



Hazzanut

AT THE MASORTI MOVEMENT

History of the Hazzanut

LISHMOA EL HARINA V'EL A T'FILLAH (Let us listen to the song of our prayers).

The Hazzanut began in the Temple in Jerusalem. Liturgy was sung by the priests and the Levites, but in synagogues the "Shaliach Tzibur" leads prayers. Where synagogues have a Hazzan, he or she performs this function, as the name implies, "Emissary of the Congregation".

Contemporary prayers tunes come from the period when The Piyyutim (Psalms) became a characteristic of synagogue culture. The Paytanim (Poets) combined traditional psalms with their original poems and developed music which would accompany the chanting of these texts. The Hazzanim were the most qualified to perform these songs, and frequently improvised or embellished the tunes.

In some way, synagogue culture evolved along with the improvisations and creativity of the Hazzanim, and from the tenth century their performances were similar to those of the secular minstrels who were also poets and musicians.

Rabbi Judah Gaon, Head of the Academy of Sura (760-764) was one of the main singers of his time, and is considered an organizer of the musical tradition in Babylonian Synagogues.

Singing in Ashkenazi Synagogues

Music culture in Northern Europe was less prevalent until the 10th Century, even though clergymen studied not only Hebrew Literature but also Synagogue singing as well. As time went by, Leitmotifs (melodies that express a specific tone) became linked to character of each festival, for example, Rosh Hashanah melodies created a feeling of approaching judgment, Yom Kippur melodies related to forgiveness and repentance, while Pessach, Shavuot and Succot melodies referred to freedom, joy and thanksgiving.

Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890) was a major player in introducing moderate and well accepted improvements to the level and style of music used in Ashkenazi Synagogues services.

Other significant composers include Samuel Naumbourg (1815-1880), who wrote the great masterpiece, the two-toned Zemiroth Israel; and Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894), who created a particular style of Jewish melodies.

Ashkenazi synagogue music was also influenced by Popular German music, including the work of the composer Mendelssohn.

Hazzanut in Eastern Europe

While Reformers and Conservatives struggled in Central and Western Europe, a number of skilled and qualified Hazzanim were creating Synagogue music in Eastern Europe. Some of them had magnificent voices and their own style, also creating new Hazzanim Schools.

The first Hazzan whose work was kept, was Salomon Kashtan (1781-1820), who had a magnificent voice. He was Hirsch Weintraub's teacher.

Nowadays, in many Synagogues worldwide, Hazzanim are influenced by these composers as well as by German music.



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