

Concert, Internet, and Kumzits

Stages of Sacred Listening

According to Yanky Lemmer, if a cantor sings too much khazones in synagogue, the prayer leader is at risk of being kicked “outta there.” Zev Muller commented similarly that he wishes he had known at the beginning of his career not to sing extended cantorial pieces that congregants “did not care for.” At times, cantors take a chastising tone toward the congregants who reject the sacred music genre they revere. David Reich told me:

Davening has become very routine. There’s very little place for creativity. They might get someone to daven for an *omud* (lead prayer at the reader’s lectern) . . . But being too creative is frowned upon. Most of the people don’t necessarily appreciate khazones. People don’t have the patience. It requires you to get in touch with certain things in yourself that some people aren’t comfortable with. They’d rather just sing melodies, easy stuff. This is deep.¹

In the eyes of Hasidic cantorial revivalists, the impulse toward participatory music in the contemporary synagogue is often described as a distraction from the experience of prayer through listening to spiritually and aesthetically elevated music that they revere.

The previous two chapters, which focused on cantorial education and synagogue prayer leading, described arenas in which Hasidic cantorial revivalists engage with and are acted on by the norms and traditions of non-Hasidic American synagogues. These institutions of American Jewish life have their own histories with khazones that have pushed both nusakh and the sounds of gramophone-era cantorial performance to the periphery. In these areas, their musical lives closely resemble the situation for their non-Hasidic cantorial colleagues, who have parallel complaints with regard to the usefulness of their training in nusakh. The musical substance of cantorial revival is ill-suited to the cultural norms of

most American synagogues. Instead, Hasidic cantorial revivalists find opportunities to articulate their music identities in performances outside the sacred setting of the synagogue.

This chapter focuses on three “out of context”-sites of cantorial performance—the concert stage, streamed video, and *kumzits* music making parties—that afford Hasidic cantorial revivalists opportunities to pursue their aesthetic aspirations in venues that are not specific to Jewish liturgical music. The recontextualization of the sacred accords with the radical project of cantorial revival, that seeks an experience of prayer through an aesthetic rather than through the rabbinically sanctioned avenues that are readily available to religious Jews. Revivalists offer a revision of the history of cantorial music, framing cantors as figures who spoke to the changing identities of Jews in modernity whose lives encompassed multiple conflicting worlds. In their conception of *khazones*, music of prayer functions both as a symbolic link to the Jewish past and as a transcendent signifier of the sacred reappropriated into individualistic and electronically mediated urban lifestyles. This conception of cantorial music supports their project of creating artistic identities, even as it pushes their sacred art out of the conservative space of the synagogue.

For at least the past two centuries cantors have performed outside the synagogue for a variety of reasons, including seeking economic gain, representing the Jewish collective to non-Jews, or pursuing the opportunity to fulfill musical desires and career ambitions that embrace the aesthetics of music worlds beyond the liturgical. While these motivations are still relevant, present-day Hasidic cantorial revivalists have a more pressing concern about how to function as a cantor in the musical form they consider to be uniquely desirable. Whereas cantors a century ago sang in concerts or on records in a style that was developed within the context of worship, Hasidic cantorial revivalists today have learned and developed cantorial aesthetics largely by listening to old records as a mediating source. Unlike their early twentieth-century predecessors, for many Hasidic cantorial revivalists, “out of context” performances are the primary site for their work. Indeed, for some of the most talented singers, concerts, internet videos, and parties are the *only* forums available for performing in this style.

Through ethnographic observation and the historical analysis of concerts, internet videos of cantorial performances, and private home presentations, this chapter illuminates the ways in which Hasidic cantorial revivalists are able to articulate their musical aesthetics. By developing performance careers in venues outside the institutions of Jewish religious life they are able to hone their musical careers around a form of expressive culture that poses a challenge to the role played by music in the Hasidic community and in other contemporary Orthodox communities. Rather than accentuating the collective through a broadly understood and popular music form, singing *khazones* affords Hasidic cantorial revivalists an avenue for nonconforming self-expression. “Out of context” performances of

cantorial music foreground a conception of cantorial music as an aesthetic experience with its own values distinct from the life of ritual in the synagogue.

