, demonstrated that a generational shift was in progress. The cantors Slobin studied had received a style of training in which nusakh was presented as a complete system for prayer leading. The focus on nusakh in cantorial education was still in the foreground when Judah Cohen undertook his ethnography on the training of Reform cantors in the early 2000s. The cantors in both Slobin and Cohen's research cohorts expressed the sentiment that nusakh was less well understood and appreciated by their congregants than by the cantors themselves. Today, cantors are increasingly focused on song leading in styles of Jewish devotional music that sideline soloist performance. Lay-led prayer leading has become a new norm in many synagogues that previously employed professional cantors.² These long-standing trends in the American synagogue are reflected in the musical lives of Hasidic cantorial revivalists and have broad implications for their paths to professionalization and experiences in the synagogue.

In this chapter I offer a series of ethnographic sketches that show how the aspirations and musical individualism of Hasidic cantorial revivalists become entangled with the professional cantorial culture of the United States. The specific parameters of musical and liturgical authority that have emerged in the American cantorate over the course of the twentieth century shape the ways in which the expressiveness of cantorial revivalists can be given presence and voice in the synagogue. Hasidic cantorial revivalists look to the gramophone-era style as an aesthetic with radical possibilities for self-exploration and experimentation. Khazones as a musical genre emerged from the synagogue, but its place in contemporary Jewish institutional life is contested, to say the least. Rather than being a signal point of unleashing of fantasy, talent and education, the synagogue is a place where cantorial revivalist dreams of self-actualization as an artist must be tempered and given new shape. For Hasidic cantorial revivalists, this dynamic is often perceived through the lens of the decline narrative that is prevalent in professional cantorial circles.

Cantor Zevi Muller is the pulpit cantor at the West Side Institutional Synagogue in Manhattan. Muller was born into a non-Hasidic Haredi family in Antwerp. While his family history diverges in some important ways from the other singers profiled in this book, his yeshivah background, self-directed musical education, and personal aesthetic orientation toward the early twentieth-century cantorial style closely mirror the Hasidic cantorial revivalist scene. Muller described the relationship of his congregants to cantorial prayer thus:

We need to recognize at least for the Modern Orthodox community I would say they don't have that same connection to the nusakh the way I have, I think. It's sad. I want them to have it because it will make them richer. But many of them don't . . . So, the Modern Orthodox, many are walking on a thin line . . . They need a khazn . . . If they would have someone who doesn't know nusakh it would sound strange to them . . . They understand what nusakh is. They know that it's the right

way. They're Orthodox, they're still kind of conservative. They don't want to change those things. But you know when young people come to my shul, they don't know much about nusakh. They know that their khazn needs to know nusakh because it's the proper way, but they don't connect to it emotionally the way I connect to it . . . So, they listen to modern music, you know, rock and roll, or R&B, or reggae, or I don't know what. They have their styles. So, you need to be able to connect. So, pop Jewish music provides some of that connection. Because we live in a world of minor, major songs, simple type of structure.³

In my conversations with cantors about their pulpit positions, alienation from synagogue musical norms and the need to negotiate with local tastes were consistent themes. After having spent considerable time and effort developing skills and performance repertoire based in the gramophone-era cantorial style, cantors who are talented, disciplined, and fortunate enough to achieve employment in a synagogue must then learn to access a new set of prayer-leading skills related to the musical conventions of their communities of employment. In this chapter I will discuss the trajectory of musical knowledge cantors must master in their pulpit jobs and the normative synagogue musical styles the cantors encounter when they enter the job market. In the negotiations of musical style and meaning between cantors and the communities they serve, it is the cantors' conception of aesthetics that must compromise and transform.

The learning path of Hasidic cantorial revivalists involves a series of replacements of musical knowledge. Orthodox pop music, the "normal" music of their birth community, is replaced by a passionate interest in old cantorial records, a style considered anachronistic in most sites of contemporary Jewish life. "Hasidic nusakh," the sounds and styles associated with prayer in the Hasidic community, is replaced by the more prestigious "cantorial nusakh," which is considered essential professional knowledge for a cantor seeking synagogue employment. In their careers at the pulpit another stratum is added to the mix, as cantors learn to fulfill the musical desires of their congregants, often by returning to pop music sounds that they rejected at the onset of their musical journey as musically unsophisticated and unsatisfying. These processes of replacement are not unilateral and permanent, but rather form a palimpsest of musical knowledge, in which different periods of a life spent in Jewish music inform each other and inflect manners of performance and habits of musical expression. Even as cantors reject some forms of musical style in favor of others, these musical decisions are not permanent and unalterable.

Not all of the cantors who participated in my research aspired to professional work in synagogues. For some Hasidic cantorial revivalists, studying old records is the end goal of their interest in singing, and recital-type performance, often in informal settings, fulfills their artistic ambitions. For others, a professional pathway in the synagogue is strongly desired. For those bent on professionalization, the primary channel to employment is in Modern Orthodox synagogues. In this chapter, I focus on the work of the small number of Hasidic cantors who are

employed to perform regularly in synagogues, and especially at their Sabbath services, which are the bread and butter of a pulpit cantor's work life.

Regular employment for a cantor is extremely rare in the Orthodox world. Many synagogues only hire part-time cantors for the High Holidays, the liturgical apex of the Jewish calendrical cycle with its own specialized liturgy demanding expert musical knowledge that lay members of a synagogue usually are not capable of performing adequately. Paradoxically, the High Holidays, which have the most complex liturgy and which most resemble a theatrical frontal performance, are the job most available to novice cantors. The High Holidays liturgy is usually the facet of liturgy that is studied first, specifically in preparation for a job.

