



Report Coz 7, August 4, 2020 **Kligman / Cohon**
Report by Jeremiah Lockwood Stanford University

	<p>COZ 7: Tuesday 4 August 2020 Mark Kligman Professor of Ethnomusicology and Musicology, Herb Alpert School of Music UCLA and Director of Lowell Milken Fund for American Jewish Music in dialogue with Baruch Cohon rabbi and cantor in California lecturer University of Judaism, Hebrew Union Musical editor on the 3rd edition of Idelsohn's Jewish Song Book, and writer of seminal books on Jewish music My life in Jewish music.</p>	
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Kligman frames Cohon's work by introducing his wonderful 1950 article on the structure of nusakh. Baruch Cohon is also a great hazzan! Cohon officiated at Kligman's wife's grandfather's funeral. They have stayed in touch over many years. Cohon's son Rabbi Sam Cohon will be assisting with the tech and singing some musical examples.

Making Sense of My Century, Cohon's memoirs, were recently published.

Cohon gives a life story. Earliest musical memories, singing at the table. His father was from Byelorussia, Yeshiva in Minsk, knew many melodies. His father wrote ten books, was professor of theology at HUC. Four books were published in his life, the others posthumously. *Faithfully Yours*, was edited by Baruch. Mother was from Portland, they met in Cincinnati. She wanted to be ordained a Rabbi in 1910, but they weren't ordaining women at that time. They married in 1912. His father had a congregation in Chicago. She wrote *Introduction to Jewish Music* in 1923.

Age 5 his first music teacher was Avrom Zvi Idelsohn (!!!). He taught him trop. Idelsohn was the "father" of Jewish musicology, collecting Jewish melodies. During WWI he was drafted into the Turkish army. He led a band in Gaza. In 1919 he was leading a concert for the British, a victory concert. He used a Sadigurer Chassidic melody and arranged it for his chorus. The next day he heard it being sung in Jerusalem. Hava Nagila. He arrived in America in 1924.

Cohon's father met Idelsohn in a convention in New York, he invited him to Chicago. Cohon's father got a position at HUC. There was a massive music collection (Brinbaum). They brought Idelsohn to Cincinnati to catalog the collection and to be professor of Jewish musicology. He was an unusual classroom professor. Idelsohn eventually left for South Africa, and then to Israel. Last year his great grandson got in touch, because a biography is in the works.

Cohon showed some scores of Idelsohn. Some examples with the music printed right to left.

Memories of Cincinatti. The style of synagogue music in Reform congregations had no cantors. (ie. Rochdale Temple) Choir was in the choir loft, with church singers. The Rabbi would speak lines in Hebrew, the choir would sing in English, "a real Church response." The other side of the spectrum, the Orthodox synagogues had cantors
He remembers asking his mother while walking to synagogue. "Let's go to Washington Street Shul instead of Rochdale Temple." "Why?" "Because there everybody sings."

We listened to records in the home. *Eilu Devorim*, by Rappaport, was one of his favorites. His son Sam sings the piece. The piece includes repetition of words, for emphasis or musical content. Anecdote from after he retired from Temple Emanuel: He began attending Shabbos services at Chabad. They invited him to daven Schachris, but no repeating words. He felt like he was driving down the street with his breaks on.

He remembers pieces from Cincinatti cantors he heard growing up.

At age 12 his mother took him to hear Jacob Beimel. A fine tolerant teacher. Taught him all the specifics of nusakh and interpretations and the holidays. By the time he was bar mitzvah he was competent bal tefila. At 17 he had his first cantorial job in Pontiac, MI. He was drafted in 1943. After the war he started to attend Young Israel. He did his khazones on a "humble business."

He was interested in show business. He moved to California in 1947. His parents transferred to HUC in Los Angeles. His mother established company, Publications for Judaism (?). They published Idelsohn's song book. He became an editor.