PERFORMANCE LINEAGES:
CANTORS AS ARTISTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Cantorial performance outside the synagogue has played an important part in the economy of Jewish sacred music since at least the nineteenth century. The Viennese cantor Salomon Sulzer (1804–90), the figure most associated with the modernization of Jewish liturgical music and the professionalization of the cantorate, performed in official state concerts at which he represented the Jewish community, as well as collaborating with the elite of the Viennese classical music scene.² In his concert performances Sulzer presented a public face of the Jewish community that highlighted the ease of movement of Jews in non-Jewish spaces and their integration into the life of the modern nation state (although the community did not always approve). Philip Bohlman suggests that cantors were responsible for inventing a modern conception of Jewish music, establishing the cantorate as a professional identity in relationship to a new domain of liturgical music expertise.³ The cantor performed a paradoxical role, claiming to preserve tradition while simultaneously creating new repertoires that sought to elevate congregants through appeals to the sounds of elite European concert and church music. As cantorial concerts became a feature of Jewish life, they were popularly embraced; however, they also inspired controversies about new cantorial repertoires, spaces of performance, and engagements with technology. The choices cantors made in their concert programming aimed to illustrate that Jewish liturgical music could be compatible with elite concert music while articulating a set of social and political ambitions for themselves and their community, and simultaneously appealing to the broad musical tastes of an increasingly urban and educated Jewish public.

Cantorial performance outside synagogues involved a breaking of ritual boundaries that invited skepticism of cantorial ethics. In order to establish the ethical profile of cantorial concerts, cantors carefully constructed narratives around their performance that established the dignity or seriousness of the sacred artist. These performances of identity were achieved through the selection of venue and through concert programming. The writings and performance career of Elias Zaludkovsky (1888–1943) are illustrative of anxieties about concertizing. Zaludkovsky was a cantor and intellectual who published criticism influenced by Pinchas Minkovsky's antigramophone and concert polemics. Zaludkovsky seems to have coined the term *hefker khazones* (wanton cantorial music) to chastise his contemporaries who engaged in recording and other forms of suspect "popular" culture.⁴ Despite his ethical concerns, Zaludkovsky concertized frequently both in synagogues and theaters, programming cantorial pieces between operatic arias and his own art song settings of Yiddish secular poetry. Zaludkovsky's concerts are

illustrative of how cantors in the first decades of the twentieth century appealed to the tastes of a broad Jewish listening public that was conversant with the elite and popular musics of the day while maintaining a profile as a sacred artist in the rarified lineage of Sulzer.⁵ To the consternation of conservative critics such as Zaludkovsky, star recording cantors in the United States performed in a more heterogeneous variety of settings, ranging from elite concert halls like Carnegie Hall to vaudeville houses on bills that included acrobats and jazz singers.⁶

Opera, a popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, posed a particular conundrum for cantors whose vocal powers were ideal for stage roles. In the Jewish popular imagination, opera was represented as the paradigmatic path of corruption for a cantor. Yet at the same time, Jews were consumers of opera. In the frequently retold and mythologized story of Yoel Duvid Strashunsky (1816–50), a cantor in Vilna, an opera role posed a path toward apostasy and, ultimately, crippling madness for a cantor who failed to resist the temptation of a secular music career.⁷ The best-known story about a cantor and the opera, in which Yossele Rosenblatt rejected a lucrative contract, carefully dances around issues of the ethics of public performance. According to his son, Rosenblatt justified his stage performances in part by suggesting that performing cantorial music for non-Jewish audiences created a positive image of Jews for the general population, echoing Sulzer's approach to the cantorate as constitutive of a public face of Jewish humanity, seeking social equality through appeals to aesthetics.⁸

While cantors continued to have popular followings and release records in the 1940s and 1950s, albeit on smaller community-focused record labels, the growth of the American Jewish community in this period was focused outside the urban immigrant milieu that favored the offerings of star cantors. Meanwhile, in the Hasidic community, professional cantorial prayer leading in the golden age style was never the norm. The Hasidic cantorial revival of the twenty-first century draws on a musical knowledge that is pointedly underground.

