

Report COZ 20: November 10, 2020 Alex Klein and Sol Zim

The Joy of Cantorial Prayer



Sol Zim

COZ 20: Tuesday 10 November

Cantor Sol Zim

A fifth-generation cantor, Sol Zim is a larger than life personality whose compositions, interpretive singing and teaching skills, copious recordings and productivity have left a big impression on the Jewish musical landscape

In conversation with

Alex Klein

Director of the European Cantors Association on landmarks in his life

The Joy of Cantorial Prayer



Alex Klein

This session can be heard here:

<https://www.facebook.com/138818510938797/videos/795038457938803>

Sol Zim and Alex Klein on the Joy of Cantorial Prayer

Reported by Robert Brody amended by Sol Zim

Tuesday, November 10, 2020, Conversations on Zoom featured an in depth interview by Alex Klein, chaired by Mark Kligman, with one of the greatest Chazzanim of our time – Sol Zim.

For any with a scanty knowledge of his huge contributions to the world of Jewish Music & Composition of “current classis”, Sol has composed, arranged, performed and made famous his own version of “L’dor Vador”, “Avinu Shebashamayim”, “Sim Shalom”, “Kad’sheinu”, “Shalom Aleichem” and many more which are sung in congregations throughout the world.

From Generation to Generation

“L’dor Vador” is a message from Sol Zim to the world – “From Generation to Generation”. He has throughout his very active life loved to work particularly with children’s choirs wherever he has performed concerts, to ensure that our musical traditions carry on through the generations. At the same time preserving pure & traditional Nuschaot – prayer modes – Sol has been a pathfinder in extending the basis of these prayer modes to a modern idiom, composing hundreds of Sing-Along versions of new melodies that have endeared him to thousands of all ages.

Sol’s musical ability and talents, writing with such audience appeal in many styles, from a Friday Night Rock Kabbalat Shabbat Service, to enhancing the pure traditional modes of our tradition, is based on a life-long professional study of music theory, harmony, composing and the many different styles of musical traditions, such as; Rock, Opera and classic Cantorial Art. He always studied with the highest & most qualified teachers whether secular or Jewish.

Sol is a rare living link to some of the great names of the Cantorial World, such as; Cantors Moshe & David Kusevitsky, Cantor Joshua Samuel Weisser, Oscar Julius (all with whom Sol studied with privately), Cantor Pierre Pinchik, Cantor Shmuel Malavsky, Cantor Moshe Oysher, Jan

Peerce, Cantor Leible Waldman, Cantor Mordechai Hershman ... just some of the names that came up in the interview.

Early Life and Training

Sol's family was from *Lamza*, Poland. His grandfather was a Chazzen, Shochet & Mohel and was the Rebbe who taught hundreds of students in their city. He passed away when Sol's father was just 15 years old. Sol's parents (Chazzen Samuel & Ida Zimelman), together with Sol's older brothers (Milton, Ralph & Sidney) escaped Lamza, Poland and immigrated to Montreal, Canada just before Hitler invaded. His parents left everything behind. They came with nothing. They did not speak any English, just Yiddish & Polish. When Sol's father arrived in Montreal, he found a job as a Chazzen for the High Holidays. He immediately studied Shchitah in order to earn a living. In 1939, baby Solomon Max Zimelman was born and from the age of 3, Sol's father had him singing solos on the Bimah, by his side and in 1942 the family moved to Toronto, Canada where Sol's father, Cantor Samuel Zimelman, took a position as Cantor at the Anshei Minsk Synagogue (downtown Toronto shul). In 1946 Sol's family decided to move to the United States, to Portland, Maine where his father took the position of Cantor, Mohel & Shochet at Shaarrey T'philoh Synagogue, then the largest Orthodox Synagogue in all of Maine.