The Orthodox synagogues that do employ a year-round pulpit cantor in the United States are, almost without exception, Modern Orthodox synagogues, not Hasidic or other Haredi synagogues. As Yoel Kohn has described it, "Somehow the Hasidic community has been producing most of them [cantors] nowadays. But the Hasidic community itself does not consume it. It's an exporter of cantors." For some Modern Orthodox synagogues, hiring a cantor is a mark of prestige and is considered an important element of communal life. A cantor from a Hasidic background adds to the self-conception of the community as elite and preservationist of tradition. Modern Orthodoxy has a profile as the most "moderate" branch of contemporary Orthodoxy. Its members generally wear clothing typical of the American bourgeoisie, undertake secondary education in secular universities, and are similar to their non-Jewish peers in terms of consuming "mainstream" popular culture. Yanky Lemmer has suggested to me that this sense of difference between Modern Orthodox and Hasidic Jews leads to Hasidim being perceived as a source of greater Jewish "authenticity."

Even if we don't sync up 100 percent, like, we're both Jews, we're both Orthodox, we both keep Shabbos, we both keep kosher. Yeah, we're different culturally and frankly they find it fascinating. Like when we have people over for Shabbos dinner sometimes, they're fascinated. *Oh my gosh you had an arranged marriage. What!? You met for forty-five minutes?! We can't believe it.* That kind of thing. But in terms of davening, it's just the opposite, it's actually a plus. Because the nusakh coming from the *khasidishe velt* [Yiddish, Hasidic world] is, and they know this, is the nusakh. It's the real deal. In most senses, in most ways.⁴

"Ultra-Orthodox" Jews are often looked to by Jews in more liberal communities to provide religious services, such as kosher certification, scribal skill for writing Torah scrolls, and rulings on matters of *halacha* (Jewish ritual law). In general, these matters of "traditional" expertise are dominated by the religious service providers—communal norms demand that communities accept the rulings of rabbinic experts. In the area of liturgy however, this dynamic is upended. In cantorial performance in the synagogue, it is the "experts" who must become the students of local musical knowledge and liturgical practices.

THE ARCHIVE AND THE REPERTOIRE
OF HASIDIC CANTORS

Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor has described a division between forms of knowledge she refers to as the archive and the repertoire. In this rubric, the repertoire represents forms of knowledge embedded in family and communal life, elements of experience that generate “embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge.”⁵ In contrast, the archive is supported by institutions and encoded in texts that are afforded official forms of respect by power holders. The archive, says Taylor, “works across distance, over time and space . . . What changes over time is the value, relevance, or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied.”⁶

In the context of the musical lives of Hasidic cantorial revivalists, the repertoire can be understood as representing the sounds of Hasidic prayer. The archive in this paradigm would represent the forms of professional cantorial knowledge—both the old commercial records the cantors love and seek to reanimate, and the professional cantorial nusakh that they must master as fledgling professionals. In the process of achieving professionalization, the archive is ascendant over the repertoire of Hasidic prayer knowledge.

The Hasidic *shtibl* is a sonic environment characterized by heterophony and noise. In this site of public prayer, all male participants (men and women are segregated by gender; indeed, public prayer is in general a male undertaking) are expected to recite the entire liturgy of the service being performed. Each praying body is a prayer leader of sorts, generating their own sonic experience. Services in Hasidic synagogues are usually led by nonprofessional singers. Professional bal tefiles are a relatively small group of singers in comparison to the enormous number of prayer houses—usually prayer services are led by nonexperts. In general, bal tefiles have a markedly different vocal sound than that which is usually achieved by the trained voices of professional cantors. Yanky Lemmer refers to the sound of the bal tefiles he heard growing up as “more organic.” As a rule, prayer is carried out very quickly in the Hasidic context, in part because of stringent rules that require the recitation of lengthy prayers, encompassing thousands of words of printed Hebrew text, on a daily basis. The requirements of fulfilling the *mitzvah* (Hebrew, commandment) of prayer demands that the texts be chanted quickly. Regularity and repetition engender an intimacy with the prayer book. A complete memorization of the prayer book is common among Hasidic Jews; this gives Hasidic singers a great advantage as they study liturgical music based on these texts.

“Hasidic nusakh,” the melodies used in Hasidic prayer, offer a degree of heterogeneity based on sect and sometimes individual family traditions. Different Hasidic groups have localized customs that distinguish them from other groups; in general, the melodies of prayer used by Hasidic Jews differ in multiple ways

1
u' ma vir - yom - u mey vi - lay la

2
u mav dil beyn yom u veyn lay la A doy shem - tz' va oys she moy

3
kel chay - v' ka yom to mid

4
yim lokh a ley nu ley o lam vo ed

5
Ba - rukh A to A doy shem

6
ha ma - riv a ra vim -

FIGURE 2. Yanky Lemmer, “Hasidic Mariv.”

from the music that has been propagated by professional cantors in the twentieth century. As Yanky Lemmer notes, “a lot of the *nusakhos* [Hebrew, plural of *nusakh*] that I grew up with are not exactly the *nusakhos* that the world has accepted.” In this statement, “the world” is a shorthand for non-Hasidic Jews in general, and Modern Orthodox synagogues, such as his place of employment, in particular. As I highlighted in chapter 2, “correcting” Hasidic prayer musical habits and adopting the professional cantorial ideology of a professionalized *nusakh* as the standard is one of the goals of cantorial training for Hasidic singers.

For reasons that are unclear, one of the most musically distinct elements of the liturgy that differentiates Hasidic *nusakh* from “the world” is the set of melodies used for the Friday evening prayer at the beginning of the Sabbath. There are two distinct versions of the Friday *Mariv* (Hebrew, evening) service that are commonly sung in the Brooklyn Hasidic community today. Cantorial pedagogue Noah Schall refers to these *nusakhos* as “Hasidic minor” and “Hasidic major.” The Friday night *Mariv* Hasidic minor was sung for me by Yanky Lemmer at an interview we conducted at one of our first meetings.