While some Hasidic cantorial revivalists hold pulpit positions, their self-driven musical educations are aligned more closely with a musical style than with the imperatives of institutions and communal norms. Commenting on his own perception that his chosen musical style is held in disfavor among people in his congregation and the broader public, Yanky Lemmer said:

I really don't care that much. Because I have to do what I feel is right . . . I just feel that's the right thing for me, it's what I do, and I need to cultivate that . . . there comes a point when you have to define what you do. I enjoy singing regular stuff [i.e., pop songs] as well. But the stuff that moves me, that really moves me, is khazones.⁹

Reliance on their own aesthetic concept places some Hasidic cantorial revivalists in the perilous position of having no congregation to pray for, but also pushes cantors to seek other sites that can serve as venues for sacred performance. These "out of context" sites of performance lean into the cantorial traditions of stage

performance and technological mediation. Bypassing the pulpit, Hasidic cantorial revivalists direct their music toward scenes and stages where they can realize their conception of sacred music.

STAGING CANTORIAL MUSIC IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

On January 31, 2018, Yanky and his brother Shulem Lemmer came to Stanford University to perform a concert in the Campbell Recital Hall. This opportunity arose directly out of excitement about their music generated by my research and the presentations I gave during my years as a graduate student at Stanford. I was also involved in the performance as a respondent during a talkback session after the concert, along with Dr. Mark Kligman of UCLA.

For this special event, the Lemmers had hired clarinetist Michael Winograd, an important figure in klezmer music who served for a number of years as the director of KlezKanada, the annual Klezmer music camp, and Yiddish New York, another annual festival dedicated to Yiddish culture. Winograd contracted trumpet player Jonah Levy, an active participant in jazz and klezmer scenes, to fill out the horn section. The band displayed a cultural schism running down the middle of the stage, which was made visual in part by the attire of the performers. On stage left stood Winograd and Levy, neither of whom are religiously observant. On stage right stood the keyboard player Shimmy Markowitz and drummer Yochi Briskman, both Hasidic musicians from Brooklyn. The Lemmer brothers stood center stage. The Hasidic musicians wore long jackets, white shirts, and yarmulkes, typical Hasidic comportment, while Winograd and Levy wore “unmarked” suit jackets. In interviews, Yanky Lemmer has referred to his Hasidic identity as a “look” or “gimmick” that is helpful in establishing his connection to audiences, especially in Europe where, he seems to imply, stereotyped images of Jews are more prevalent.

In his concert appearances, Lemmer typically performs for non-Hasidic Jews with mixed-gender audiences seated together. This was the case at the Stanford concert, where a crowd of mostly older men and women sat in the same auditorium. As a rule, gender segregation in public events is enforced in the Hasidic community. Performing for mixed-gender audiences is controversial for Hasidic singers and has emerged as a source of conflict between rabbis and musicians. The Lemmer brothers have mostly managed to steer clear of explicit conflict around the issue, although Yanky has mentioned that vitriolic comments about his performance for mixed seated audiences in a concert he gave at a non-Orthodox synagogue were a source of discomfort and anxiety for himself and his family.¹⁰ While for non-Hasidic audiences the association of Hasidic Jews with classics of cantorial music may appear natural, even inevitable, singing cantorial music fits uneasily with the Hasidic cultural landscape, in large part because its audiences straddle lines of identity and often include Jews from more liberal backgrounds.



FIGURE 7. Yanky Lemmer. Photo courtesy of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University.



FIGURE 8. Yanky Lemmer, Yochi Briskman, and Shulem Lemmer. Photo courtesy of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University.



FIGURE 9. The Lemmer Brothers and ensemble. Photo courtesy of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University.

