

Chapter 12

The Music of Worship: Selective Return to Traditions

I will sing a new song unto thee, O God.
—Psalm 144:9

Music is a thread that flows through Beth-El's history, a filament for sensing changes in worship, ritual, and traditions.

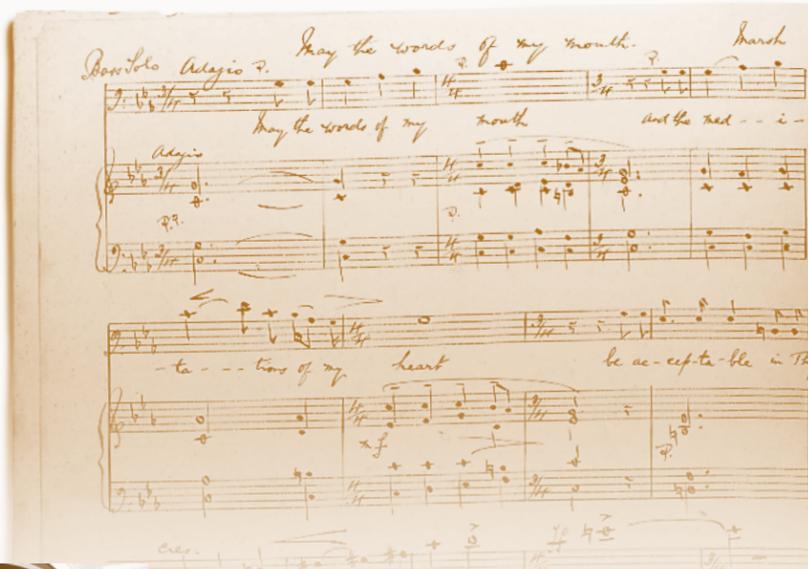
Classical Reform differed from Orthodox Judaism in its standard use of musical accompaniment. Rather than chanting prayers or *davening* with a melancholy Ashkenazic cantor, Reform Jews worshiped in a sanctuary filled with joyful choral music and organ preludes. Their music, like their theology, was geared toward melding with the American mainstream.

At Beth-El, professional choral music was part of the worship service from the beginning. In 1904, the congregation engaged four singers—yes, a quartet. The tradition of four voices harmonizing with an organ during worship services continued into the millennium, although the choir's dominance diminished.

Beth-El's first sanctuary featured a choir loft above the altar, emphasizing the centrality of musical accompaniment. Beth-El's second sanctuary, completed in 1920, not only had a prominent choir loft, but within it a wall-to-wall pipe organ, pleasing to the eye and ear. The music performed was "high church," a style that German-Jewish composers had adapted from Protestant liturgy. Complex, clas-

sical, and commanding, this was music for listening.

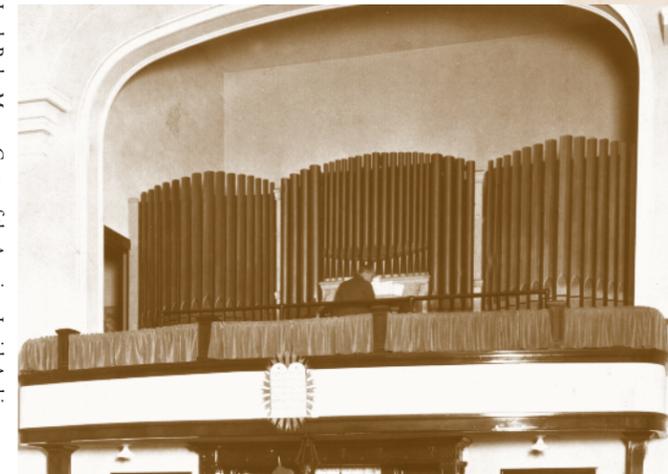
Beth-El's first music director was organist William J. Marsh, a statewide celebrity and professor of choral music at Texas Christian University. From 1908 to 1929, Marsh directed the Temple Quartette, as it was called, and continued substituting for years thereafter. The composer of several hundred works, Marsh won the contest that decided the state's official song, *Texas, Our Texas*. For the inaugural service at Beth-El's Broadway Avenue synagogue, Marsh composed a liturgical score. His handwritten sheet music, filled with minor-key chords and transliterations of the Hebrew, is on file in the Temple archives. Those original Sabbath melodies were later incorporated into a program of Jewish festival music performed by the Temple Quartette on WBAP



radio. The broadcast featured contralto Lilli Bogen Morris chanting *Kol Nidrei* and baritone Sam Losh singing, *May the Words of My Mouth*.

So popular was Marsh with the Temple Quartette that they were the only musicians invited to serenade General John J. Pershing when the World War I hero visited Fort Worth February 7,

THIS SPECTACULAR PIPE ORGAN demonstrates the role of classical liturgical music in 1920.



Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

1920. Two days before the general's visit, the choir had been the main attraction at a banquet celebrating Rabbi G. George Fox's 10th anniversary at Beth-El. The group's rendition of Verdi's quartet from *Rigoletto* received such resounding applause that the choir followed with an encore, *Ein Kelohenu*. (A later choir director remarked that *Ein Kelohenu*, a lively closing hymn adapted from a German pub song, is Number One on the all-time Jewish Hit Parade.)

Beth-El's choir members were usually not Jewish. (There were exceptions—contralto Lilli Bogen Morris and soprano Eva Potishman Brown.) Most choir members worked on Sundays singing in churches. Some of the city's best choral vocalists vied for positions at



Beth-El because they could sing for the Jewish Sabbath without giving up their church jobs. Sam Losh, the Beth-El Quartette's popular baritone, directed the Losh Institute of Music and School of Expression. Losh was a local celebrity—a former song leader for the troops at Camp Bowie and the founding conductor of the Municipal Opera Chorus. Losh succeeded Marsh as Beth-El's music director in 1929.

Choir Director More at Home than Rabbi

During the Depression years, the choir was often laid off, although the organist usually remained on the pay-

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<p>PIANO DEPT.</p> <p>Sam S. Losh, Mrs. Sam S. Losh, Mrs. Clarence R. Dehm, Miss Mary Johnston (Dunning System), Miss Roberta Dedmon, Miss Mary McGinley, Mrs. Raymond Haas, Miss Frances Hawley (Towsley System).</p>	<p>VOCAL DEPT.</p> <p>Sam S. Losh, Mrs. Roger C. Neely.</p> <p>EXPRESSION DEPT.</p> <p>Mrs. Sam S. Losh, Miss Mary McGinley, Miss Ruth Pfeiffer, Miss Musa Le Foster.</p>
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roll. The music director seemed as indis-
BARITONE SAM LOSH operated a premier music school. For more than 25 years, Losh worked with Beth-El's choir. He succeeded W. J. Marsh, who composed the score (at left) for the 1920 opening of Beth-El's Broadway Avenue synagogue.

pensable as the rabbi, sometimes, it seemed, more so. He had a longer history with the congregation. Marsh, Beth-El's original choir director, served under three rabbis: George Zepin, George Fox, and Harry Merfeld. Losh joined the choir when

Fox was the rabbi, moved up to music director during the Merfeld years, and remained into Samuel Soskin's rabbinate. The organists knew what the congregation warmed to: thunderous preludes during the 15 minutes preceding services, theatrical postludes at the close. In between might be adaptations of Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Schumann from the *Union Hymnal*. The organist enjoyed the latitude of turning worship services into liturgical music concerts punctuated by the congregation's recitation of the *Shema*, the *Kaddish*, and the ever popular *Ein Kelohenu*.

Torahs

Have a beautiful scroll of the Law prepared, copied by a talented scribe, written with fine ink and a fine quill, and wrapped in beautiful silk.

—Talmud, Shabbat 133b.

Metaphorically, the Torah is a tree of life, the scroll of God's law. Cloaked with a rich mantle of fabric and topped with silver crowns called *rimmonim*, the sacred scrolls are dressed in a style befitting royalty. Such ornate coverings and lofty metaphors show the respect with which Jews regard the Torah. Each Torah's parchment panels, sewn together and attached to carved wooden rollers, embody our heritage. The handwritten words contain lessons to guide each generation as it confronts issues of morality and mortality.

Beth-El has five Torah scrolls, three in the main sanctuary and two in the chapel. Each scroll is rolled to a different chapter and verse within the Five Books of Moses. One Torah is ready for the weekly Sabbath reading, another for upcoming holiday readings, and still others for study by bar and bat mitzvah students and the rabbi.

Each of the five Torahs comes with a story.

Two of the scrolls survived the 1946 fire that gutted Beth-El. Custodian Enoch Jackson rescued those Torahs, taking them to his home for safekeeping. Remnants of another two scrolls, found in the rubble, were respectfully buried years later at Emanuel Hebrew Rest cemetery.

After the fire, the synagogue was rebuilt. For the rededication in 1949, employees from Wolf & Klar Jewelers donated a Torah in memory of Alex Wolf, a Beth-El patriarch who died in 1947. Accompanying the scroll was a framed memorial tribute signed by Wolf's 163 employees.

Another of Beth-El's Torahs belonged to the Jews of Uhrineves, Czechoslovakia, a congregation that perished in the Holocaust. The scroll dates to 1800. Beth-El received this Torah as a permanent loan from England's Westminster Synagogue Memorial Scrolls Trust. With its emotional



TORAH SCROLLS with velvet mantles, silver shields, and silver crowns, rest inside the ark in the chapel at the Broadway Temple.

heritage, this scroll was a gift from a committee of congregants in memory of Rabbi Samuel Soskin, who died in 1970. It was among 1,564 Torahs from Moravia and Bohemia discovered after World War II in a Prague synagogue converted into a warehouse. Until 1963, the Holocaust Torahs remained stored there, deteriorating from dampness, insects, and lack of use. The State Jewish Museum of Prague in 1963 contacted a British art dealer, who arranged for London's Westminster Synagogue to acquire, catalogue, and begin repairing the scrolls. More than 1,400 have been

Below the choir loft was the *bimah* with its dark wooden lectern, ark, and a pair of seven-branched standing menorahs. The *bimah* was elevated like a theatrical stage several steps above the congregation. Worshipers looked up to the rabbi. Symbolically, he was their intermediary to God.

