

Report COZ 6, 28 July 2020 **The High Holydays 2020**

Report by Robert Brody

	<p>COZ 6: Tuesday 28 July 2020</p> <p>The High Holydays 2020: how will they sound in Lockdown, and what are the implications for Cantors in the future.</p> <p>Curated by Russell Grossman for ECA with international cross-denominational panel including Alex Klein Manchester and Jeremiah Lockwood California with Cantors Benny Rogosnitsky New York; Deborah Katchko-Gray Connecticut USA, Eric Moses Toronto; Albert Chait Leeds; Nathan Goldman Stuttgart; and Jeremiah Lockwood, San Francisco</p>	
<p>Deborah Katchko- Gray, Benny Rogosnitsky, Alex Klein, Jeremiah Lockwood</p>	<p>Eric Moses, Alby Chait, Russell Grossman, Nathan Goldman</p>	

The High Holydays 2020: how will they sound in Lockdown, and what are the implications for Cantors in the future?

An online meeting – Conversations on Zoom (COZ) was held on 28 July 2020 to discuss the possibilities for management of Shul Services over the coming High Holidays in view of the covid-19 restrictions on public assembly, travel, singing and all the associated anxieties etc.

The meeting was convened by the European Cantors Association and chaired by Russell Grossman who , after an explanatory introduction introduced six Cantors who each gave a brief talk on plans in place in their communities for both current activities and the manner in which they intend to manage the forthcoming Yamim Noraim, about seven weeks ahead – and what it might mean for the future.

Cantor Eric Moses – Toronto eric.moses@me.com

Our first speaker was Cantor Eric Moses of the Conservative Beth Sholom Synagogue, Toronto. He is graduate of the Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute and Past President of the Toronto Council of Chazonim. His first position at age 25 was in Montreal and since 2001 at his synagogue in Toronto. The community had been used to their shabbat morning services being enhanced by monthly participation of the Ruach singers that ensured very large regular attendances at the shul for a highly musically inspired service.

Since the pandemic, his synagogue has accepted the validity of on-line minyanim, with their services being streamed live on shabbatot and by Zoom on weekdays. The

system is turned on by the caretaker and let run unmanned throughout the service. (As is the 'Loop' hearing system in many other synagogues). This has been especially appreciated by those saying kaddish.

He expressed optimism saying that the broadcasts of services have engendered hugely increased participants in the shul services, communal identity and involvement.

Regarding the Yamim Noraim, government regulations permit 30% occupation of the premises – which could be up to 800, but it is proposed that the shul will allow a maximum of 200 to register to attend. Masks will be essential. The services will be abridged and there may be two consecutive services held. Different seats will be used for each service.

Plans for the abridged service will commence at Ein Kamocha, with full keriat hatorah, no haftara, shofar (see later discussion) musaph to contain a choice of the more 'impactful' elements – not necessarily the most halachically significant parts – followed by kaddish and aleynu.

The community seriously considered a radical idea of using a drive-in cinema for this year's Yom Kippur service, however after much discussion, this will not be proceeded with.

Cantor/ Senior Minister Alby Chait Leeds albert.sebastian.chait@gmail.com

Next was Rabbi/chazan Albert (Alby) Chait, originally from Liverpool and now Senior Minister at the orthodox United Hebrew Congregation (UHC) in Leeds. His spirited address praised the COZ meeting's range of religious affiliation.

His community has 1,000 families and services previously involved a choir of 22 men, so a rich ongoing musical tradition was their norm.

Alby was amazed and gratified to find that people 'out there' are genuinely interested and seeking participation in synagogue prayers, His online kabbalat shabbat services are highly regarded and attract up to 5,000 attenders on a regular basis! Even his weekday schachrit services attract many more than usually attend at synagogue. Alby felt there was a strong reason to continue this after the pandemic.

The shul is not opening for any services – all have been online.

Regarding the Yamim Noraim, problems foreseen are that members remain nervous about attending group meetings and how to limit applicants who would want to attend to a maximum safe number. He is totally against prioritising some Jews over others to attend synagogue.

On the Friday preceding Rosh Hashanah it is proposed to have a service 90 minutes before shabbat that will include string quartet and piano and significant music including some of Alby's father's chazanut compositions. The suggestion to do this before Kol Nidrei was discounted as impractical. They are planning a service on Yom Kippur in the shuls large secure car park on chairs socially distanced

Cantor Nathan Goldman – Stuttgart nhgoldman1995@gmail.com

Nathan Goldman, who is also originally from Liverpool, is the chazan in Stuttgart IRGW.de community. He welcomed Deborah Katchko-Gray, from whose grandfather's chazanut he had found much inspiration.

