

I'D LIKE TO TEACH MY SHUL TO SING

Or: "I've never felt more like singing with Jews"

וְכַשְׁאַתֶּם מִתְפַּלְלִים – דְּעוּ לְפָנַי מִי אֲתֶם עוֹמְדִים

Uch'she'atem mit'pal'lim - D'u lifnei mi atem omdim

And when you pray, know before Whom you stand

Brachot 28b

מְשׁוֹרֵר, (שִׁירָה)

M'shoreir (Shira)

A m'shoreir¹ is traditionally translated as a 'chorister' or a 'poet'.
The root of the word comes from "*shira*"; song.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CREATING SINGING COMMUNITIES

1) CLEAR AIMS:

- What are you really hoping to achieve?
- What do you believe is possible?
- Who else in your team is excited by these aims / this agenda?

2) THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE:

- With our words (*avoid making it seem incredibly easy or obvious*)
- With our faces, our bodies, our position in the room etc.

3) THE MUSIC WE CHOOSE:

- What melody do we choose for what occasions?
- Is the melody you want to teach accessible? If not, that's fine, but let's be realistic.
- Who will be in the congregation?
- How much support will you have? Vocally? Emotionally? From whom?

¹ More information if you're interested: The tradition of "m'shoreirim" stems from the Renaissance (often Italian) cantors, who were the first to focus on the creation of new music, letting go of the more traditional chanting style. A combination of the influence of the Protestant Church, who had introduced choral singing with instrumental accompaniment before the service, and Kabbalist Isaac Luria's 1500's move to bring more joy into Kabbalat Shabbat, led to the addition of m'shoreirim, and - ultimately - to the beginnings of the reforming of Jewish music. Traditionally, *m'shorerim* surrounded the cantor and sung harmonies to fill out the chord, or teach the community their responses.

PSALM 92: TZADDIK KATAMAR

Text: Psalm 92, v13-16 (Liturgy in Kabbalat Shabbat)

Music: Louis Lewandowski

TZADDIK KATAMAR YIFRACH
K'EREZ BAL'VANON YIS'GEH
SH'TULIM B'VEIT ADONAI
B'CHATZROT ELOHEINU YAFRICHU

צִדִּיק כִּתְמָר יִפְרָח
כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה:
שְׁתוּלִים בְּבֵית יְהוָה
בְּחִצְרוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִפְרִיחוּ:

OD Y'NUVUN B'SE'VAH
D'SHENIM V'RA'A'NANIM YIH'YU
L'HAGGID KI YASHAR ADONAI
TZURI V'LO AV'LATAH BO.

עוֹד יִנּוּבוֹן בְּשִׁיבָה
דְּשָׁנִים וְרַעֲנָנִים יִהְיוּ:
לְהַגִּיד כִּי־יָשָׁר יְהוָה
צוּרֵי וְלֹא־עוֹלָתָהּ בּוֹ:

*The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. Grow tall like a cedar in Lebanon.
Planted in the house of their Maker, they shall flourish in the courts of our God,
Bearing new fruit in old age, still full of sap and still green,
To declare that the Creator is faithful - my Rock in whom there is no wrong.*

4) THE DETAILS / CHALLENGES:

- Pre-existing Synagogue Layout
- The "B'nei Mitzvah service".
- Do your sound / ritual / council team understand your agenda?
- When we ask for volunteers, we have to mean it - i.e. what happens when one of your most enthusiastic singers is completely off-key?
- Tech / Sound / Requirements of a 'streaming' set-up?
- If you stream, what will you choose to share on the the stream?

5) STRATEGIES I HAVE FOUND HELPFUL:

- Liz Lerman: "Turn your discomfort into enquiry" / "Maintain a pleasant countenance"
- Mindfulness of new material and frequency/repetition
- 'Shira' - a monthly song learning session on a Shabbat morning.
- The set up of the room and location of the *shlichei tzibbur* (service leaders)
Where do you place additional singers? The choir?
- A "lead singers" group (you might call them *m'shor'rim*)
- Teens joining the music team (for *Kabbalat Shabbat*?)
- Choir members empowered to add harmonies they know
- Choir to hold the melody or add harmony?
- Keys / What we're listening for.
- Being in the moment and not afraid to make changes, where possible.
- Using Kavannot to help us teach new music (an example, below)

KI ESH'ME'RAH SHABBAT

Text: Att. to Abraham Ibn Ezra

Music: Dan Nichols

MMMM.... MMMM.... MMM, MMM, MMMM
MMMM, MMMM, MMMM, MMMMMMMM.

This is an exaggeration, but can you make learning new music as simple as possible & set people up for success?

KI ESH'ME'RAH SHA...BBAT EL YISH'M'REINI
OT HI L'OL'MEI AD BEINO U'VEINI

כִּי אֶשְׁמְרָה שַׁבָּת – אֵל יִשְׁמְרֵנִי
אוֹת הִיא לְעוֹלָמִי עַד בְּיָנוּ וּבְיָנֵינוּ

If I keep Shabbat, God will keep me. It is a sign forever between God and me.

WISE WORDS FROM MY TEACHERS:

“Sometimes, using your choir as the “teacher” can help create a partnership between the choir and the congregation. All too often, that relationship is perceived as an adversarial one; congregants experience the choir as too “performative,” usurping the congregational voice rather than enhancing the congregational voice.

By having the choir actually teach a new melody to the congregation, they are, in fact, asking the congregation to add their voice. A partnership is forged. It is no longer them or us. Eventually, the choir can enhance the moment by adding harmony to the congregation’s singing of the new melody, thereby creating another level of partnership. Having the role of the teacher switch from cantor to choir can also feel a bit less didactic.”

Merri Arian, “Levelling the Praying Field”, Transcontinental Music Publications 2018, p.24

“Let’s not forget: The main purpose of gathering this rag-tag (though sometimes amazing!) group of singers is to create communal musical energy - *not to create musical perfection*. So, of course, everybody is invited to participate. Our prayer service isn’t a performance, it’s a community effort, to which everybody contributes in his or her own way.”

Joey Weisenberg, “Building Singing Communities”, Machon Hadar 2011, p.5

6) JUST DO IT!

- Don’t let perfection get in your way. This is a process.
- Allow for joy and trust in your community and yourself.
- If I can help, feel free to e-mail me: cantorziacobs@frs.org.uk