His parents encouraged him to write article, 1950 "Structure of Synagogue Prayer Chant" when he was 24. He had been working with it all his life.

He had cantorial positions in California. First in Pasadena.

He transferred to UCLA where he was cantor at the Hillel. There he met his wife, Claire from New Jersey. She worked as a day care worker in a Jewish Camp. He got hired as the Cantor.

Auditioning for cantorial positions in those days. No one asked if he had "graduated from Kindergarten. They said get up there and daven, and they knew what to expect."

He worked at Valley Beth Israel.

1959-60 He substituted for Cantor Saul Silverman when he went on vacation. He was working on small TV series, but sitting next to him on the bima were big timers in Hollywood.

His father passed away in 1959.

Mark plays a record of Cohon's music, "Generations." An album of duets of Sam and Baruch.

Cohon got ordained so he could legally perform weddings. He was ordained in 1969 as a Rabbi.

1973 he became cantor at Temple Emanuel Beverley Hills. At this point Reform was becoming more traditional. He was there for 21 years. He gave input to the music of the congregation. They play a record of Cohon singing "Hashkiveinu" from the 1970s.

They play a record of Cohon singing "T'ka B'Shofar" from the 1970s.

Cohon talks about the influence of Rock and Roll on Jewish Music.

Baruch and Sam perform live a Chanukah song that Cohon wrote. The piece is his "best seller."

Ends with a comment about changing knowledgebase of Jewish laity.

Questions:

Question about Jewish Hollywood.

The average Jewish executive in the studios had very little connection with the life of the Jewish community. Most were secular. It was a six-day week, no Shabbos. A secular atmosphere. We could crack jokes in Yiddish, but that was about as far as it went.

Gene Wilder. The Frisco Kid. Wilder was Jewish, but not knowledgeable. Cohon was hired to teach him to daven. They became friends.

Question about cantorial scene in Los Angeles.

In the 1950s and 60s cantorial training was very limited. Cantors could sing well, but that didn't mean they could sing well. There was an organization, but it was weak. We had the Cantors Assembly.

Hershel Fox was the cantor at Valley Beth Shalom. He was a good entertainer, he knew Yiddish. Cohon convinced him to come to the cantors convention. Fox said, "I shouldn't be going there. I'm not really a cantor. I'm a Yiddish actor." At the convention at night there would be some entertainment. Hershel did a comedy routine and had them rolling in the aisle.

There was a chapter of the CA in Los Angeles. Orthodox and Reform also had associations, but the CA was more active. "It was a different ballgame."

Malcolm Miller asks about English/Hebrew prayer settings?

Cohon says it was a trend that was necessary because Hebrew was not as well known. The education industry became a little less demanding and maybe a little less effective. We needed the English lyrics to support it.

An aside about his uncle, Harold Rheinhard, Rabbi at West London Synagogue. During the war they sent over the Kindertransport to England. The organizer of the transport told his uncle about a warehouse in Prague where they stored all of the sifrei Torahs looted from synagogues all over Europe. They raised money and brought back Torahs and another transport of kids.

Cohon says, if you stick to the Hebrew alone, if you're Orthodox you know what it means. The trend would be to add translations so that people would know what it means.

Conversation at the end about English language in prayer settings. Cohon suggests diminishing knowledge over time. Julie Pitkin suggests Jewish kids now have better knowledge than their parents.

Mark Kligman suggests a future session on nusakh. Cohon says his article focuses on Eastern European tradition. A Sephardic cantor would have a very different set of musical examples.

Boaz Tarsi, asks if the article was solicited or did he initiate it?

The question is unclear and Cohon says he had learned from Beigel. He was editing the Idelsohn book. His parents wanted him to have some publications to show his qualification.

Daniel Katz asks, how did you get JAMS to be interested in this topic?

Cohon is not sure but thinks his mother may have had a connection because of her work in publishing.

Tarsi asks who was on the peer review board?

Cohon can't remember.

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