



25th Richard W. Briskin
Cantor-In-Residence
Gedalia Penner-Robinson

Sunday, May 12, 2024

The Richard W. Briskin Cantor-in-Residence Award was established in 1997 in loving memory by his wife, Henra, his family, and friends. This award is presented annually to an outstanding student of the H.L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. The award recipient leads the congregants of Temple Beth El in a Shabbat weekend of song, study, and prayer. Recognition of these talented students serves to perpetuate Richard's love of cantorial music.

Richard W. Briskin ז"ל

REMEMBERENCES



Starting as a young boy, Dick trained with Hazzan Samuel Rosenbaum and learned how to lead Shabbat services. Later in his adulthood, after becoming a tax attorney as well as a husband and father, Dick returned to temple life, often davening as a lay cantor when one was needed. With the encouragement of Cantors Mark Goldman, Martha Birnbaum and Sam Rosenbaum, he enrolled in the Eastman School of Music, where he challenged himself with classical

voice training. At the same time, he began studying Hazzanut with his beloved teacher and mentor, Hazzan Rosenbaum, who later wrote, “Enriched by his love for Hazzanut and the moral and spiritual qualities it afforded, Dick found contentment, love, joy, and a justifiable sense of achievement and serenity.”

Dick died just two months short of his 54th birthday, at a time when he was dreaming more and more of enrolling in cantorial school and becoming a professional cantor. His hope was to retire early from the law and find a little shul that would allow him to be its cantor. That dream, unfortunately, was not realized. But the Richard W. Briskin Cantor-in-Residence Award was established and will, hopefully, continue to inspire other cantorial students to fulfill their dreams.

Gedalia Penner-Robinson

RECIPIENT OF THE 25th RICHARD W. BRISKIN CANTOR-IN-RESIDENCE AWARD

Originally from Queens NY, Gedalia grew up in a Modern Orthodox home full of Torah, tefillah and music. His experience with Jewish song leading goes as far as back as supporting his father, the rabbi of their shul, in harmony for kabbalat shabbat and even High Holiday services. His love for singing and harmony continued through high school and a gap year in Israel until he reached Yeshiva University (YU), where he joined Y-Studs A Cappella and his professional musical career began.

Singing and serving as the musical director for Y-Studs A Cappella opened up Gedalia's world both literally and figuratively. Gedalia travelled the world with the Y-Studs and similar groups, sharing vocal music and inspiring Jewish community. Even when performing locally in and around NYC, his eyes were opened to the vast applications of music to Jewish life and celebration. During this time he was also introduced to the vast and beautiful gamut of Jewish practice and experience, singing at countless bnei mitzvah and other events in Orthodox, Conservative and Reform settings.

Gedalia finished YU with a Bachelor's in Music and began teaching at Carmel Academy in Greenwich, CT. In his classroom, music was not as much Mozart and Beethoven as Sheet Music Twister (left foot, C sharp!); his classroom motto is “music is everywhere and everyone's”.

In 2019, Gedalia joined Hadar's Rising Song Residency in Mount Airy, Philadelphia. There, Gedalia and his six fellow residents studied under the expert tutelage of award winning Jewish musician and teacher Joey Weisenberg.

Today, Gedalia lives in Riverdale, NY with his husband, Caleb, and dog, Booker, where he is studying to become a cantor at the H. L. Miller Cantorial School of JTS. He continues to pursue music full-time, leading communities and congregations in song and tefillah; consulting with and arranging for a cappella groups; giving private prayer and bnei mitzvah lessons; and producing his own original music. He currently works at Congregation Adath Israel of Riverdale (CSAIR).



Guest Cantor

Cantor Matt Austerklein, 2011 Recipient

“My weekend as the Briskin Cantor-in-Residence was one of the most memorable of my final year as a cantorial student.” Since then Matt went on to become Cantor at Temple Beth El in Bethesda, and then shared a pulpit in Akron with his wife, Rabbi Elyssa Austerklen. We are fortunate that Matt will be returning as a monthly cantorial presence at Beth El in the year ahead, as well as for the upcoming High Holidays. Matt serves as teacher and mentor to cantorial students and is currently completing his PhD in Jewish Studies on cantorial history. Of particular interest for our congregation is that in 2022, he received the Cantors Assembly’s Samuel Rosenbaum Award for Scholarship and Creativity, one of the organization’s highest honors. Matt is the editor of three books and the author of numerous articles on Jewish music, and you can follow his weekly column on Jewish music at mattausterklein.substack.com.