The sanctuary had no sound system, save for the acoustical properties of the room. And Beth-El's main sanctuary did have good acoustics. There were few soft-spoken pulpiteers in the decades before microphones were commonplace. Clergymen projected their voices. This was the era of oratory. Sermons were lengthy, 30 minutes or more. Rabbi Fox's wife, Hortense,

sat up front and signaled when it was time to come to a stop.

Rabbis, as well as ministers, were often addressed as "doctor," underscoring their broad secular knowledge. In actual fact, only two of Beth-El's rabbis, Ernest Grey and George Fox, had earned Ph.D. degrees. Fox's doctorate was from Illinois Wesleyan University, and he joked that he was the "first Methodist rabbi in captivity." Rabbi Merfeld had a law degree, but nevertheless was commonly addressed as "Doctor Merfeld."

None of the rabbis nor any of the men in the congregation wore head coverings. Yarmulkes were considered an Old World custom. "They looked down on people who wore yarmulkes," recalled Francis

distributed as memorials to Czechoslovakia's lost Jewish communities and as symbols of Jewish survival.

The Czech Torah Network, a Holocaust education project with an Internet site, publicizes the story of these scrolls and assists synagogues researching their origins. Many a congregation has tracked down its scroll's home community and sent emissaries to visit the town, worship at the synagogue site, and tend the local Jewish cemetery.

Beth-El's Holocaust Torah rests in the small sanctuary's ark. Alongside it is a 43-year-old Israeli-made Torah, donated in 1980 by Ellen and Ted Mack in memory of her father, Mark Feinknopf (1892–1980). Ellen needlepointed the mantles that cover this Torah and the adjacent Holocaust scroll. She designed the delicate Hebraic compositions from motifs in the works of Jewish artist Ben Shahn (1899–1969).

In the main sanctuary, the three Torahs are covered with mantles made of quilted blue cotton. Designed by an

Oregon weaver, they were presented to the congregation in 1991 as a gift from Edward and Lynny Sankary and Ruby Kantor.

For the High Holy Days, in concert with the purity of the Days of Awe, the congregation's Torahs are draped in fine white garments. A set of white velvet covers, accented with gold-threaded trim, were purchased in 1987 for use on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. On the back of each mantle is an inscription, sewn in gold thread. One velvet cover was dedicated to the memory of Cecile Brown. The others honor Michael Gilbert, Melissa Minker, Elise and Jack Greenman, Max Franklin Masnick, and Elin Rose Franzen.

Beth-El's Torahs have one other set of mantles. These were stitched from terry cloth by weaver Sarah Cohen for the congregation's move from Broadway to Briarhaven. On August 12, 2000, a 100-degree summer morning, Rabbi Mecklenburger reverently handed the Torahs to five members of the Temple Youth Group.

Accompanied by congregational singing, they began the seven-mile march to the new Temple. The walk drew several hundred Beth-El members, as well as well-wishers, water carriers, and news photographers. Along the route, congregants periodically passed the Torahs from one person to another, sharing the honor of holding the scroll and feeling the weight of history.



TORAH MARCHERS. Billy, Rozanne, Ben, Ashli, Roz, and Maddie Rosenthal complete the last leg of the seven-mile Torah walk. Rozanne carries the Torah in its terry cloth traveling coat.

Rosenthal Kallison, whose father and uncles were among the Temple founders. As was customary, gentlemen removed their hats indoors. Raymond Cohn rested his fedora on the windowsill (an interior feature eliminated in a later remodeling). During Sabbath services, ladies kept their hats on, wearing close-fitting caps during the Roaring Twenties and chapeaux with artificial flowers and netting during the 1940s. For Sabbath services, women also donned white gloves—cotton or kid-skin. Families sat together on wooden pews, usually in the same rows, week after week.

The Torah was rarely removed from the *aron kodesh*. When the choir sang, "*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh,*

... Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts," the rabbi opened the ark. Congregants could see the dark velvet Torah mantles and silver breastplates, but rarely saw the scrolls unrolled. Friday evening services, an innovation of the Reform movement, did not include Torah readings. Saturday services did, but Sabbath morning worship at Beth-El, if scheduled at all, was abbreviated, lasting half an hour and geared to children attending Sabbath School. Occasions when the Torah scroll was opened included the High Holy Days and *Simchat Torah*, which marks the end of one Torah-reading cycle and the beginning of the next. Sometimes, but not always, the Torah was taken out for *Shavuot*. The rabbi

read the pertinent passage from Exodus in which God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. More often, however, the Ten Commandments were recited in English by a confirmand, and the Torah remained in the ark. (Weekly Torah readings were not instituted until World War II, when interim Rabbi Eugene Lipman, appalled at the congregation's unfamiliarity with the *sefer Torah*, began opening and reading from the scroll each Friday night, a ritual that continued into the millennium.)