At the age of 8, Sol's father, keen on having him receive a sound Jewish & Musical education, sent him to Williamsburg, Brooklyn in New York to study at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas where he lived in the Yeshiva's dormitory. At the same time Sol was studying privately with Cantor Joshua Weisser, a composer and teacher of Cantorial Liturgical music and when Cantor Weisser retired, Sol then studied with Oscar Julius every Friday afternoon with many hours of strict studying of Solfeggio, Theory, Harmony, Counterpoint & Conducting. From the age of 9 through 13 Sol sang in Oscar Julius's choir as his prime soloist where he sang with Chazzen Kapov Kagan, twice a month and on the other weekends Sol sang with many other great Cantors like; Cantors Pierre Pinchik, Shmuel Malavsky, Leible Waldman, Moshe Oysher, etc. During summers Sol would go home to his family in Portland, Maine and studied Conducting, Writing & Theory with Professor Jacob Rosemarin who was a professor of music in Montreal and Choirmaster at Montreal's Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue.

At the age of 15, Sol decided to transfer to Yeshiva University H.S. where he was granted a full scholarship. Upon graduating, he went on to the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) Cantorial School. In 1959, while still in school at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Sol took a weekend position as part-time Cantor at Temple Shalom of Westbury, New York where he met June, his wife. June's father, Jack Schwartz, had been very active at the shul. Sol and June married in 1961 and have two sons, Craig & Eric.

In 1964 Sol took a position as Cantor at The Hollis Hills Jewish Center in Hollis Hills, New York where he received a Life-Time contract and is still serving as Cantor for the past 56 years.

From the time Sol took his first weekend Cantorial position, he could see that many worshippers were Non-Hebraists and were just listeners and not *daveners*. He was determined to find a way to create a spark of participation.....Foot Tapping Worshippers, actually involved in the "Davening" and feeling the spiritual emotion of the prayer.

Sol decided to write a piece of synagogue music where everyone could join in. The result was "L'dor Vador" and it transformed the nature of the Service. He kept writing many more compositions that would draw the Congregation into participating in Services. He made it easier for worshippers who could not read the liturgy by using Chassidic syllables like; Yam-bidi-bye-bye OR ya-ba-bai, etc. So, some called Sol "Zim-Bidi-Bai-Bai" ! Yes, Sol Zim started "CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATORY MUSIC".

Publications Concerts and Recordings

Sol assembled some of his compositions into his first "Joy of Shabbes" Book. Since that venture, he composed & wrote "Joy of Israel", "Joy of Jewish Memories", "Joy of the Jewish Wedding", "Joy of

Passover", "Joy of High Holidays", "Simchat Shabbat", "Spirit of Shabbat" (2 Volumes), "Friday Night Rock Service", "More Joy of Shabbat", "Joy of Chanukah", "Original Cantorial Concert Selections", "The Joy of Prayer" (A Year Round Hebrew School Curriculum), mostly published by Tara Publications.

In addition to the above, The *Cantors Assembly of America* (an exceptional organization) has Published Anthologies of Sol Zim's music, they are: SOL ZIM SHABBAT ANTHOLOGY, SOL ZIM ROSH HASHANA ANTHOLOGY, SOL ZIM YOM KIPPUR ANTHOLOGY and the 4th one is SOL ZIM SHALOSH R'GALIM ANTHOLOGY which is now going to print. These Anthologies are being used in Cantorial Schools as part of curriculum.

Sol has made many Records & CD's. At first with Tikva Records and then Menorah Records. At first with his brother Paul as the "ZIMEL BROTHERS". Some of the Recordings with his brother Paul & Brothers Zim.

Sol recorded many Record Albums and CD's by himself on ZILMAY ENTERPRISES.....
"GREAT JEWISH MELODIES", "JOY OF SHABBOS", "ORIGINAL CANTORIAL MASTERPIECES", "CHILDREN'S CHANUKAH SING-ALONG", "FAMILY SEDER SING-ALONG", "JOY OF ISRAEL", "JOY OF PASSOVER", "DAVID SUPERSTAR" (A Friday Night Rock Service), "JOY OF JEWISH MEMORIES", "SOL ZIM LIVE IN CONCERT", "FRIDAY NIGHT CHAI", "THAT'S MY BOY", "WE ARE THE WORLD", "JOY OF PRAYER", "AVINU SHEBASHAMAYIM", "WE SHALL NEVER FORGET" (Yom Hashoah).