The Hasidic major *nusakh* for Friday night *Mariv* is distinct from this minor melody and shares a sense of melodic outline with the major modality typically associated with the chanting of *Kabbalos Shabbos*, the suite of Psalms and mystical texts that initiates the Sabbath. The following transcription is from a performance

Bar khu - Es a do nay Ha m' vo rakh
 Barukh a doy nay ha m' voy - rakh
 Ley o lam - vo - ed
 Ma'a vir yom u mey - vin lay lo
 uma vir beyn yom uveyn lay lo -
 A do nay -
 7 Tse va oys she mo El - chay - v' ka yam ta mid
 8 yimlokh a ley nu ley o lam - vo ed
 9 Bo - ruch A - to A do - nay ha ma vir A ru - vim

FIGURE 3. Yoel Kohn, Friday night Mariv “Hasidic major.”

of Yoel Kohn at an unusual cantorial concert in the form of a prayer-leading service called *Nachalah* (Hebrew, inheritance) held at Hebrew Union College (HUC) and organized by veteran cantor, teacher, and advocate for cantorial music Jacob Mendelson. *Nachalah* was envisioned by Mendelson as a showcase for cantorial tradition and was presided over by himself and his students. I introduced Kohn to Mendelson in 2018 in the hopes that his traditionalist approach would be appreciated by the cohort of young cantors at HUC, leading to multiple invitations to present at *Nachalah*. In the concert notes that were produced for a service performance Kohn participated in, his version of the *Barchu* from the Mariv service was



FIGURE 4. Yanky Lemmer, “Cantorial” Friday night Mariv.

labeled “Hasidic nusakh,” unambiguously commenting on the difference of his style from the mainstream approach taught at HUC and heard in liberal movement synagogues.⁷

While these two styles (Hasidic major and minor) seem to be prevalent among Brooklyn Hasidic Jews, they are not necessarily both well-known across communal boundaries within the Hasidic world. For example, when I sang Kohn the Hasidic minor nusakh I had heard from Yanky Lemmer, he did not recognize it. Both these melodic forms are distinct from the “cantorial nusakh,” which is considered the mainstream by professional cantors and which Lemmer performs in his pulpit position. This rendition of the cantorial version of the same text was sung for me by Lemmer moments after he demonstrated the version he grew up with.

This version of the Mariv service is included in cantorial training anthologies and is the standard in American synagogues. However, at the time of the founding of the cantorial training institutes, both major and minor variants of this melody were in circulation. Adolf Katchko, whose anthology is used as a standard work at the HUC Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, included both major and minor variants in its first edition.⁸ The Friday night nusakh is one of the most radical point of difference between Hasidic and non-Hasidic prayer practices and was cited by almost all the participants in this research as an example of friction between the different forms of prayer music. Many of the participants in this study cited the Friday night service as a liturgical moment when they became keenly aware of the differences between their musical upbringing and the norms of “the world.” This musical shift makes the replacement of Hasidic “repertoire” by professional cantorial “archive” unambiguously audible.

Hasidic cantorial revivalists are valued for their perceived access to tradition, their performance of classic cantorial compositions, and their mastery of professional cantorial skills. As I have shown in previous chapters, Hasidic cantorial revivalists take great pains to develop their knowledge of khazones and cantorial nusakh. In practice, however, these markers of cantorial excellence are subordinated to yet another domain of liturgical skill. Contemporary styles of synagogue music, such as the contrafact pop melody I described at the beginning of this

chapter, play a major role in cantorial performance and are a dominant force in sculpting the soundscape of the synagogue.

CHARISMA TO DECORUM, PRESENTATION
TO PARTICIPATION: MUSICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE
IN THE AMERICAN SYNAGOGUE

Something happened to cantorial music in the years between World War II, when cantorial music constituted a vibrant element of Jewish popular culture in synagogues and media, and the 1980s, by which point khazones had had taken up a seemingly permanent fringe position in the life of the American Jewish community. Identifying the causes of this shift involves sifting through memory, myth, and sedimented layers of nostalgia and prejudice. For lovers of khazones and some professional cantors, the shifts in the sounds of American Jewish life have taken on a semi-official status as a narrative of decline and loss.⁹

In this section I will briefly outline some of the shifting cultural forces that contributed to the lachrymose narrative of cantorial culture. This narrative of loss is not only a retrospective melancholy theory of Jewish music; it is also descriptive of material circumstances. Most American synagogues no longer employ cantors or have shifted musical practices toward new musical styles that do not adhere to the conception of tradition (the ideology of *nusakh* I discuss in chapter 2) that is taught by cantorial training institutions and harbored by many cantors. For Hasidic cantors, the history of social change in the synagogue and how it has shaped the sounds of prayer are formative of their professional working environment and the kinds of music they can make at the pulpit.

Listening, as Peter Szendy has argued, is regulated by “regimes” that reflect ideologies and political contexts. In any musical experience, the listener coconstructs meaning and authorizes—or, conversely, denies agency to musicians.¹⁰ Jacque Rancière has suggested that the senses and their uses in aesthetic experience reflect political contexts that regulate who can speak and what can be understood.¹¹ As historian Sophia Rosenfeld has noted, “basic auditory perception, as well as the kind of hearing we call active listening, is historically variable; it depends on incidental and deliberate changes in technology, the environment, aesthetics, and social relations and is also generative of those changes.”¹²

The changing perceptions and practices of cantorial music in the American Jewish community not only reflect a shift in musical tastes; these changes speak to emergent identities and political contexts that mirror the constitution of the identity category of “American Jews.” In each chapter of this book, I have gestured toward describing shifts in the sociality of listening that have attended the historical development of Jewish liturgical music in the United States. Jewish American habits of listening define and delimit the aesthetic context in which Hasidic cantorial revivalists work. The reflections on shifts in music and listening in this section

are by necessity partial and provisional but will hopefully be helpful in illuminating some of the problems of listening that Hasidic cantorial revivalists face in their synagogue employment.