Festivals: What? No plagues?

Jewish holidays received different emphases in decades gone by. *Sukkot*, the harvest festival, turned into a pageant. Every child in the Religious School crowded onto the *bimah*, bringing baskets of fresh fruit offerings. Songs for the holiday included the

holiday songs in the *Union Hymnal* did not mention Haman or Pharaoh. Instead they emphasized that God “befriended” and “defended” Israel. In that vein, the first *Union Haggadah*, published in 1907, omitted harsh or cruel representations of Judaism. Its Passover seder service for the home did not mention the Ten Plagues, which wreaked havoc on Egypt by turning water into blood, healthy cattle into diseased livestock, and first-born sons into victims of God’s wrath. Reform Judaism preferred to highlight more positive aspects of the Exodus from Egypt. (The Holocaust altered such perceptions, returning Haman to Purim and the plagues to the Passover seder.)

The original *Union Haggadah* also omitted the now familiar line, “Next year in Jerusalem.” Zionism was then anathema to the American Reform movement,

although Beth-El’s early congregants were not as vehement as the Reform movement’s national leaders. Some of Beth-El’s early members—Louis Weltman, Felix Bath, and U. M. Simon—had Eastern European roots and emotional bonds with Jerusalem and the embryonic Zionist movement. Reform leaders gradually turned into Zionists. The 1937 revision of the *Union Hymnal* featured a song category labeled “Nation.” It included *Hatikvah*, which was then the Zionist anthem and later Israel’s national anthem. Its title is Hebrew for *the hope*. It is doubtful that *Hatikvah* was sung at Beth-El before Israel’s independence. Although *Hatikvah* was printed in the revised *Union Hymnal*, music director Sam Losh was apt to choose more familiar alternative selections such as *America the Beautiful*, and *God of Our Fathers*.

Sam Losh stayed at Beth-El until 1939. The

organist were heard, but not seen. They were background musicians. Nonetheless, appreciation for choral music remained strong. When the rebuilt synagogue was dedicated January 8, 1949, the choir’s soprano performed an emotional solo of *Bless This House*.

“Mixed” Marriages

Rabbi Soskin must have been aware of changes in ritual, worship, and theology emanating from the Reform movement’s headquarters in Cincinnati. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations was recommending more Hebraic content in Sabbath services and more Torah usage. Previously, religious education had emphasized Judaism’s universality, its similarity to other religious philosophies. Now the UAHC suggested



PURIM, 1954. Because Reform Judaism took the violence and vengeance out of Purim, many children dressed as cowboys and cowgirls for the holiday.



PURIM 2002 shows a return to tradition with most children dressed as Haman, Mordecai, King Ahashueros, Queen Esther, and Queen

Hymn for Tabernacles, in which the generic lyrics exclaimed: “In the bosom of the earth, the sower hid the grain, thy goodness marked its . . . birth, and sent the early rain.” On *Simchat Torah*, the last day of *Sukkot*, Consecration of first-graders was celebrated as a major life-cycle event, with class pictures snapped by a professional photographer.

Purim was the Jewish Mardi Gras, the occasion for adult masquerade balls. At costume parties, to which Gentile friends were invited, women sometimes dressed as nuns and men as cowboys. Haman, the villain of the story, was nowhere in sight. To Reform Jews living comfortably in America, the rogue Haman, who sought to annihilate the Jews, seemed a fictional exaggeration. Nor did Mordecai, the vengeful hero, afford a good role model.

American Reform Jews emphasized to their neighbors and to themselves the prophetic values found in Micah 6:8: “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” Purim and Passover



PURIM CIRCA 1910. Masquerade balls, similar to Mardi Gras and Halloween parties, were popular at the turn of the last century. Costumes had little connection with the Purim story. Above, a nun, a cop, and a devil pose for a group picture during a Purim Ball at the Hebrew Institute.

congregation was so appreciative of the music director’s continuity and conviviality that they honored him with a testimonial dinner attended by 300 admirers. Succeeding Losh was W. Allen Rubottom, an organist hired several years before. It was during Rubottom’s tenure that fire demolished the Temple’s interior along with its handsome pipe organ. That grand instrument was replaced with an upright Hammond organ underwritten with a \$1,500 contribution from beer distributor Ben E. Keith in memory of his colleague Sam Levy, Beth-El’s first president.

