

Hazzanut

IN THE MASORTI MOVEMENT

Hazzanut in Uruguay

To speak about Hazzanut in Uruguay, it is inevitable to speak about the history of the New Israelite Congregation, since it is the only masorti community.

The congregation had a Hazzan before a Rabbi. Hazzan Jose Wahrmann z"l was hired in August 1937, owner of a sweet voice, exceptional pitch and voice color, I've been told. There is much talk about his warmth and of how much he studied, even after having been a student of great teachers in Germany. He was a Bar Mitzvah teacher and was dedicated to fulfill the mitzvah of Bikur Cholim. Hazzan Wahrmann was the Chairman of the Chevra Kadisha and one of its main activists. He retired in 1977 after 40 years of activity.

After retiring, Hazzan Wahrmann was succeeded by Felipe Curiel z"l, born in Turkey in 1933. From a very young age he dedicated himself to music, integrating and directing choirs of the network. He further studied in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Throughout his career he recorded an album called "Let's sing songs in Hebrew" and two tapes, the first entitled "Israel of thee I sing" and the second including only songs of Sepharadic ballads. Throughout his artistic career he performed several concerts and recitals in community institutions, and also outside it, both in Montevideo and throughout the country, as well as abroad. He participated in the Festival of the Song in Viña del Mar, Chile, representing our country, and also in the 1st South American Hazzanim festival, held in Porto Alegre Brazil in 1995. He officiated until his death in 1996, leaving a wealth of compositions that were compiled in a book in his memory.

Hazzan Luis Cattan began his musical activity as part of the school and synagogue choir from the age of 13. A few years later he left the choir and started his training as a cantor, assisting Hazzan Felipe Curiel. He attended conferences organized by the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary, which gave way to the School of Hazzanim Bet-Asaf. He not only served as a cantor, he was also the Director of the School of Tradition of the community and history professor in the Hebrew Ariel Institute of Uruguay. He served as a Hazzan in Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Panama, Ecuador, Costa Rica and the United States. Here in Uruguay he released a CD of Sepharadic, Ashkenazi and Contemporary Israeli music. He officiated at the New Israelite Congregation until the year 2003, when he left for the United States to serve as a Hazzan and Executive Director.

In 1999 a new draft Hazzan came, who almost immediately to his Bar Mitzvah began studying with Hazzan Luis Cattan as a mentor. This draft Hazzan is the one who writes here. I remember my first year of participation in the Yamim Noraim, joined the choir, having some involvement as a Sheliach Tzibur. During the year I sang in kabalot Shabbat and Shachrit along Hazzan Luis Cattan. In high school I joined the choir of the Ariel Hebrew Institute of Uruguay. In the year 2003 I joined the School of Hazzanim Bet-Asaf of the Rabbinical Seminary, where I was welcomed as the Uruguayan nephew. Throughout the years of study, besides being one of the Hazzanim, I was in charge of the musical direction of two tnuot that tried-out to travel to compete in Viña del Mar, Chile. I participated in various recitals of Hazzanim, until finally, after many experiences and learning, I graduated in 2006. Since then I was part of two shows of contemporary Israeli dance and singing.

During these years, alongside me, I had Hazzan Marcelo Bruckmann, who has integrated choirs of the network, and also directed the choir in the Jose Pedro Varela National School. He had the privilege to have Hazzan Felipe Curiel as a teacher, whom taught him to sing and play the shofar.

As you can see, the history of the Hazzanut Masorti in Uruguay always followed the same road and hand in hand with the same community, leaving marks of big Hazzanim that knew how to show, teach and accompany the future generations. Nowadays we are still singing tunes of yore, but striking a balance between them and modern ones. Over the years the tradition of singing melody or nusach varied. I must say I am quite insistent on this and every so often I try to introduce a little more of the beauty of the Nusach.

It is good to innovate; it is good to keep tradition.

The nusach and the melody, accompanying and teaching, leadership and humility make the Hazzan.

Hazzan Jagay Alfassa
Nueva Congregación Israelita
Montevideo, Uruguay