Writing in 1948 in the Yiddish newspaper *Der morgn-zhurnal*, cantor and journalist Pinchas Jassinowsky described the prayer leading of recording star Cantor Samuel Vigoda in a New York synagogue:

It wasn't long before the group of people were cradled in prayer and were transformed from indifferent listeners to devoted *daveners* [Yiddish, ones who pray]. The commonplace feeling disappeared from every Jewish face and the people were as if wrapped in a *talis* [Hebrew, prayer shawl] of holiness . . . Gathered together were religious and secular; young and old; women and men bearing deep emotion on their faces and in their longing countenances shone the spirit of their grandfathers and grandmothers, from long disappeared generations, who still live in their gazing into the old sacred place.¹³

Jassinowsky's prose reads to us today as stylized and romanticized. But the phenomenon he describes, according to which listening to cantors constituted a popular form of sacred experience, is broadly represented in the Yiddish press and literary descriptions of cantors in Jewish literature.

The memory of this kind of communal consumption of cantorial prayer leading, and the vestiges of long-form cantorial improvisations in ritual contexts still practiced by a handful of elder cantors, haunts cantorial revivalists. This kind of cantorial musical production offers a tantalizing concept of artistry and reception that Hasidic cantors romanticize and that some seek to reproduce.

The sounds of these kinds of concert-like prayer-leading services are preserved in bootleg recordings of cantors in synagogues, recorded surreptitiously starting in the 1950s and 1960s, as tape recorders arrived on the consumer market. Field recordings, referred to as "live davenings" by fans, represent a more intimate and raw depiction of cantorial sound than what is heard on commercial recordings. Whereas commercial records featured entextualized versions of cantorial performance, rendered as aria-like renditions of music of prayer tailored to the time constraints of 78rpm records, live davenings capture the art of cantors *in situ*, as a form of ritual.

Live davenings capture some of the great artists of the cantorial golden age in their later period. They document a broadly diverse set of approaches to prayer leading that foregrounded expressiveness and individual stylistic approaches. Listening to live davenings of gramophone-era stars like Pierre Pinchik or Moishe Oysher reveals a heterogeneity of musical material, encompassing a variety of musical sources and an approach that seem to be heavily improvised. The sound of prayer leading on live davening recordings disturbs the sense of nusakh as a unitary source of melodic material. Long-form cantorial prayer leading heard on these recordings emphasizes the role of charisma, creativity, and individual style in constituting the cantorial approach to prayer leading.¹⁴

These recordings document a variety of compositions and improvisations in the renditions of prayers sung by cantors. The noise and activity of the bodies at prayer in the synagogue can also be heard. The public that listened to creative cantorial prayer leading in synagogue was far from passive and silent. The congregation sings along at moments in unsteady heterophony, but it can also be heard in a variety of other forms of sound making, including bodily movements and the flowing monotonal individual chanting of the prayer service. Live davenings bear the imprint of a sociality of listening that involved forms of sound-making expressiveness on the part of the listeners.

For the listening participants in cantorial prayer services, the aesthetic labor of the cantor was a focal point of the musical experience but was not the only source of sound. How cantors responded to the “noise” of the synagogue was perhaps not uniform; Pinchik was said to have shushed his congregation from the pulpit at times, dramatically demanding silence so he could exercise the full dynamic range of his voice. But the polyvocal environment of the synagogue was a marker of a synergistic relationship between cantors and their congregation. The Jewish public seems to have understood cantorial performance as contributing to a legitimate and desired form of Jewish prayer.

These recordings are crucial evidence for contemporary singers who endeavor to learn how to lead services in the creative style of the masters of the idiom. Hasidic cantorial revivalists cite live davenings as a keen source of inspiration and aspiration. Discussing the aesthetic compromises he makes in his prayer leading, Yanky Lemmer comments:

If I was completely in charge, well, I know I'd have no audience. I would try to daven like Ben Zion 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].¹⁵

The reception of live davenings is significant both for its value as a pedagogic and aesthetic source but also as a form of antinormative community building. Live davenings constitute what media studies scholar Blake Atwood has called an “underground distribution network,” a social mechanism that surreptitiously shares forms of media that are either illegal or otherwise marginal to the economic and cultural mainstream. In the days before the internet, fans would swap recordings of revered cantors that they had made themselves. Today, the internet has democratized access, but some fans continue to hoard their live davenings, only agreeing to share with other collectors who can exchange similarly rarified sonic treasures.¹⁶

Live davenings document and repurpose an experience that is intended to remain ephemeral. They are a trespass against the typical norms of synagogue life. In order to record a cantor leading Sabbath or holiday services, fans would surreptitiously sneak recording devices into synagogue spaces where the use of electricity was formally forbidden on these occasions by normative interpretations

of *halacha*. For deep lovers of khazones, the aesthetic value of these recordings transcends the halachic prohibitions that attended their creation. The sense of controversy around these objects is barely acknowledged by the Hasidic musicians I have spoken to. The existence of live davenings is generally celebrated and the recordings are considered to be at least as important a source of cantorial knowledge as the commercial recordings that constitute the “standard repertoire” of young cantors.

As I have shown in previous chapters, the post-World War II American synagogue shifted away from the cantorial paradigm of creative davening, supported by the sociality of a polyvocal synagogue sound environment. The reasons for this shift are beyond the scope of this study, but they seem to relate to the process of suburbanization, the generational shift from immigrant to native-born American cohorts as the dominant communal force, the move toward an assimilatory identity as middle-class Americans employed in the professions and educated in public schools, and the adoption of an orientation toward Zionism as a cultural focal point for the community.