The smaller organ was just one way the new sanctuary differed from the old. The rest of the interior reflected subtle changes in ritual and theology. The *bimah* was lower than before, closer to the congregation’s eye level, an indication of more interaction between worshipers and clergy. The choir, still high above the *bimah*, was hidden behind an artfully constructed marble wall. The singers performed in an upstairs room, channeling their voices through an amplification system in the wall. The vocalists and

exploring traits and strengths of Jewish culture to connect congregants with fellow Jews. Rabbi Soskin, who was raised Orthodox, was comfortable with traditional Judaism, yet he did not push Beth-El toward change from the pulpit or in the Religious School. Personally, he observed the second day of holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Passover, while his congregation did not. Soskin sensed that his congregants did not want more ritual or more Hebrew, at least not at Beth-El.

Many of Fort Worth’s Jews had dual synagogue memberships. They belonged to Ahavath Sholom, the traditional congregation with its Ashkenazic flavor, and to Beth-El. One reason was “intramarriage,” meaning a Reform bride marrying an Orthodox groom. In Fort Worth, with its limited pool of young Jewish adults, such matches were inevitable. Couples often opted to affiliate with both religious institutions because they had in-laws and grandparents worshiping at each synagogue. Kenneth Baum’s family fit into that category. “My mother (Bessie Kuperman) used to joke that her parents came from a ‘mixed’ marriage,” he related. “So

we belonged to both the Temple and the Shul. I was a bar mitzvah in 1946 at Ahavath Sholom. I was confirmed at Beth-El in 1949. Ahavath Sholom had no Confirmation classes then. In my Confirmation class at Beth-El, I was the only one who could read Hebrew. I bounced back and forth."

Another family that combined traditions was the Goldman household. M. M. (Mickey) Goldman, a Polish immigrant, married Charlotte Max, who had grown up at Beth-El. When Goldman observed a *Yahrzeit* on the anniversary of a relative's death, he went to the Shul to say *Kaddish*. Beth-El had no daily minyan (but began a Sunday morning minyan when the Briarhaven Temple opened). Ahavath Sholom had always convened a morning minyan and an evening minyan, providing a worship setting for coreligionists commemorating *Yahrzeits* or observing their first year of

mourning. Ahavath Sholom had always pegged *Yahrzeits* to the Jewish calendar. Beth-El followed the secular calendar, reading the names of loved ones on the Sabbath closest to the anniversary of their deaths. Members of "blended families," who considered reciting the *Kaddish* among their highest religious duties, therefore found it comfortable to keep one foot in each tradition.

Fort Worth Jews acknowledged that Ahavath Sholom and Beth-El were vastly different. Many Beth-El congregants were not averse to traditional rituals in liturgy and music; they simply understood that one institution did things the Ashkenazic, or Eastern European way, and the other followed American Classical Reform practices. A line defined by rituals separated the two. At one place the men wore yarmulkes and prayer shawls; at the other they did not. At the Shul, couples were married under the *chuppah*; at Beth-El they were not (until 1950, when

more and more brides and grooms requested a wedding canopy). Ahavath Sholom took out the Torah on Saturday mornings and paraded it about the room, singing in Hebrew a Psalm of David. Beth-El kept the Torah on the *bimah* and did not introduce the Torah processional until the end of the 20th century. Ahavath Sholom had a traditional cantor, often a tenor, intoning Hebrew melodies and ancient chants from the Torah and *haftarah* portions. Beth-El took pride in its professional quartet. (Only in the 1990s did the Reform congregation begin to get into the habit of bringing in visiting cantors with mellow baritone or soft soprano voices and a repertoire of new and traditional melodies.)

Rabbi Soskin understood the interrelationship between the Temple and the Shul. He did not try to alter it. If Beth-El were to change and embrace too many Eastern European Jewish traditions, there would

seemingly be no choice, no "line" separating the two congregations.

Shofar Signals Return to Tradition

Rabbi Milton Rosenbaum, who served from 1949 to 1956, attempted to alter the balance. He introduced Hebrew lessons, bar mitzvah ceremonies, and, in the music department, the shofar. Each innovation gave rise to conflict. Until Rosenbaum's arrival, worship services were suspended during the summer when the rabbi went on vacation. The choir took the season off. Rosenbaum saw no reason for worship to take a holiday. He arranged for Rabbi A. J. Brachman, a local oilman and non-practicing rabbi, to host Friday night services during the July and August interlude. Brachman's wife, Sarah, helped organize a spirited volunteer choir. The experiment worked so well, it continued

Shofar

Make a joyful noise unto God.
—Psalm 100:1

The first time the congregation gathered for Rosh Hashanah services, October 1, 1902, worshipers heard the sounds of the shofar. That ram's horn was borrowed from Temple Emanu-El in Dallas and presumably blown by Rabbi Solomon Philo. The next year there were no High Holy Days services. In 1904, services convened but there is no mention in early Temple histories of how the ancient notes of *tekiah* and *teruah* were sounded.

Rabbi Harry Merfeld's receipts from the 1930s state that he annually paid a trumpet or cornet player \$10 for "services rendered" on the "New Year and Atonement Day." Congregants whose memories stretch to the early 1940s remember the year a Paschal High School student was hired to play his trombone during the High Holy Days services.