The pop-inflected rhythms and synthesizer presets favored by the Orthodox instrumentalists in Yanky and Shulem's backing band reflect the styles and timbres of contemporary Orthodox music, evoking pop song production and the sound of "one man band" wedding musicians who work the Orthodox society circuit performing hit songs on Casio keyboards. The synthesizer pop style was in conflict with the aesthetic presented by Winograd, a folklorist and avant-garde improvising musician. Winograd's playing draws on the sound of early twentieth-century klezmer records and contrasts starkly with the sonic world of the Hasidic players, whose musical terrain mostly hews to drum machine beats and synthesizer pop sounds.

For the opening numbers of the concert, the Lemmer brothers performed nostalgic Yiddish songs such as "Di naye hora" (The new hora) and "Mamele" (Mother), associated with Moishe Oysher (1906–58) and Molly Picon (1898–1992) respectively. While "Di naye hora" is a Zionist song that celebrates the founding of the State of Israel, in this concert setting and arrangement as a klezmer wedding dance number its political meaning was subsumed into an ethos of nostalgia. These pieces were presented in upbeat arrangements that skirted the line between klezmer and pop sounds and served as fitting showcases for the Lemmer brothers' charismatic and energetic stage personas.

For one of Yanky's solo numbers, about twenty minutes into the concert and after the audience had been wooed by a string of entertaining and familiar pieces, the instrumentation and musical style shifted. Winograd switched over to

keyboard, replacing Markowitz, and accompanied Yanky in a duo format. Winograd set the keyboard to an acoustic piano setting, removing the stylized synthesizer effects that Markowitz had been using. Yanky introduced the prayer, “Ono Bokoach,”¹¹ a setting of a centuries-old prayer text of unknown authorship, which Josef Shlisky recorded in 1924, by telling the dramatic story of the cantor’s childhood abduction by a choir leader who brought the boy singer to America—a story that has become part of cantorial lore through repetition in liner notes on reissue albums.¹² Yanky then went on to discuss the mystical prayer the piece sets, a poetic and evocative text that calls on God to untie the knots of the spirit. His spoken introduction prepared the audience to hear the cantor’s voice as offering a forum for contemplating the experience of pain and an opportunity for mystical introspection. Yanky’s speech invited the listeners to hear the music through the prism of the experiences of loss, vulnerability, and the political and economic vicissitudes of Jewish history.

Musically, “Ono Bokoach” was a radical departure from what had preceded it in the concert. Winograd’s playing was minimalistic, eschewing flamboyant arpeggios and dance beats for a sparse sound that referenced the kinds of accompaniment heard on early records. On cantorial records, the organ or, less frequently, the piano or the orchestra, provides instrumental accompaniment, mostly played with great restraint, with sustained pedal points and only occasional figuration in imitation of the antiphonal responses that would have been sung by a choir. The austerity of Winograd’s choices sounded intentional. His harmonization of the melody was a straightforward transcription from Shlisky’s record, bringing to mind other early twentieth-century records that feature sparse and “raw” accompaniment, such as country blues, and Dixieland jazz records. Yanky gradually built up the dynamics of the recitative, exploring its emotional potentials over the course of the five minutes or so he was singing. As the piece gradually moved into the upper register of his voice, the characteristic *krekh*ts accentuating the beginning of phrases became more prominent, matching the idiomatic styling of Shlisky’s recorded performance.

Yanky’s bodily gestures modeled the responses intended for the audience to experience: eyes closed, face slightly clenched, hands upturned in supplication. Yanky began to sweat. He looked as though he might be about to break into tears. The hall was silent as he sang, the sparse texture of the piano acting as a spotlight drawing Yanky’s voice into the center of meditative attention. At the end of the piece, the audience, made up predominantly of older, non-Orthodox Bay Area Jews for whom golden age cantorial music is almost certainly not part of a synagogue-based ritual practice, burst into rapturous applause.

Yanky’s emotive concert persona orients the audience to a conception of the cantor as arbiter of aesthetic experience and conduit to pleasure through music. In the concert format, Yanky is able to invoke both the classic sound of the records he loves and the presentational liturgical experience associated with the cantorial



FIGURE 10. Yanky Lemmer. Photo courtesy of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University.