This latter development had a distinct aural impact on prayer. In the 1950s, American synagogues began to adopt a version of the “modern” Hebrew Israeli phonology for the performance of prayer. This change had a powerful impact on Jewish vocal music traditions based in the Yiddish-accented pronunciation of prayer. The sounds of Yiddish phonology play a distinctive role in cantorial vocal production.¹⁷ The move away from this marker of the European immigrant heritage had a radically disrupting impact on the sonic-memory qualities of prayer, as noted by Cantor Moshe Ganchoff (1905–97). Ganchoff quoted one of his mentors, Pierre Pinchik, as saying, “What’s that word, *a-TA* [Hebrew, you, pronounced with the stress on the second syllable]? The right word is *A-to* [with the accent on the first syllable]. *Dos is idish. Ata is nisht idish* [Yiddish, That is Jewish. *Ata* is not Jewish].”¹⁸ For Pinchik, the use of the modern Hebrew phonology evacuates the prayer texts of their signification of Jewish identity. Even the word *ato*, the masculine singular second person pronoun used constantly in prayer to address God, becomes foreign-sounding when it is changed to meet a set of political conventions that are external to the social and spiritual logic of Yiddish expressive culture.

Shifts in the listening habits of Jewish Americans, generally toward embracing popular culture, occurred simultaneously to the establishment of a new kind of cantorate. In the period after World War II, cantors were trained in seminary conservatories in a style of prayer music that was text based and discouraging of the kinds of populist exuberance that characterized some of the stars of the phonograph era. Rather than having to rely exclusively on performance charisma as the basis for employment, the cantorate was transformed into a unionized workforce that provided a service for synagogues as prayer leaders and educators.

The perceived alienation of acculturated American-born Jews from the offerings of their synagogues was noted with some frustration by members of

the Cantor Assembly, the union of Conservative cantors, in their professional journal. In a representative screed in the *Journal of Synagogue Music* from 1967, Samuel Rosenbaum dubbed prayer “the lost art,” accusing his congregants of being “uncomfortably well dressed, faces, fixed, eyes shallow, focused on things far away . . . And the prayer, the prayer we so desperately need, it lies buried in the untouched recesses of the heart.”¹⁹ Rosenbaum’s negative assessment of American Jews accords with Riv Ellen Prell’s description of the mid-century American synagogue as being preoccupied with “decorum” at the expense of cultural intimacy and popular engagement with the experience of prayer.²⁰

In response to the acknowledged problem of communicating with their congregations, some pulpit cantors introduced new musical styles. Commissioning new pieces of music by classical composers had been a staple of the musical life of elite synagogues since the nineteenth century. Picking up the pace of embracing new styles in the 1960s and 1970s, some cantors commissioned pieces that incorporated elements of jazz and pop music in an effort to regain relevance to the musical lives of their congregants.

In the same period when these cantor-driven commissioned projects were being composed and performed (and sometimes recorded), another stream of populist liturgical music began to enter the synagogue.²¹ Guitar-strumming Jewish singer-songwriters were composing new songs on liturgical texts, influenced by the sounds of the folk revival and the 1960s counterculture. The two most prominent examples of this phenomenon were Shlomo Carlebach and Debbie Friedman, who were associated with the Orthodox and Reform movements, respectively.²² These musicians produced new music on liturgical texts that have been embraced as a new liturgy geared toward enhanced participation in worship through group singing.

While the music of Carlebach and Friedman is iconic of a new era in liturgy, American Jews have a longer history of calling on group singing of metered melodies to perform “American” identities. Extending back to the nineteenth century, hymn singing in English played a major role in synagogue worship.²³ Recording star cantors helped establish solo vocal styles of prayer leading as normative in American synagogues in the era of mass immigration from Eastern Europe (ca. 1880–1924) but pushback against the “foreignness” of khazones was not long in coming. Already in the 1920s, some rabbis and cantors were appealing to American-born children of Eastern European Jewish immigrants with an approach to prayer that promoted group singing of newly composed metered songs.

The “Young Israel” movement, initiated by Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, featured congregational melodies as the primary style in its services. Musicians such as Israel Goldfarb, the composer of the ubiquitous “Sholom Aleichem” melody, and Jacob Beigel were two early twentieth-century proponents of participatory music as a form of religious outreach to less “traditional” Jews.²⁴ The popular melodies of Goldfarb and Beigel provided participatory songs that filtered out into mainstream

synagogues, including non-Hasidic Orthodox synagogues, that are still sung today and understood to be “traditional.” New liturgical songs, like Goldfarb’s “Sholom Aleichem” or Beime’s “Mi Khamokha,” were marked by simple melodies and symmetrical phrasing that facilitated ease of performance for nonprofessional singers.

In an echo of these earlier approaches to participatory frames of synagogue comportment, Jewish liturgical songwriters emerging in the 1960s wrote music geared toward communal singing. Their compositions employ metered melodies and conform to the melodic norms and major or minor scalar conventions of Euro-American pop and folk music. For American Jews, the songs of Carlebach or Friedman are easy to sing along with, thereby providing a quality that makes their music palatable and attractive. These musical changes marked a move from a performance framework to a participatory model of worship music-making. In this model it is presumed to be a positive value for as many of the people present as possible to take part in the music-making, usually through unison singing.²⁵ This shift in the ontology of prayer music from a performance framework to a model focused on the experience of group music-making is not unique to the liberal movements and appears to be normative in many Orthodox contexts as well, especially in Modern Orthodox synagogues.²⁶ The musical norms of participatory music are adjusted to local ritual practice, the most notable difference being the exclusion of women’s voices as prayer leaders in Orthodox synagogues.²⁷

In an echo of the reform of cantorial music in the nineteenth century, when Sulzer and other cantors imported sounds of German Romantic choral music into Jewish liturgy, the music of Carlebach, Friedman, and their generation of songwriters “rationalized” Jewish liturgy through the techniques of regular rhythm (in contrast to the “nonmetered” or flowing rhythm of Jewish prayer chant), melodic simplicity (in contrast to the highly ornamented style of Eastern European cantors), and “standard practice” triadic harmony (as opposed to the mode mixture that characterizes khazones and nusakh and that bears an uneasy relationship with conventions of harmonization). But unlike the music of Sulzer, whose reforms were implemented as part of a strategy of professionalizing the cantorate and centering cantorial musical authority, the Jewish liturgical folk song movement was part of a general sensibility of recentering authority.