Milton Rosenbaum, Beth-El's rabbi from 1949 to 1956, insisted on returning to tradition. Brass instruments were for bands and orchestras, not the Days of Awe. The sounding of the shofar was among the changes he instituted.

Temple President Harry Teter, who had moved to Texas from Chicago in 1938, volunteered to play the ancient instrument. Although Teter had no special musical training, he produced a good sound from the ram's horn. "He was proud to be blowing it," his son, Don Teter, recalled.

One young congregant who listened to the sounds of the shofar with special interest and aspirations was Stanley Ackin, a pre-teen with the gift of music. He had taken trumpet lessons since elementary school. With longing, the youth gazed at the spiral-shaped shofar, a Yemenite ram's horn that had been presented to the congregation during the



STANLEY ACKIN took pride in the rich sound he produced from the elegant Yemenite ram's horn.

1960s by Robert and Mollye Ann Davis Kahn. The elegant, elongated ram's horn rested on a wooden stand displayed year-round in Rabbi Schur's study.

"Stanley stared at that shofar and yearned for it," said Rosalie Ackin, his mother.

Stanley Ackin had the "lip," meaning the expertise of a brass musician, to play the shofar, which has no mouthpiece. Rabbi Schur, however, said the youth could not handle the instrument until he celebrated his bar mitzvah, which was not scheduled until January 1967. In the meantime, Teter had

developed cancer. For several years, Rabbi Schur blew the instrument, turning beet red as he forced out the requisite sounds.

Finally, in September 1967, 13-year-old Stanley Ackin, wearing a suit and tie and strutting proudly, stepped up to the *bimah* and raised the spiral-shaped ram's horn to his lips. A collective gasp was heard as the young teen, whom the congregation had watched come of age, made the ancient instrument truly sing.

"He loved the challenge of not having a mouthpiece," Rosalie Ackin recalled.

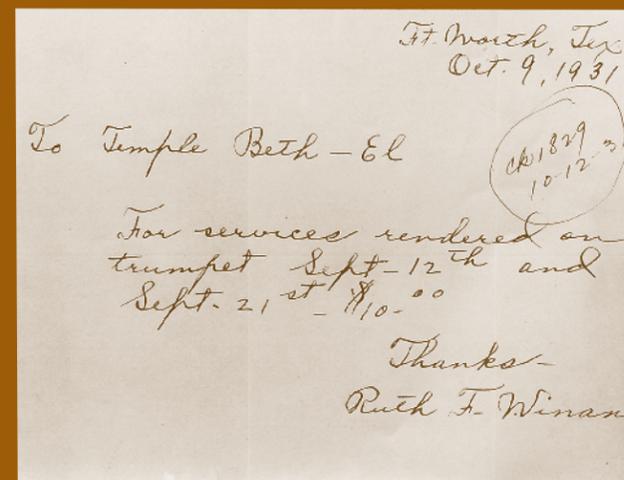
For years thereafter, the congregation looked forward to hearing Stanley Ackin sound the shofar at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. While studying for a masters degree in music at Emporia State University in Kansas, he often returned to Fort Worth for the High Holy Days, at the

congregation's expense. Each year, he seemed to play more masterfully than the season before, holding the final note, *tekiah gedolah*, until it trailed off in reverie. He was truly a *ba'al tekiah*, Hebrew for *impresario of the shofar*.

When Ackin married and settled in Kansas, Rabbi Schur returned to the task of lifting the ram's horn. In the 1980s, when Steve Ginsburg served on the ritual committee, he volunteered that he could probably sound the shofar because he, too, had the "lip" of a brass player. When invited to sound the shofar the following year, Ginsburg modestly turned down the request, suggesting that the honor be extended to other congregants. Bruce Weiner, also a former high school trumpet player, sounded the notes. The ritual committee found other brass musicians—Judy Schwartz, a French horn player, and Kim Campbell Factor, a trumpeter. Ginsburg, Weiner, Schwartz, and Factor began sharing the honors on a rotating basis.

At Rabbi Mecklenburger's suggestion, Weiner held annual shofar classes before the High Holy Days so that all congregants aspiring to play the instrument could learn. The rabbi's son, Alan Mecklenburger, sounded the shofar at children's services. The shofar classes led to group performances on Rosh Hashanah, during which shofar players stationed themselves at all corners of the sanctuary and, on cue from Weiner, played a set of notes in unison. The chorus of shofars put a new twist, indeed, on an ancient tradition.

A TRUMPET PLAYER blasted the ancient notes during the High Holy Days of 1931. She charged \$5 per service and submitted this bill for services rendered.



throughout Rosenbaum's seven years in Fort Worth. Summer services became routine. (In later years, lay leaders conducted services when the rabbi and the quartet were on summer vacation, with the congregation chanting the prayers.)

