

JEWISH JOURNAL

NEWTON JEWISH JOURNAL – JEWISH JOURNAL.ORG - AUGUST 26, 2016

Sixty-five Cantors Experience Sounds and Sites of Spain

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– Cantor Elias Rosemberg*



The Cantor's Assembly group in the Imperial City of Toledo. At right, the group in Cordoba admiring the statue of Maimonides

Cantor Elias Rosemberg, along with 65 other cantors, members of Temple Emanuel of Newton and members of other synagogues throughout America embarked on an exciting trip to discover the Sephardic sounds and sites of Spain. The group toured various parts of Spain, including Barcelona, Madrid, Cordoba, Granada and Seville.

Starting in Barcelona, they were welcomed by Barcelona community leader and expert on local Jewish history. Dominique Tomasov Blinder, who talked a bit about the origin and return of Sefarad. Sefarad is a place mentioned once in the bible of unknown location. Since the period of second century Ancient Rome, Spanish Jews gave the name "Sefarad" to the Iberian Peninsula and thus descendants of Iberian Jews refer to themselves as Sephardi Jews. After walking in the steps of the ancient synagogue in Barcelona. they were off to Girona, Sagrada Familia Church and Guell Park, the Moorish Alcazar Palace and the Old Jewish Quarter in Seville, and Madrid.

Soon Shabbat was upon them, joining together with members of the Madrid Jewish community, they took a few moments to relax, pray and get to know one another. Participants also reached out to the nascent Jewish communities of today to hear their struggles. and their successes. With the Spanish government opening the door to citizenship for Jews with Spanish roots, and the opening of new centers of Jewish culture, there has never been a more exciting time for the Jews of Spain.

The Cantor's Assembly trip was highlighted with, beautiful music each night, starting with a concert in commemoration of 1,000 years of Jewish presence in Spain, moving on to Cantonal Concert: "The Soul of Sefarad" at the beautiful Palau De La Musica Catalan concert hall, focusing on music influenced by the Catalan region and ending with a moving Kabbalat Shabbat service, themed as "A World of Jewish Music for Erev Shabbat." Cantor Rosemberg himself sang at the concert in Barcelona.



Cantor Elias Rosemberg from Temple Emanuel, Newton, MA (right) and Cantor Luis Cattan from Westport, CT (left) performing a concert in Barcelona, Spain.

Cantor Rosemberg reminisced about the trip; "It was a fantastic trip. The interaction with both my colleagues and congregants was inspiring. We learned about how the Jewish people flourished for centuries in Spain, but also how terrible it was to be a Jew during the inquisition; so much suffering. For me, the highlights of the trip were singing together 'Ani Ma' amim" in a Synagogue in Toledo (now a museum) and 250 of us singing 'Hatikvah" in a closing event in Seville. Saying after all: Here we are!"

The trip ended in Seville, the romantic capital of Andalusia, where the group walked through the Barrio de Santa Cruz the former Jewish Quarter, with a local guide and were treated to a Flamenco performance. The Cantors Assembly to explore the *Sephardic Sounds & Sites* of Spain was a once in a lifetime emotional, inspirational and uplifting experience, connecting with Spain's existing Jewish community, hearing from leading thinkers and world renowned lecturers, and participating in momentous concerts and ceremonies. Together, 65 cantors and other participants sang, celebrated and explored all that Spanish, Ladino and Sephardic cultures have to offer.