The binary of “participation and presentation” offers little explanatory power for the experience of aesthetics and listening. From the perspective of Hasidic cantorial revivalists, the dialogue of cantor-artist and their “noisy” congregation engaged in ritual forms of participatory listening speaks to the particularism of Jewish memory and prayer practices. Hasidic cantors who embrace khazones adopt a stance of rejecting the participatory model. The participation-presentation binary is inadequately attuned to the aesthetics of prayer that at one time were deeply entwined with conceptions of Jewish community, mutual aid, and creativity. Lost from this narrative are questions of communal identification with the Yiddish-speaking immigrant heritage and the sacred listening experience of khazones.

In the absence of a Jewish public that embraces the cantorial revivalists' conception of the aesthetics of prayer and affirms the power of their voices to focus and refine prayer experience, the aspirations of cantorial revival are indefinitely deferred. In the career of Hasidic cantorial revivalists, a musical progression is evident from the repertoire of their birth community to the archive of old records and professional cantorial knowledge. In the context of professional life, however, cantors must reorient their musical practices once again to make room for the folk-pop liturgy that makes up a major component of their prayer leading. In the following subsection, I will offer a few vignettes that illustrate how cantors construct a prayer service in their Modern Orthodox pulpit jobs and the multiple musical styles they negotiate in their attempt to fulfill their professional ambitions to work as cantors.

SCENES FROM THE PULPIT: NEGOTIATING THE CANTOR'S VOICE

Yisroel Lesches is the assistant cantor at Lincoln Square Synagogue, where he has worked since 2016, first as a cantorial intern. Lesches took an entrepreneurial approach to his cantorial career. He offered his services for free to Lincoln Square on the Sabbaths when Yanky Lemmer, the senior cantor, had off. He gradually worked his way up to the position of assistant cantor. Along the way toward more formal employment, he made adaptations in his style of prayer leading, to “correct” the nusakh he learned growing up to conform to the cantorial nusakh used at Lincoln Square.

Lesches was born in 1986 in Sydney, Australia in the small Hasidic community of that city. Like many young Lubavitch men he eventually moved to New York, the center of the international Chabad Lubavitch movement. Although he described himself as more aligned personally with Modern Orthodoxy than Hasidism at the point in his life when we were talking, he recognizes his upbringing as having been a key factor in choosing khazones as his musical path.

Today, when I walk into a real Chabad shul, like 770 [refers to the building number on Eastern Parkway where the headquarters of Chabad is located], I feel uncomfortable. I feel I don't belong here. I belong in a Modern Orthodox shul. Australian Chabad is more like Modern Orthodox . . . But it's funny, because if I'd grown up Modern Orthodox, I don't think I'd be a khazn. Right? Because it's Hasidic communities that are keeping khazones.

Lesches keeps a spreadsheet with a running list of the pieces he uses for the various liturgical elements of the Shabbos morning service each week. Cantorial nusakh plays a role in his prayer leading, but he rejects the model of sophisticated improvisation, mode mixture, and allusion to cantorial records—a style he associates with Noah Schall and his students—as the basis of his prayer leading.

For example, I love Yanky, but . . . The changes that he'll do are like little modulations in *Shakhris* [the morning service], he'll modulate to minor back to *freygish*. You'll notice, and I'll notice, and nobody else will notice . . . What I feel that a khazn should do is, if I were to split up *Shakhris* for example, I have till *Kel Adon* [a hymn in the *Shakhris* service traditionally sung with the congregation]. *Kel Adon* is its own thing obviously; then from *Kel Adon* to *Shemoneh Esrey* [the central prayer of the service]. And then *Kedusha* [a musically marked text within the *Shemoneh Esrey*] till the end. So that's four sections. In every section I'd try to gather six variations. By *variation* I don't mean going to *freygish* and back because nobody notices that. I mean melodies, actual melodies that are different, very noticeable, but critically, are not longer than it would take to just daven the nusakh. Because once you start to stretch you drive everybody crazy.²⁸

The musically marked elements of his prayer leading are drawn from popular sources such as Shlomo Carlebach, or Orthodox pop music icons like Mordechai Ben David, Avraham Fried, and the like. Lesches is self-consciously trying to develop a brand as a cantor whose music is accessible and populist. Yet, despite his efforts to differentiate himself from “serious” cantors, Lesches's prayer leading is not worlds apart from the approach taken by Lemmer.

Some major elements of the Shabbos *Shakhris* in a cantorial prayer leading service, as observed at Lincoln Square Synagogue:

1. *Shokhyen Ad*—a series of short prayer texts. This prayer marks the opening of the cantorial performance; the section preceding *Shokheyn Ad* is sung by a lay member of the community. This section is typically sung using cantorial nusakh, with varying degrees of emphasis through improvisation and variation.
2. *Kel Adon*—a metered poem sung as a call and response between cantor and congregation, or as a unison metered melody. Typically sung to a melody, either from a Shlomo Carlebach song, a Hasidic nigun, or an Orthodox pop source.
3. *Shemoneh Esrey*—a series of prayer texts said by the congregation to themselves silently or quietly in a rapid chant; these same texts are then repeated and sung by the cantor. The first paragraph of the *Shemoneh Esrey* (“*Avos*”) has a melody that is sung (with some variants) by most cantors in the Ashkenazi diaspora. The prayer text paragraphs that follow are often treated as “modal” passages suited to improvisation or composed variation on generic themes.
4. *Kedushah*—a prayer text within the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrey*, containing quotations from the prophet Isaiah that describes the prayers of the angels. This section is typically treated in a musically more emphasized or ornate fashion that sees the most variety of approaches; cantors gravitate toward employing contrafacta melodies, often from popular music sources.