FIGURE 11. The Lemmer Brothers and ensemble. Photo courtesy of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University.

golden age. The concert hall is a forum in which participants are willing to engage in stylized listening practices that cede authority to presentational performers and allow artists to set the parameters for Jewish liturgical experience. Yanky's stage performance connects to a history of cantorial concerts, but unlike cantors of the golden age for whom the pulpit was also a concert-like setting for performance, for Yanky, concerts play a pivotal role as a site for the performance of his concept of cantorial artistry that he can only rarely access in the synagogue.

THE INTERNET AND CANTORIAL CULTURE

Leaders in the Hasidic community have taken a variety of approaches to the internet, with the Chabad embrace of the web as a means of religious outreach representing an extreme liberal stance. A mass event held at Citi Field in 2012 represents a more conservative approach that is well represented among Hasidic leadership. At the 2012 gathering, rabbinic leaders implored their followers to abandon their use of the internet, citing fears about its deteriorative effects on youth and general morality.¹³ Despite these qualms, anecdotal evidence suggests that internet use and social media are widespread among Brooklyn Hasidic Jews—both for commerce and entertainment. In the Hasidic cantorial revivalist community, the internet plays a significant role both as a source for learning golden age cantorial repertoire and as a site for performance.

Yanky Lemmer's 2007 video of "Misratzeh B'rachamim," which is based on the 1924 record of Mordechai Hershman, is a live recording of a concert held at the Young Israel Beth El Synagogue in Borough Park Brooklyn, where Yanky was serving as a choir singer for Cantor Benzion Miller.¹⁴ Founded in 1902 and boasting superb acoustics in its cavernous Moorish-style sanctuary, Beth El has an important history as a center for cantorial music, having employed numerous star cantors at its pulpit, including Hershman himself. As I showed in interlude B, Beth El holds a unique position in the liturgical music world of Jewish New York as a holdout of prayer leading in a style that is reminiscent of the golden age presentational approach.

In his Beth El concert video, Yanky, at the time twenty-four years old, sings the piece a whole tone lower than Hershman, rendering his vocal tone darker than Hershman's original. There is a hesitance in his performance, his eyes downcast and his body still throughout (he had not yet developed his showman's bravura). Yet his performance is marked by attention to coloratura and ornamentation that immediately marks his performance as informed by the golden age style. Although the view count of this video has hovered around fifty thousand for over a decade, a modest reach for a "viral" video, Yanky claimed that posting this video on YouTube led directly to a spate of work as a cantor and ultimately to his being hired at Lincoln Square, thereby giving him one of the most prestigious cantorial positions in New York. Yanky continues to regularly post videos on his Facebook and

Instagram accounts that range in production values from cell phone documentation of concerts to more professional music videos.

For Yoel Kohn, social media has provided his primary forum in which to perform as cantor after leaving the Hasidic community. He describes the role social media played in creating an opportunity for him as a cantor as follows:

I became nonreligious, and I didn't actually pursue cantorial at all. For some reason I was recorded singing [Pierre Pinchik's 1928 record] "Roza D'Shabbos" . . . A friend of mine was just pointing a camera at me. And we started recording . . . And suddenly, things started happening. People were contacting me. It became viral . . . So I thought, you know what, I'm gonna start producing, because as soon as I wanted to warm up, it became a big production, I became busy . . . Somebody posted it on Facebook, for friends only, and not just that, with a warning, please do not share, because I didn't want there to be a video of me singing without a yarmulke. I figured if my parents see this, it's gonna hurt them. But by the time it got back to my parents, my mother told me, Oh my God! You're famous! You're viral! I figured, alright. Fuck it. I'll produce some more. I'll put myself out there. Maybe get some work out of it. And that's it. That's the story of me.¹⁵