There are presently no services held in the synagogue. But in Germany it's now possible to reopen and there are plans for Rosh Hashanah with limited attendance, pre-registered, all masked congregants, although the cantor/leader is not required to be masked in Germany. The service will comprise only highlights of the services and there will be no choir. This will put the emphasis on the need to use nusach to make the services special.

Cantor Deborah Katchko-Gray – Ridgefield, Connecticut, USA

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Cantor Deborah has been the cantor at Congregation Shir Shalom Ridgefield, Connecticut (Reform) since 1999. She is a fourth-generation cantor and was the second woman to serve in a conservative synagogue. Music has been an essential aspect of her services but Pikuach Nefesh is the over-riding factor and singers are "super spreaders" of the Covid virus. Their on-line services have doubled attendance and have attracted testimonies and photos and been hugely appreciated.

Bar mitzvah lessons are conducted on line, shiva services have made possible for hundreds to attend from around the world to show respect whereas this was not possible traditionally and they have been very moving and have offered comfort to the mourners.

Regarding the Yamim Noraim, they will not be using their choir and may utilise pre-recorded tracks.

Deborah expressed concerns about "Zoom-bombing" where antagonistic outsiders have been able to disrupt services and other means such as Facebook or YouTube might be favoured for broadcasting the services.

Jeremiah Lockwood – San Francisco jeremiahdaniellockwood@yahoo.com

Jeremiah is cantor at a conservative synagogue in San Francisco. He is primarily a musician, not formally trained as a chazan, but currently studying for a PhD exploring Chassidic chazanut. His interest is widening the attraction of synagogue music by incorporating outside musicians to Friday evening services to engage increased audiences. The shul has been closed since March.

Regarding the Yamim Noraim, there is sadness that face-to-face services will not be conducted and the compromise will involve pre-recorded services with the possibility of being more impactful, widespread and appealing to those who are not otherwise shul-goers.

Cantor Benny Rogosnitsky – New York Benny Rogosnitsky

cantorbenny@pesyn.org

Benny Rogosnitsky, yet another cantor born in Liverpool is chazan in New York's Upper East Side New Park East synagogue. His community has been severely affected by Covid-19 with some families losing 3 members, businesses have collapsed, people have had to move to cheaper homes and some have faced bankruptcy. At its peak, New York was suffering up to 900 deaths per day, now close to zero.

Shabbat and morning services have resumed for pre-registered members but Benny feels that attenders are nervous of attending and this inhibits kavanah in their davening.

Chazan Yitschok Meir Helfgott is also at the shul and previously on shabbat mornings they had a choir of 8 – 12 men and attendance of 900.

Regarding the Yamim Noraim, it is intended to have restricted attendance with priority being given to the pre-registered elderly and infirm.

Services will commence at Ein Kamocha, sermon, shofar, sermon, and musaph, 2 hours maximum with possibly 3 such services held with one hour in between for cleaning. Chazanut will be only one piece for each service, decision regarding choir is still pending. The query of beracha levatala in repeated services is under consideration and may be alleviated by alternating the chazan or seeking other halachic alternatives.

Priority will be given to Yizkor services, possibly held each hour during the day. The crisis is not only cantorial but essentially humanitarian – people are afraid of the current situation and for their futures.

Comments and question session.

Alex Klein commented that through Zoom and online links the world has become smaller and we are getting closer. He looks forward to continuing cooperation between congregations of whatever denomination.

Shofar. If singers are super spreaders, then the shofar can be considered a super-duper spreader! Shofar activities amongst the speakers included that the shofar could be blown outside, into a side room of the shul where it can still be heard. There could be shofar blowing in public parks and on the preceding Sunday.

Choirs. Choirs generally will not be used but possibly a quartet socially distanced.

Social distancing for service leaders.

Deborah Katchko-Gray commented that cantors and leyners are not happy to share the bima with others at close distance. She will not share closed room with others and considers it too dangerous and a rethink is necessary.

Nathan Goldman saw it as an advantage that off-key singers in his community will not be able to disturb his davening! In Germany the service leaders do not have to wear masks.

Johnny Turgel asked if anyone has found a mask that is comfortable to sing with. **Cantor Steven Saxon** uses a mask with a frame but found that it reverberates and is not comfortable. Perspex screens around a singer are not effective barriers against viral distribution. Rachel Adelstein said that Broadway singers use modified masks with frame-support.

Geraldine Auerbach summed up with thanks to all participants. Rosh Hashanah will be a significant watershed in the conduct of services under the current restrictions. She said that there was the possibility of miscegenation – and we could see people voting with their feet or in this case with their fingers as they have a lot of choice and might not tune in to their own synagogue.

Attendees (about 50) at the meeting were encouraged to enrol in the Forums Jewish Music Group at Humanities Commons so that they could be informed of future COZ and other activities