5. Torah Service (part 1)—The scriptural reading is typically performed by someone other than the cantor. This part of the service constitutes a break for the cantor.
6. Torah Service (part 2)—*Mishebeirach* and *Rosh Chodesh Bentshn*. At the end of the Torah reading there are a variety of prayer texts, some of which it is customary for cantors to emphasize musically, especially in the supplicatory *Mishebeirach* (May the One Who Blessed) section. This is where the *Avinu Shebashamayim* (Our Father Who Is in Heaven) prayer for the State of Israel is said in some congregations. The *Avinu Shebashamayim* setting by Paul Zim is frequently performed by cantors in this section of the service. Zim's piece is in a style reminiscent of Broadway or film music genres. On the Sabbath before the new month, the *Rosh Chodesh Bentshn*, the blessing of the new month, is said, often in a musically elaborate setting that calls upon sounds of cantorial recitative.

Lemmer has developed a sophisticated approach to creating variation and musical interest within his prayer leading using tools from his study of old records and Schall's nusakh, but the moments of the service where he utilizes his sophisticated cantorial techniques are an exception in the overall service. The pieces that are given the most time and emphasis are metered songs for congregational singing. *Kel Adon*, the hymn mentioned by Lesches, is almost always sung by Lemmer employing Carlebach melodies that are well-known to congregants and that encourage group participation through singing. This liturgical element is given ample space within the service. In comparison to the amount of time devoted to unison melodies sung by the congregation, the khazones elements are intentionally condensed.

On one occasion when I was at Lincoln Square, Lemmer put together an impromptu choir made up of some of his fans in the congregation, men who were interested in music or who had some experience in choir singing. Lemmer asked me to join in as well. During the Torah service, which the cantor is often not actively involved in leading, Lemmer convened a quick rehearsal in the Rabbi's office. The piece we were preparing was a rendition of Sol Zim's *Avinu Shebashamayim* (Our Father in the Heavens), a prayer text composed in 1948 in tribute to the newly founded State of Israel that has since come to be included in the Torah service as part of the supplicatory prayers for healing. Zim's piece was composed in 1988 and was popularized by the chief cantor of the Israeli Defense Forces, Shai Abramson, as a tribute to fallen Israeli soldiers. *Avinu Shebashamayim* has the stylistic feel of musical theater; it is highly sentimental and divided into sections that build in dramatic tension. The melodically memorable opening section is metered and does not feature ornamentation typical of cantorial recitative. Zim's piece does share with classic cantorial compositions an unabashed dramatic quality. It makes a naked appeal to the emotions—in part through its nationalistic Zionist content.

The piece is popular among cantors who view it as a crowd-pleaser; I have heard it performed during services by Yanky Lemmer, Zevy Steiger, and Zev Muller. While the piece has little to do musically with classic cantorial performance, having more of an affinity with Broadway and film score music, it is an impressive showcase for a vocal soloist. As such, the piece has been adopted by many cantors as an appropriate opportunity to demonstrate their affecting powers in the context of ritual leadership. It is notable that Zim's *Avinu Shebashamayim* is the "exception" to the general rule of thumb that most cantors with pulpit positions have mentioned: full-length soloist compositions are not permissible in synagogue prayer leading because of the reduced interest among congregants in hearing extended cantorial recitatives during services.

The musical norms at Lincoln Square reflect both broader currents in Modern Orthodox liturgy, as well as the history of the specific institution. The local musical culture was shaped by Sherwood Goffin (1942–2019), the founding cantor at the synagogue who served there for fifty years. During the years when I was conducting research, Goffin, then the cantor emeritus, was always present at services and, as Lesches and Lemmer attested, gave the younger cantors feedback and helped enforce the norms he had established. Goffin emerged in the 1960s as a Jewish folk singer and songwriter, using his prominent pulpit as a position from which to experiment with new populist approaches to participatory music. His album *Neshama* (1972) features songs in a pop style and arrangements played by A-list studio musicians of the day. While Goffin reinvented himself in later years as a cantorial traditionalist and an advocate for "correct" nusakh in his public lectures, his lasting legacy has been his contribution to the growth of the participatory pop-oriented liturgy in the Orthodox world.²⁹

As Yanky has mentioned to me, he feels that he must walk a line between showing his talents in the best possible light and being "excessive":

You have to give them a high note here and there, because they have to know, oh he's got a voice. You have to give them a *dreydl* [Yiddish, vocal ornament] here and there—oh wow, he's a khazn. [I've] kind of got all these tools in my box that are almost wasted, but not. You know what I mean? . . . I learned to like it . . . I'm a pretty good psychologist. I read people and I read crowds pretty well.³⁰

In a prayer service led by Yanky and his brother Shulem, Shulem demonstrated how virtuosic performative moments could be interpolated into participatory music, both in a cantorial vein and by using the "tools" of pop vocal music. In this service for Friday night, the Lemmer brothers leaned heavily on the melodies of Shlomo Carlebach during the Kabbalos Shabbos (welcoming of the Sabbath) service, as is typical of their prayer leading. Among the pieces they sang were Carlebach's popular setting of *Mizmor L'Dovid* (Psalm 29) and a contrafacta for the final verse of the hymn *Lecha Dodi* (Come my beloved) using the melody

of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah."³¹ Cohen is a popular choice for cantors seeking a "mainstream" pop culture item that is perceived to be well-suited to Jewish ritual contexts, both because of the songwriter's religious background and the themes explored in his lyrics. Cohen's songs are increasingly used in liturgical contexts across the Jewish denominations both as *contrafacta* for Hebrew prayers and sometimes with their original lyrics.