The 2015 video performance that altered Kohn's professional prospects was an impromptu cell phone recording that captured a display of virtuosity in the interpretation of old cantorial records.¹⁶ The same is true for early videos of Yanky Lemmer. These raw documentarian videos allow cantors to inhabit the role of "viral" celebrities, using the internet as a venue for their style of sacred music. As cultural critics have noted, video sharing sites like YouTube have a unique capacity to negotiate between commerce and community with content driven by the roughhewn aesthetics of amateur videos.¹⁷ For Yanky, viral internet moments helped stage a major career development. However, in his pulpit position Yanky is extremely limited in performing the kinds of early recorded cantorial repertoire that he initially attained notoriety for and that make up the bulk of his internet videos. For Kohn, the videos helped him frame a space as a cantor who had left his community, paving the way for making a modest "comeback" as a cantor, mostly singing at private events in the Hasidic community, always outside the synagogue ritual context. That his visual appearance is mainstream while he interprets classic cantorial records has been perceived as a paradox and a source of his charisma.¹⁸

Yanky Lemmer and other Hasidic cantorial revivalists have suggested that the internet helped draw Hasidic singers to cantorial performance by providing access to otherwise difficult to find old records. Aryeh Leib Hurwitz, a cantor who was born in the Brooklyn Chabad community, comments that he does not own any records of his own and listens and learns from cantorial records exclusively online, especially on a cantorial WhatsApp group where fans share mp3 files. Online archives, especially the Florida Atlantic University Recorded Sound Archive Judaic Collection, grant access to an enormous body of historical Jewish records that effectively make individual collections superfluous. The web-based

archive contains an estimated 100,000 songs, featuring cantorial records from the earliest gramophone era records through mid-century American cantorial albums, and on into the present. Private collectors have uploaded their cantorial records to streaming sites such as YouTube, making them widely accessible. On file-hosting sites and social media platforms, Hasidic cantorial revivalists interweave uploads of old records with new videos of interpretations of classics, signaling an orientation toward music-making that blurs chronology and a pastiche approach to self-presentation that is well suited to the medium of the internet.

In their online videos, Hasidic cantorial revivalists inhabit the role of the cantor as presentational artist, directing the experience of liturgy through historically informed performances in ways that are rarely possible at the pulpit. With their video productions, cantors present themselves as artists with a relevant musical message, utilizing the most contemporary media platforms to reach a broader public. The artistry demonstrated on these videos serves an overt role as a form of self-promotion, putatively toward the goal of getting jobs as a cantor in concert or in the pulpit. At the same time, making videos functions as an end in itself, affording Hasidic singers a virtual site in which to perform their public identities as cantorial artists in the golden age style. The production of videos connects Hasidic singers to the musical world of the golden age, asserting the role of technological mediation as an expression of cantorial identity. Indeed, for Hasidic cantorial revivalists, the mediated sound of cantorial voices on records are the key source of legitimate knowledge about their art form. Producing recordings of themselves connects Hasidic cantors to a version of the kinds of musical practices typical of the artists they revere.

CANTORIAL KUMZITS IN HASIDIC BROOKLYN

The Hasidic kumzits is a music-making party, which, in its essence and aims, can be traced back to the first generation of Hasidim in Eastern Europe. In the early eighteenth century, Hasidic rabbinic leadership cultivated support from their followers through collective singing of paraliturgical music.¹⁹ The term *kumzits* itself derives from Yiddish and literally refers to sitting together. As such, it signifies a central space for collective engagement in music. The *khazones kumzits*, as these parties are sometimes referred to by participants, differs from typical music parties in the community both in terms of the music being sung and the format of presentation. Instead of Hasidic *nigunim*, performers sing covers of early twentieth-century cantorial records of liturgical pieces derived from synagogue ritual (not paraliturgical pieces); and, instead of a group vocal texture, soloist voices are featured. As such, the *khazones* version of the *kumzits* is a relatively new phenomenon, seeming to have emerged in the twenty-first century. For the new generation of Hasidic cantorial revivalists, such parties are an important outlet for the performance and development of their artistry.