Some other recordings Sol made with his brother Paul as THE BROTHERS ZIM include:
"GREATEST HITS", "LIVE AMERICANA", "PEACING IT TOGETHER", "AM YISRAEL CHAI", "ZIMEL BROTHERS SING" etc.

In July 1966, Sol arranged a trip to Israel and asked his brother Paul to join him. Only one concert was arranged by Yonatan Yuval to be held at the Bet Ha'am auditorium in Jerusalem. Sol arrived with Paul a couple of days before the weekend, was met by Yonatan Yuval and in the Taxi from the airport, Sol discovered that only 50 tickets were sold for the concert which was to take place on Sunday, just about 3 days later. Sol was now on a MISSION. He asked Yonatan to arrange that he Daven in HEICHAL SHLOMO on Friday night & Saturday morning and that his brother Paul to Daven in YESHURUN Synagogue Friday Night & on Saturday Paul would join Sol for Musaf. As it turned out, the **CONCERT on Sunday** was **STANDING ROOM ONLY!** Clearly, their talents & devening were appreciated. Following that Concert, every Shabbat for the rest of the Summer, they both Davened in 4 more Shuls and had many more concerts over the next several weeks.

In 1967 Sol (in his twenties) wanted to make a Record with a FULL ORCHESTRA. Knowing that there would be high costs involved, Sol borrowed \$10,000 from 2 friends. He commissioned Orchestral Arrangements by the well known Gershon Kingsley & Robert De Cormier, went to Vienna to make the Recordings, came back to the United States and offered it to numerous record labels, United Artists Director of Record Distribution, made an offer of \$18,000 for the recording, enabling Sol to pay back the money he borrowed and even make a few dollars for himself.

Alex asked Sol: "What is your secret to composing?"

Sol replied: He looks for the meaning of each word and what is the feeling to be expressed. Is it Joyous? Celebratory, Sombre? Is it Heroic or Dramatic?

All the compositions that he writes are also written for Choir 2 Part & 4 Part. He also said he finds composing relaxing, joyous & he loves to make people feel the emotion of the Prayer even though they may not understand the words but the music can make people feel the emotion and meaning of the prayer.

One of Sol's unusual experiences was having a "choir of 1,000 children" sing in a Concert in Central Park in New York City and Sol leading & singing with them on a high small platform with a 15 pc band.

Sol continues to be commissioned by many Congregations, Cantor as well as others in the Jewish Music World to write special compositions for events, concerts, etc. One of the most memorable was when Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Canada & Cantor Beny Maissner, commissioned Sol to compose a Friday Evening Chassidic Service. The Rabbi introduced Sol as ZIM-BIDI-BAI-BAI.

Alex: How did you come to write a Friday Evening Rock Service?

Sol answered this was suggested by his two sons, Craig & Eric. Sol rarely listened to Rock Music, only Classical, Opera & Cantorial Jewish Music. His sons took him to a Rock Concert and quickly found out what Rock Music was all about. In 4 months he finished writing a Rock Service. Adults, teenagers and children clamored to be part of the upcoming Shabbat Rock Service which was taking place on a Sunday night. There were about 100 voices and a 5 piece band. The concert was Superb. It was a huge success! Sol is always keen to widen the appeal of Shul music but always making sure that his compositions maintain his deep knowledge & respect of authentic traditional Nuschaot. Sol had this Friday Evening Rock Service recorded and called "DAVID SUPERSTAR".

Alex asked: You have been in your Shul well over 50 years, what is the secret?

Sol replied that he has always been blessed with wonderful Co-Officiants, Rabbis and even Shammitis and a wonderful Congregation. His Presidents & Board of Directors have always been cooperative, supportive & respectful of all of his projects & undertakings. He always had choirs; Adult, Teen & Children. He considers his congregation "his family".

Alex: What is the essence to give the current generation who want to study Chazzanut?

