

**Report COZ 4: 14 July 2020** Jeremiah Lockwood with Hankus Netsky  
Ashkenazic Jewish Music – Hazzanut Report by Charles Heller, Toronto

	<p><b>COZ 4: Tuesday 14 July 2020</b></p> <p><b>Jeremiah Lockwood</b></p> <p>PhD candidate at Stanford University Graduate School and accomplished radical Jewish musicians, in dialogue with</p> <p><b>Hankus Netsky</b> Multi-instrumentalist, composer, teacher and scholar, founder-director of the Klezmer Conservatory Band</p> <p><b>historically informed performance of Ashkenazi Jewish music: myths, fantasies and embodied research agendas</b></p>	
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**Hankus** welcomed the assembled Zoom audience and clarified that the advertised title “Ashkenazic Jewish Music” would focus on **hazzanut**. He reviewed the kinds of wide-ranging questions that his students (Jewish and non-Jewish) ask and summarised his point of view: “East European Jewish music as a living ethnic cultural tradition”. A key stage in the post-war development of this tradition in the USA was the prominence given to Israeli pronunciation. By 1958 only 2% of Jewish institutions in the USA were Yiddish-based.

There are two ways of looking at hazzanut: as a tradition within the Jewish community, and as a World Music heritage. Two recent developments have been the employment of women cantors and the promotion of “singing communities”

Jeremiah Lockwood is a descendent of hazzanim and is studying the role of hazzanim for his PhD at Stamford.

He described recent changes in the status of listening as a devotional form – “deep listening” to music as a meditational form. The traditional relation of the cantor to the congregation has been that the cantor is a tradition-bearing artist and the congregation is in sync with the cantor.

In recent times there has been a shift in how worshippers respond to this model. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cantors had economic standing and the art of soloistic hazzanut was

appreciated. This kind of hazzanut is extremely rare today: the 3-hour service comprising set pieces, virtuosity, improvisation and communal responses. The term “Ashkenazic Jewish music” as generally understood today means klezmer, Hasidic, and Yiddish folk, theatre, and art song, and traditional hazzanut tends to be less widely known. Jeremiah has been a leading figure in its resurgence, along with other activists, including cantors Jack Mendelson, Jack Kessler, Judith Berkson, and Sharon Bernstein.

Hankus introduced samples of the way hazzanut is presented:

Moshe Oysher’s *Amar Rabi Elazar* as “Middle-Eastern swing”

A sample from a live selihot in which the hazzan Leib Glantz is declaiming in a kind of Sprechstimme

Pinchik’s *Rozo de Shabbos* reworked in 2005 by Hazzan Jack Kessler and his group “Atzilut” complete with percussion, notably the rainstick.

And the same piece performed by Hazzan Asher Hainovitz with Andre Hajdu at the piano creating his own original harmonic framework.

And the same piece recorded in rock fashion by Jeremiah’s Band, “Sway Machinery” in 2015.

In response to a query as to whether this latter version could be regarded as hazzanut, an informal poll found that the Zoom participants felt that this version “worked”.

Jeremiah described his work with several contemporary Hasidic cantors such as Yanky Lemmer, describing them as “key voices in the cantorial revival today” (though this is not the ground where you might expect to find a flowering of hazzanut)

### **Cantorial training**

Jeremiah reviewed the status of cantorial training in the USA today. There still are experienced teachers such as Noah Schall with private students — they will write out different versions of a piece of hazzanut catered to the abilities in each individual student. The cantorial training school of the Orthodox movement, the Belz School of Sacred Music at Yeshivah University, does not serve as a credentialing program that leads to employment as a cantor."

Jeremiah described his work of “reintroducing the listening moment” as opposed to accepting the ubiquitous modern “participatory service”.

Hankus stated that hazzanut should be regarded as a World Music heritage. Its special features include improvisation and the use of nusah. He recommended watching an interview about this

with Hazzan Benzion Miller, on the Yiddish Book Center website. He also mentioned the characteristic hazzanic vocal style which could include a Rosenblatt-type falsetto, or the *subito forte* attack.

## **Discussion**

The chat box of the Zoom generated a discussion about differences between listening and participating.

Alex Knapp described the accompanist in hazzanut as both listener and participant. Boaz Tarsi raised the issue of defining terms, even familiar ones such as “cantorial music” and the “cantorial rhapsody”. Hankus mentioned that the function of the hazzan is still not widely understood.

Jeremiah’s work with contemporary Hasidic cantors shows that hazzanut is not dead yet. (Geraldine adds: and while people are still trying to define, codify and possibly restrain it – it has escaped on an exciting and exhilarating journey of its own, spearheaded by the Hassidic cantors)

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*Minutes recorded by Charles Heller*