On a hot summer night in 2018, Yoel Kohn sang at a kumzits in the home of a Satmar Hasidic friend of his in Brooklyn, just a few blocks from the Williamsburg Bridge. Like the other men in attendance at the kumzits, Kohn was born and raised in the Satmar community. Despite his break with Orthodoxy, Kohn has maintained his passionate interest in cantorial music and is considered to be a star performer among a small cohort of Hasidic cantorial fans and *khazones aficionados*. On that summer night, Kohn had been invited to lead a private prayer service and then to participate in a round robin impromptu recital of cantorial classics sung by a small invited group of knowledgeable singers, all Hasidic men. Kohn began the party by leading *mariv*; the focal point of his prayer leading was a rendition of *Hashkiveinu*, a prayer text in the *mariv* service, using the setting recorded by Cantor David Roitman in April 1925.²⁰ Kohn's solo vocal performance was over eight minutes long, mirroring the length of Roitman's double-sided 78-rpm record. His voice captured nuances of Roitman's original with a timbral specificity and fidelity to the intonation and stylistic details captured on the old record.

Yoel, like his peers in the small community of cantors who are committed to historical performance practices, has cultivated *coloratura* singing techniques that closely follow the models provided by old records, including attention to microtonal inflection and ornamentation. In his performance of *Hashkiveinu*, Yoel executed a virtuosic falsetto *coloratura* passage typical of golden age cantorial performance. As in a concert setting, the kumzits attendees sat with eyes focused on the singer, some with looks of intense emotional engagement, mirroring the dynamic arcs of the music, others relaxed, sitting back in their chairs as passive and satisfied audience members. The men present, mostly singers themselves, sang choral responses at appropriate moments in the piece.

Mirroring Roitman's record, which featured a chamber ensemble made up of organ, flute, and string accompaniment, Kohn's rendition also relied on instrumental accompaniment, provided by David Reich, who used the string setting on his synthesizer keyboard, recalling the timbre of the historical performance. Departing from the original, Reich improvised a short passage to "fill in" the space when the 78-rpm record would be turned over to hear its completion on the other side. This *mariv* service was distinct from norms of Orthodox practice, not only because of the focus on cantorial performance, but also in regard to the use of a musical instrument during prayer. Instrumental accompaniment is forbidden in Orthodox synagogues, but it is a typical element in the sound of early cantorial records. The use of the keyboard in Yoel's prayer leading in this kumzits setting was a notable instance of aesthetic concerns appearing to override or obscure norms of ritual practice.

When Kohn finished, after a confusing and cacophonous interlude of everyone seeming to talk at once, other singers began to perform. One after another, the attendees took turns performing virtuosic vocal pieces recorded by early twentieth-century cantors, at the forefront Yossele Rosenblatt, Samuel Malavsky,

and Zavel Kwartin. Some of the singers were youthful and raw; others were seasoned artists who had worked as professional cantors. These included Yossi Pomerantz, who until recently held a pulpit at the prestigious Modern Orthodox Congregation Beth Tikvah in Montreal, and Yoel Pollack, Kohn's cousin and a prominent singer in the Satmar community whose original compositions are sometimes performed at mass gatherings, such as the Satmar Rebbe's Chanukah celebration.

For the final number of the evening, the group sang Israel Schorr's "Yehi Rotzon Sheyibone Beis-Hamikdosh," a ubiquitous favorite originally recorded in 1927 and covered by countless cantors in concert and on record that I discussed above in chapter 1. The end of the piece was approached as an improvisatory jam session, with each of the singers taking a phrase, treating it as a virtuoso improvised cadenza, then passing on the solo to the next singer, and ending with the entire group singing the chorus together, resulting in a roaring, brassy swell of voices as each singer sought to assert his own presence.²¹

The kumzits offered a powerful space for the performance and experience of golden age repertoire, and an outlet for creativity and religious feeling. As such, the kumzits that night had much in common with "classic" Hasidic social music-making parties: it was a homosocial gathering for religious music-making, but with the difference that the musical focus was on the individual not the collective. Rather than reinforcing the social norms of the community, the party made room for the articulation of nonconformist approaches to prayer and aesthetics. The meaning of the party was transformed by the music itself, the presentational performance format, and the ambitions of the artists to reach across time to locate an aesthetic of Jewish prayer that they find to be uniquely compelling.

