



## SCRIBE CONTRIBUTOR



### **Jack Chomsky**

*Cantor Jack Chomsky has served at Tifereth Israel since 1982. He is a graduate of Brown University and the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary.*

## **This Year, Don't Forget About Your Cantors!**

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Cantor Joseph Malovany sings a prayer in Warsaw's synagogue.

It's that time of year again when we cantors, having been hard at work for months preparing for the upcoming High Holidays, pick up the local newspaper and inevitably find articles written by our rabbinic colleagues about the trials and tribulations of rabbis preparing for this difficult occasion. And we sigh... and go back to our work.

I don't want to be sour about this – and it's great that members of our rabbinic leadership get to express their feelings and tell their stories about how they try to put all the experiences of the last year and all their hopes for the next year into a package that will engage and encourage those who show up on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur— and that their words will attract and not repel, and find the right balance between challenging people to do better and turning them off.

But we cantors take upon ourselves the challenge of preparing hours upon hours of material to be chanted (while many or most of us battle seasonal allergies), prepare choirs, prepare others to lead, make musical choices that find the balance between upholding ancient and modern traditions and connecting to contemporary musical ideas and materials, holding and building congregants' enthusiasm while praying mostly in a language that few of the congregants understand.

I thought it would be nice to share with the Forward's readers some observations of a few of my beloved Cantors Assembly colleagues as they prepare themselves and their communities for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur 5777.



Elias Rosemberg of Temple Emanu-El in Newton, Massachusetts told me, "I love the High Holidays. I have the opportunity to sing and lead services with the entire congregation and to see wonderful people that perhaps don't come as often.

The services at Temple Emanuel are so varied that it is really a beautiful experience. Some services I sing by myself. Others with choir and/or musical instruments. The temple has an historic contemporary service on the second day of Rosh Hashanah where we use a special Machzor with readings and songs."

The inclusion of musical instruments goes back just a few years and has been very well received. "I'm very proud of it. At the same time, I started to include more teens singing services together with the choir or doing some special songs with me. I also recorded a double CD with all the music for the holidays."

Temple Emanu-El Newton

(The CD is gorgeous – to eye and ear.)



Adas Israel Washington DC

Ari Brown of Washington’s Adas Israel responded that “it always strikes me that we spend a great deal of time preparing everyone else. I’m specifically thinking of working with children, whether in choirs or kids who lead a prayer or join for a duet, and the organization of reaching out to parents and scheduling rehearsals and making sure everyone else feels confident when they step on the bimah. I think children’s participation is a highlight of services for many congregations, and it takes a great deal of time and encouragement to make that happen

in a way that is smooth and that adds to the kavanah of the service. “

An interesting example – she always has groups of children lead the shofar calls. “It’s relatively easy for them to learn, they naturally are drawn to the shofar, and it keeps them and their families riveted to the Rosh Hashanah liturgy when they have to watch for the baal tekiah and be ready to call.”



Cantors Assembly

Alisa Pomerantz-Boro, Senior Vice-President of the CA, serves Congregation Beth El in Voorhees, NJ. She said “everything that happens on the bima, every week and on the High Holydays, is orchestrated by me. I roll the Sifrei Torah for every service from the sanctuary to the teen service to the religious school and family services, change the mantels, oversee the silver polishing, assign the Torah readings, practice with every reader, work with the choir, prepare and lead engaging family services and learners’ services. I also think and plan new and creative ways to make our services more accessible to my congregation; incorporating new melodies and new opportunities for inclusion. I continue to keep up all of my other responsibilities at work and at home and I miraculously manage to house, feed and host throngs of company throughout!”

If you’ve heard any of these cantors, you know that they are outstanding singers and prayer leaders. Their prayers are inspiring musically, but even more so because they come from loving, open hearts.



Chizuk Amuno

Finally, my colleague Manny Perlman of Chizuk Emuno in Baltimore, reports “When you’re the “messenger” for a 145-year-old congregation serving in his 20th year and only the 7th cantor in its long history and additionally your late father and all of your three brothers are all cantors, preparation is like driving a classic turbocharged race car. It’s part of your way of life and living.”

So I wish our rabbis well—locally and around the country and throughout the world – but I hope that you’ll listen with some extra enthusiasm and appreciation this year to the hard-working hazzanim who devote themselves to standing with you, praying on your behalf, and joining with you in raising the voices of a world Jewish community.