During Rabbi Rosenbaum's term, choir director Allen Rubottom retired from Beth-El. Dr. Michael Winesanker, head of TCU's music department, served on the search committee to fill the position. His first choice was Adrienne Reisner, a professor of organ at TCU. She had trained under Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Leo Sowerby, whose cantata, *The Ark of the Covenant*, was performed in 1962 at the Sisterhood's annual interfaith service.

That was the year the choir came back into view. Beth-El's physical facilities had expanded. The addition of the Danciger Education Wing turned the choir room behind the marble wall into a classroom. The choir relocated inside the sanctuary on the balcony's east side. Reisner, glad to be back in the open, performed triumphant preludes. The choir also entertained during the spring of 1965 at the congregation's annual meeting. For *Kol Nidre*, Reisner hired former Hungarian opera star Desiré Ligeti, a bass who taught on the TCU faculty. Legiti was Jewish but unaffiliated with either Fort Worth synagogue. Reisner remained at Beth-El for 19 years. She enjoyed her work so much that when her family moved in 1968 to Portland, Oregon, she found a position there as a synagogue music director.

Leonard McCormick, who became chairman of the Humanities Division at Tarrant County College's Southeast Campus, was the next musician to sit at the organ and conduct the Temple Quartette. Reisner had prepped him to play grand preludes. McCormick sensed that the congregation and its worship habits had changed. "People arriving before services would greet one another and catch up on things," he recalled. "If I played loud preludes, people talked louder. . . . Rather than fight their conversations, it was easier to play something quiet and set a mood." The "churchy tradition" was on the wane, the organist observed, adding, "Some knew the music well enough to hum along." Listening was gradually giving way to participation.

The demographics of the congregation were also changing. Many congregants were graduates of the Temple Youth movement that Rabbi Schur initiated at Beth-El in 1957. These worshipers, now young adults, had come of age singing along to the less formal accompaniment of a guitar. In the summer of 1976, the Greene Family Camp for Living Judaism, operated by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, opened in Bruceville, Texas. As more Fort Worth teen-agers attended the camp, they too became attuned to a different style of music. The songs of the youth movement were not the formal, four-part harmony of the professional choir. They were less complex, in sync with the folk

music trend of the 1960s, and later the rock beat of the 1970s.

McCormick attended Jewish music conferences and tried to keep abreast of the trend toward lighter, more contemporary liturgical sounds. "Conferences on Jewish liturgical music paralleled music trends in Christian churches," he recalled. Contemporary music was filtering into the pews.

Beth-El began blending both styles of music. The Sabbath evening service included 18 to 21 musical selections. The congregation joined in chanting perhaps six of these. Gradually, the mix became half-and-half—10 or 11 musical numbers geared to the choir, and 10 pitched to congregational singing. As more congregants joined in song, the worship committee asked the organist to play the more familiar versions of prayers such as the *Mi Chamocha* rather than new or obscure melodies, no matter how beautiful. With the congregation more apt to sing along, musical adaptations needed to be both familiar and less complex, so as to encourage chanting in unison.

Snow Birds

Accelerating the trend toward ritual and congregational song was the Sun Belt Phenomenon, the demographic movement of families from Northern states to cities below the Mason-Dixon line. As Jews from other regions moved to Fort Worth, they brought with them their different Reform traditions. Beth-El had been out of the Jewish mainstream, but mainstream people were moving in.

Northern congregations located in urban settings with large concentrations of Jewish families saw no reason to retain clear lines between Orthodox and Reform, traditional and modern. The mainstream trend was to blend styles of worship. The tendency was to add trappings of tradition, such as the *yarmulke* and *tallit*. Rabbi Mecklenburger, a guitarist and a product of the Temple Youth movement, arrived in 1984. Over his rabbinical robe he wore a *tallit*, but on his head, no *yarmulke*. His example gave tacit permission for the selective revival of traditions.

Ahavath Sholom had also changed. Men and women sat together. Most congregants drove to Shul, rather than walk. Daily *cheder* gave way to twice-a-week Hebrew School. Ahavath Sholom moved toward Conservative Judaism, a denomination that dates to 1902 and emphasizes tradition with a modicum of change.

In 1993, Leonard McCormick retired as Beth-El's music director after 25 years. He was followed by Mark Dunne, an organist who left in 1997 to work for the UAHC's music division in New York. Dunne's successor was Robert Chism, who noticed the beat-up piano in the social hall and realized it was a vintage Steinway grand. Chism asked music-lovers Roz and Manny Rosenthal to have it refurbished, and they did. He also selected the

digital organ for the third Temple. Chism resigned during the summer of 2002, leaving little time to put together a new choir for the High Holy Days. Worship Committee Chairman Leonard Schweitzer, a music aficionado, put out the word about the musical vacancies. By the High Holy Days, he had arranged the hiring of organist Brad Volk and four talented singers, two of whom performed with the Fort Worth Opera. The turnover in music directors during the 1990s may have reflected the choir's diminished role and autonomy.