"KHAZONES IS DEAD": LONG LIVE KHAZONES

After the kumzits party in Williamsburg, a young man who had attended noted with disgust that none of the excellent singers present at the party could get a pulpit position as a cantor, including a few singers who are not so very young and already have substantial experience as professional artists. Switching into English from Yiddish, the young man proclaimed that "khazones is dead," echoing, perhaps intentionally, the old adage from the 1980s that "punk is dead," an articulation of the fear among members of a subculture that the antinormative stance of their music-loving community is at risk of imploding under the social pressures of nonconformity. But unlike punk, which putatively died owing to commercial overexposure and mindless imitation by noncognoscenti, fans of cantorial music fear the death of the genre because its artists are stifled by indifference.

Performance in venues outside the synagogue allows Hasidic cantorial revivalists opportunities to present their desired concept of liturgical expressive culture, pushing against commonly held cantorial narratives of communal indifference to golden age cantorial styles in the synagogue by accentuating other sites of presentation

as forums for sacred music. “Out of context” spaces of cantorial performance allow Hasidic cantorial revivalists to connect with the musical past that is the focus of their desires, but with a changed approach to the sociality and function of the music. Whereas cantors of the golden age presented the sacred music style that they developed in synagogue prayer-leading contexts using new mediated technologies and in secular concert spaces, for today’s Hasidic cantorial revivalists the opposite is the case. A form of cantorial music they have learned primarily from mediated sources provides the repertoire and stylistic norms of their performance, which is usually conducted outside the synagogue ritual context.

Instead of deriving their sacred music practice from a communally constructed worship music culture, Hasidic cantorial revivalists are focused instead on the aesthetics of their own subculture, invoking a temporally displaced locus of authority that values the music of the past over that of the present while articulating a form of subjectivity that strains limits placed on expressive behavior in their birth community. By singing cantorial music outside the synagogue, Hasidic cantorial revivalists seek to reconcile their alienation from the musical life of the contemporary synagogue by framing cantorial performance as an art experience independent of ritual, but one that is suffused with the spiritual authority of the liturgical roots of their musical offering.

Golden age cantors described their work as serving a variety of functions, including addressing communal desires for cultural preservation, seeking aesthetic elevation of the Jewish community through artistry, and as a means of generating deeply felt experiences of prayer. While contemporary Hasidic cantorial revivalists share these goals as a foundational point of reference, their work points to another set of possibilities for the meaning of cantorial performance and its relationship to the Jewish collective. For Hasidic cantorial revivalists, pursuing aesthetic excellence through *khazones* is a practice that engages critically with the norms of the Jewish community and surfaces a conception of cantorial music as a nonconforming practice. *Khazones* offers the cantors a means to articulate artistic impulses and feeling within a Hasidic social context that places limits on expressions of individualism. Their work challenges the norms of multiple Jewish communities, creating a musical experience through repertoires and vocal techniques that are instantly recognizable as markers of difference from the norms of any contemporary synagogue.

Hasidic cantorial revivalists surface an alternative history of cantorial music as an art form that directly addresses and even accelerates points of tension in the Jewish collective response to modernity. The music of golden age cantors attained the status of a recognized representation of the Jewish collective through a system of aesthetics, not through adherence to rabbinic values. The challenges that cantors have posed to religious authority in the past continue to resound in the nonconforming stylistic choices of Hasidic cantorial revivalists. *Khazones* offers the cantors an alternative to what they perceive as parochialism in synagogue music

and challenges the status of normative definitions of Jewish law and custom as the deciding factor in personal comportment in their birth community. By highlighting nonsynagogue sites of performance, whether by choice or necessity, Hasidic cantorial revivalists foreground one possible history of cantorial music that resonates with their own life stories, in which Jewish sacred music is a practice that is dependent on performance outside religious institutions in order to achieve its fullest expression. In this version of cantorial history, new technologies and secular venues allow artists to represent Jewish collectivity in ways that push at the boundaries of rabbinic authority, framing aesthetics, performance, and nonconformity as central organizational values in the music of prayer.