Sol replied: It is necessary to know, understand & learn Jewish History & Hebrew Liturgy, Read Music well, be familiar with Choral Conducting & Develop & Hone their own skills & of course study voice!! They must be leaders, not followers. Learn how to be partners with the Rabbi and other co-officiants. Also, find a way to get their congregation to be Participants in Prayer through music. It is also very important that they realize what they themselves can do musically, to make a person "FEEL PRAYER". Being a Chazzan is an extremely meaningful role and a Cantor helps the congregant participate & experience spirituality.

Alex asked about the use of Instruments.

Sol noted that Reform Congregations are using instruments and he is accepting of that, but he does not himself use instruments on Shabbat or Holidays. During the Pandemic he has been using Zoom to make Havdallah Services more enjoyable with piano, but it is done after Shabbat is actually over. On EREV Shabbat he has been using instruments only until after L'cha Dodi (before Shabbat actually begins). This has been helpful during the quarantine period when congregants are not coming to the shul itself.

SOL TALKS ABOUT HIS COLLABORATION WITH MAESTRO, DR. MORDECHAI SOBOL Z'L and his son MAESTRO OFIR SOBOL:

Sol shared with us his unique musical collaboration and special friendship with Dr. Mordechai Sobol z'l and his son Ofir Sobol. Sol spoke of their musical brilliance and their gift to the Jewish World of presenting the highest level Cantorial Concerts in major concert halls in Israel and throughout the world, with full Symphony & magnificent orchestrations they created. Sol has been performing Concerts in Israel with Mordechai & Ofir for over 25 years and has recorded much music with them as well. Sol is now working closely with Ofir Sobol who has followed in his father's footsteps.

MARK KLIGMAN then took over the meeting and managed the many compliments and questions from the Participants. **Cantor Jaclyn Chernett** on behalf of the group gave her heartfelt thanks to Sol who has been a great teacher and mentor in her Cantorial journey.

In Conclusion, Sol is “America’s Superstar of Jewish Music”. Much has been written in his biography, of his history, talents and achievements but this evening we were privileged to be treated with an insight to the real person behind the biographies, and the memory of this exceptional interview has endeared him to us and will remain an everlasting memory with us.

Sol Zim Bio solzim1@aol.com ;

Chazzan, Composer, Professor/Teacher, Concert Performer Extraordinaire, Recording Artist; Sol Zim is one of the most dynamic and innovative personalities in Jewish Music today. He is a graduate of The Jewish Theological Seminary Cantorial School. He received an honorary doctorate of music from the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as the Max Wohlberg Award for composition from the Cantor’s Assembly. Sol Zim is professor of Jewish Music at the "Academy for Jewish Religion" Cantorial School in New York City. He also lectures extensively, nationally and internationally, at other cantorial schools and is a frequent "scholar/composer in residence" for many Jewish organizations. He makes a point of working with children and synagogues across the globe. He concertizes on stages throughout the world. His compositions are known and sung universally. He is a world-wide inspiration.

Sol Zim bio (longer)

Composer, practitioner and teacher extraordinaire, Sol Zim is one of the most dynamic and innovative personalities in Jewish Music today. He is a graduate of Yeshivah University, the Jewish Theological Seminary Cantorial Institute, Brooklyn College (BA), and New York University (MA). He received an honorary doctorate of music from the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as the Max Wohlberg Award for composition from the Cantor’s Assembly. Sol studied voice and operatic roles with Kurt Baum and other operatic coaches of the NY Metropolitan Opera Company. He performed many of these roles on stage. To develop his cantorial art/technique and to fine-tune his artistry of Jewish song, he studied privately with cantor Moshe Koussevitsky and Shalom Secunda. Sol was offered contracts with the Vienna State Opera and the Israeli Opera but in decided what was most important to him, he decided to devote his life to the furtherance of Jewish music.