The congregation was becoming more and more receptive to contemporary cantorial music. Beginning in 1991, a visiting cantor, Sharon Kohn, sang during the High Holy Days. For two years she visited once a month to lead Sabbath services with the rabbi. Student cantors, visiting cantors, and one part-time

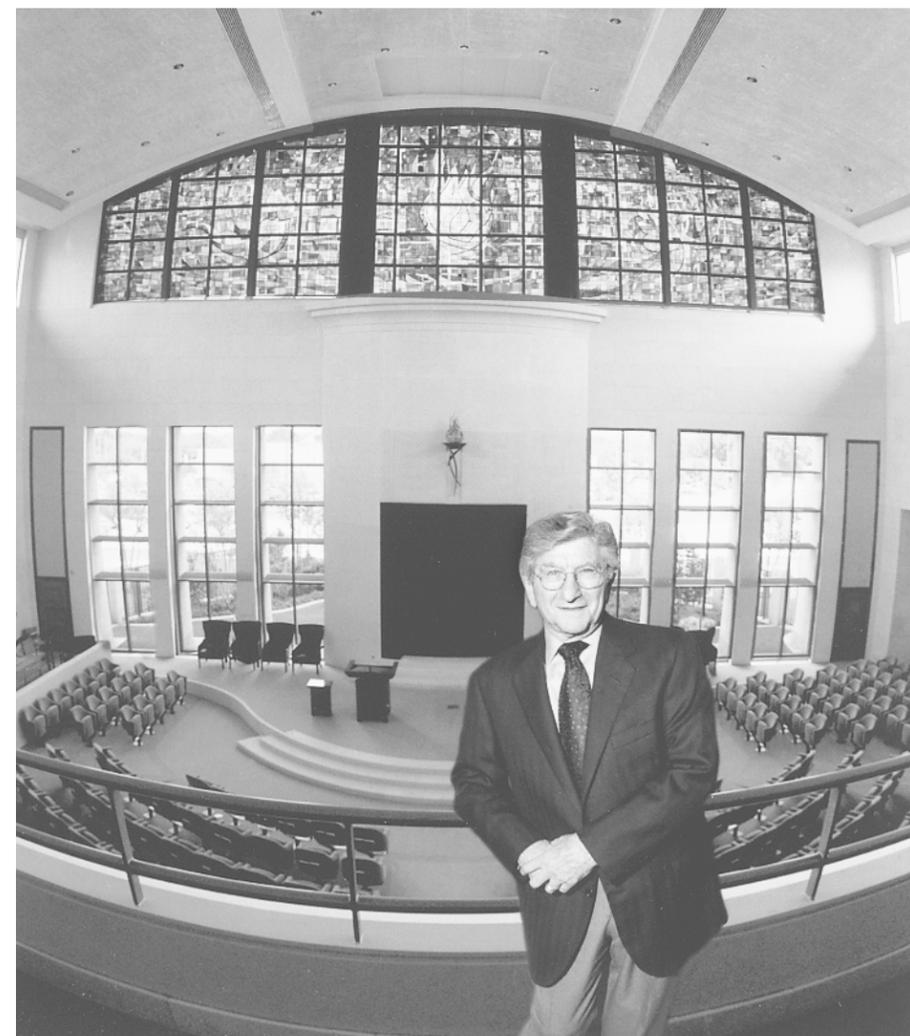
cantor, Karen Gilat, followed. Rabbi Mecklenburger, meanwhile, had instituted a monthly family service during which he strummed the guitar. When the Briarhaven Temple was built in 2000, the administrative wing included a cantor's office, with the expectation that it might some day have a full-time occupant.

By Beth-El's centennial year, there was far more congregational singing and chanting, with some worshipers swaying and bending the knee during the *Aleinu* and the *Shema*. Bar and bat mitzvah students proudly chanted from the Torah, using the silver *yad* to point at the words on the parchment scroll. Women blessing the Sabbath candles from the *bimah* often swirled their hands over the flames, drawing their fingers to their eyes. What had originated as a superstitious custom to ward off the evil eye began to feel comforting, summoning the mood of the Sabbath.

The congregation grew more attuned to music and to changes linked to past traditions. Worshipers became less reliant on organ accompaniment and better acquainted with the language of prayer. Many rituals cast off a century ago were gradually reintroduced.

"We are experimenting with tradition," Rabbi Mecklenburger observed.

Beth-El is still far from Orthodoxy. It has also traveled far from the practices of its founding families. ✪



LEONARD SCHWEITZER is Beth-El's man for all seasons. A lay rabbi, he completed a para-rabbinic course at Hebrew Union College and coordinated services during the rabbi's 2002 summer sabbatical. Schweitzer has been elected Brotherhood president, Temple president, and vice president of the UAHC Southwest Council Regional Board. He has headed committees overseeing everything from worship to historic preservation. With his camera, he documented construction of the Briarhaven Temple. A music aficionado, Schweitzer gets the credit for recruiting gifted student cantors to Beth-El. He also chants from the Torah.