To both the Carlebach piece and the Cohen song, Shulem added improvisatory codas that showcased his impressive upper vocal range and command of *coloratura* singing. The two improvisatory "solos" referenced different stylistic traits. The Carlebach song, which employs a *freygish* augmented second modality, was appended with a nonmetered coda (see figure 4). In this section, Shulem improvised a passage that made reference to a classic cantorial cadential riff (line 3 in the transcription), heard on many golden age records—like Mordechai Hershman's *Av Horachamim Hu Y'rachem* (1921), for instance. The Leonard Cohen song was also leveraged as the site for an ornamented improvisatory section, but here the musical genre referenced was contemporary pop singing, with a distinct R&B element (see figure 5). Shulem's phrasing, with its persistent syncopation and "jazzy" growl and swooping effects, bore a sonic similarity to pop R&B singers such as Michael Jackson or Justin Timberlake. Shulem cites Jackson as an influence in the promotional text on his website.³² Of all the cantors who participated in this project, Shulem's involvement with secular pop music is the most thick. Shulem is currently signed to a major label, Decca Gold, and is exploring a career as a cross-over artist in the adult contemporary pop genre. While Shulem's career as a pop singer makes him unusually effective in performing sonic code-switching between cantorial and pop sound, the stylistic reference points he touches on are far from unusual. Figures from pop culture such as Leonard Cohen and Michael Jackson are decidedly *not* out of bounds as points of cultural literacy in the musical worlds that Hasidic cantorial revivalists inhabit.

In another example of a Hasidic cantorial revivalist interacting with a community with its own conceptions of synagogue experience, Zevi Steiger leads services at the Southampton Jewish Center, a Chabad house that serves the needs of a community of mostly older, affluent Long Island Jews who for the most part do not identify as Orthodox. Chabad houses are community centers that have been established in countless towns and cities around the world as part of the Chabad program of *kiruv*, or religious outreach to non-Orthodox Jews.³³ The rabbi who has run the synagogue for over twenty-five years makes decisions about the liturgical composition of the service based in part on his perception of the needs of the congregation. This results in a pastiche of Orthodox liturgy with elements borrowed from the liberal movements, such as English-language readings, which are unusual in most Orthodox contexts. The rabbi seems to be following the *kiruv* philosophy of meeting people where they are in order to draw them closer to the Chabad conception of tradition.³⁴

oy A do nay - oz
 2 l' a moy yi - tem
 3 A do nay - yi vo - rekh
 4 es a moy -
 5 V' sha loym -

FIGURE 5. Shulem Lemmer, coda to Mizmor L'Dovid (Carlebach).

Bo i - l' sho - lom A te - res bo la
 5 Gam b' sim cho - v' tso - lo
 9 Toykh e mu - ne am - se gu - lo
 13 bo i bo i - ka la -

FIGURE 6. Shulem Lemmer, L'cha Dodi/Hallelujah improvisation.

Steiger's approach to prayer leading comports with the kiruv philosophy as well but is refracted through the lens of a specific style of cantorial traditionalism he has gleaned from his training with Noah Schall. His performance of the prayer service invokes Schall's ornamented and detailed nusakh, interspersed with congregational melodies. Prominent in the mix are American synagogue "standards," melodies such as the well-known *Mi Khamokha* melody by Jacob Beigel composed in the 1920s.³⁵ Tunes by Beigel and his contemporary Israel Goldfarb are familiar to the members of the Southampton Jewish Center. Less

well-known were the Carlebach songs that Zevi also included, tunes that sometimes resulted in Steiger and the rabbi being the only people singing during the “sing along” songs.

In an unusual dynamic that reflects the generational cohort of the congregation, it may be Steiger’s khazones, and not his expertise in liturgical folk pop styles, that is most appreciated by the congregants. After the end of a service I attended, the elder members surrounded Steiger, praising his singing and offering comparisons to star cantors from the middle of the last century. Richard Tucker (1913–75), the cantor who was best known for his crossover career as an opera singer, was offered as a point of flattering comparison. I heard an elderly lady say that the service reminded her of going to hear cantors with her grandparents as a little girl. It struck me how even for this elderly person recourse was needed to the grandparents’ generation to conjure a vivid memory of cantorial prayer leading.

In discussing his prayer leading, Steiger stressed that aesthetics could not be the only gauge of success and that the experiences of his congregants were key to the decision he made about composing the service. For the older people who come to the synagogue, his singing of melodies that are familiar to them are central to their feeling of belonging and engagement. Mutuality and compromise need not only be sources of discontent for cantors. Compromise can also register as a form of pastoral care.

What I try to do is always get stuff, at least some stuff, that people are familiar with. So, I’m not gonna change the tunes, for example, for the Kedusha so much, because many of the people aren’t traditional. That’s their only connection to *yiddishkayt* [Yiddish, Jewishness], in general to religion. So, when they come to shul, I want them to see something they’re familiar with.³⁶

For Steiger, the musical requirements of his job are compatible with his self-conception as a religious Jew, even if they are in tension with his aspirations as an artist.

The social negotiations of the synagogue place limits on the self-expression that Hasidic cantorial revivalists have sought out through their appeal to the genre of khazones and their investment in the idea that it can serve them as a creative artistic field. In their pulpit positions, the cantorial skill set they have painstakingly acquired can only be partially activated. Instead of developing more deeply in their chosen musical style, Hasidic cantorial revivalists must cultivate new musical skills as prayer leaders. The musical requirements of pulpit positions draw into question the viability of synagogues as an appropriate destination for the skill and talent of Hasidic cantorial revivalists. Khazones revival is driven by a passionate interest in the sounds of the Jewish past, as articulated by artistically minded young singers. These singers hold an outsider perspective on the role of what prayer music can express, how it can function as an art experience, and what possibilities khazones can open up in the life of an aspiring musician.

Their aesthetics and desires put them at odds with contemporary Jewish institutions. Employment as a cantor cannot fully address the needs and musical obsessions of these musicians. Instead, Hasidic cantorial revivalists look outside of the synagogue to find different stages of performance, where, paradoxically, they are better able to fulfill their conception of cantorial prayer music as an art practice and a form of sacred listening.