Zim is professor of Jewish music at the "Academy for Jewish Religion" Cantorial School in New York City. He also lectures extensively, nationally and internationally, at other cantorial schools and is a frequent "scholar/composer in residence" for many Jewish organizations and synagogues across the globe. By highlighting a children’s choir in most of his concert performances, Zim is responsible for the formation of hundreds of Youth Choruses in Synagogues and schools throughout the world. After all, Sol says;”Children are our Future – today’s Jewish children are tomorrow’s Jewish leaders”

Zim is celebrated for his distinctive compositions and has written hundreds of popular melodies and arrangements (i.e. L’dor Vador, Adon Olam, Kad’shenu, Sim Shalom, Avinu Shebashamayim, etc.), which are sung in congregations the world over. His 25 recordings feature Yiddish, Israeli, Chassidic, Broadway, opera and pop music. Most of his recordings contain original material and they include music for all ages. His 13 books of original music are used throughout the world by cantors, rabbis and educators and his “anthologies” have become leading guides and textbooks for cantorial study. Sol’s “Avinu Shebashamayim” is sung in synagogues and concerts throughout the world and has virtually become a second national anthem in the state of Israel. He believes the cantor cannot merely sing and daven ‘to’ a congregation – he says “we must involve our people in prayer and daven together with them to heighten and illuminate the spirit in our congregations”. Sol is truly the

pioneer of congregational participatory music and all his songs, melodies and cantorial chants reflect this ideology and always create a spiritual connection.

Alex Klein biography (short) alex@cantors.eu www.cantors.eu

Alex Klein was born in London. He has been passionate about Jewish music, especially chazzanut all his life. As a youth he took services in Finchley Synagogue and studied at Jews College. He settled in Manchester where he brought significant Jewish artists and cantors for concerts to the UK. He worked with Geraldine Auerbach, Director of Jewish Music Institute, as head of its Synagogue Music Section Together they created the European Cantors Association in 2012 which runs Cantors Conventions in European and British cities and other programmes.

Alex Klein biography (longer)

Alex Klein says: I was born in London. I have been passionate about Jewish music, especially chazzanut all my life. As a youth I took services in Finchley Synagogue and studied at Jews College. Alex settled in Manchester where he brought significant Jewish artists and cantors for concerts to the UK. He worked with Geraldine Auerbach, Director of Jewish Music Institute, as head of its Synagogue Music Section Together they created the European Cantors Association in 2012 which runs Cantors Conventions in European and British cities and other programmes.

He says: I was brought up in London in a musical family. My father was a singer, conductor and musician. I was introduced to music before I could walk or talk when the top singers and chazzanim would come round to the house and jam with my father on a Saturday night on a monthly basis.

I saw my first superstar chazan Moshe Oysher as a boy in the East End of London and was hooked. My first teacher was rabbi/chazan Avraham Rosenfeld who taught me nusach and lehening well before my bar mitzvah.

I was a member of Finchley synagogue and would take services in the youth minyan and be part of the youth shabbaton in the main shul. I attended Jews College to become a teacher. I also attended Rev Bryll chazanut class (unofficially). I then studied law but decided to go into business and Hebrew teaching.

As a young man, I started to arrange concerts for charity and worked in bringing the best Jewish artists to the UK. I have lectured in cantorial music in the USA, Europe, Israel and the UK.

I had my own radio programme on Sunset radio after being in a team at BBC radio Manchester. I have performed professionally in Evita, Whistle Down the Wind and Witness for the Prosecution. I worked with Geraldine Auerbach's Bnai Brith Music Festival by putting on a Kurt Weil programme in Manchester.

In looking after the cantorial art and the role of the cantor I was part of the executive of the JMI Synagogue Music Section, then of 'Tephilharmonic' helping to run the cantorial conventions. I founded the Tephilharmonic the Julian Klein scholarship sending boys to TACI in Israel. I became head of Cantorial Wing of the Jewish Music Institute of which Geraldine was the founder Director. When she retired from JMI in 2012, Geraldine and I established the European Cantors Association (ECA) ECA has continued the tradition of holding cantors conventions in Europe with the world's top cantorial teachers

I am a member of the executive of the National Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education NASACRE and an Exec member of Jewish Representative Council of Greater Manchester and region. I am also a member of the international Council of Holistic Therapists and able to practice massage and aromatherapy to clinic/hospital standard, as well as a Patient Representative Adviser for NHS Northern Care Alliance

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