Musicians

Jonathan Allentoff, Violin

Alla Kusnetsov, Piano

Sandra Halleran, Cello

Max Steiner, Percussion

Rochester Jewish Chorale

The Rochester Jewish Chorale, under the leadership of Bob Hyman, is dedicated to perpetuating Jewish culture through musical performances, musical education and community service. Founded in 1991, the RJC performs throughout the greater Rochester area, primarily at Jewish institutions and community events.



Song List

Adonai S’fatai

OPB Judith M. Berman, Arr. Merri Lovinger Arian

A Simple Song

Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and Leonard Bernstein, Music by Leonard Bernstein, from “MASS”

Matana Tova

Written by Gedalia Penner-Robinson

Dos Yiddishe Lid (“Jewish Song”)

Written by Shalom Secunda

Eilu D’vorim

Written by Jacob Rappaport, Piano Arr. Morris Barash

Akavyo

Piano Arr. J. Mandelbrod

Keter Melucha

Written by Ishay Ribo, Arr. Gedalia Penner-Robinson

Lenyen- A Tryest-Mantel (“Reading- Like a Comfy Coat”)

Written by Alan Bern

Rumania, Rumania

Written by Aaron Lebedeff, Arr. Sholom Secunda

Baruch She’amar

Written by Gedalia Penner-Robinson

Od Yishama

Written by Gedalia Penner-Robinson, Commissioned by Adas Israel

Odcha

OPB The Chevra, Arr. Gedalia Penner-Robinson

Past Briskin Award Winners

Hazzan Michelle Freedman Rubin, 1999 Recipient

Cantor and Religious School Director at the Greenwich Reform Synagogue in CT. “In addition to the great joy I have in serving my synagogue community as cantor and education/youth director, my greatest joy in life comes from my family, my husband Jeff, my twin daughters and step children.” Michelle adds, “I had the honor of meeting Cantor Martin Leubitz shortly before beginning cantorial school and hold him in great regard. It was for that reason that I was particularly honored to be the first recipient of the Richard W. Briskin Cantor-in-Residence Award.”

Rav Hazzan Ken Richmond, 2002 Recipient

Cantor at Temple Israel of Natick, MA, since 2006, Ken received his rabbinical ordination in 2021 and became Co-Senior Rabbi with Rabbi Weiss. Ken enjoys leading the congregation in participatory prayer, teaching and learning with students of all ages. Married to Rabbi Shira, they have three boys whom they’ve been raising with Yiddish as their first language. “Shira and I really enjoyed our weekend with you in Rochester, and the weekend had a big impact on us.”

Hazzan Teron Shalom Cohen, 2003 Recipient

“My cantorate has brought me to the four corners including Long Island, Berlin, Vancouver, Switzerland. In 2017 I took a break from the full-time pulpit and immigrated to Israel until August of 2023. And now I’m working as a Cantor for the holidays in Winter Park, Florida.” Teron appreciated his time in Rochester and the valuable mentorship offered by Hazzan Leubitz.

Hazzan Arianne Slack Brown, 2004 Recipient

I am Cantor of Adas Israel in Washington, DC. This is a wonderful, thriving congregation with a community of all ages and a vibrant music program. My husband (Rabbi Randy Brown) and I are the proud parents of 3 amazing boys. I have such wonderful memories of the Briskin weekend and am grateful to have had the experience.” Among her many talents, Arianne is a renowned specialist in Yiddish music, and has performed in many productions with the Folksbiene Yiddish Theater in NYC.

Hazzan Bat-Ami Moses, 2006 Recipient

“I’ve been a Cantor for 17 years now. After 5 years at my little synagogue in Manhattan, we moved to Columbus, Ohio, where my husband Rabbi Jay Moses became the VP of the Wexner Foundation, and I was lucky enough to find a pulpit at Temple Israel in Columbus. It has been a wonderful match; I’m starting my “Bat Mitzvah” year at the synagogue. Bat-Ami and her husband have two sons. “I remember that (Briskin) weekend with such fondness and fun, personally and professionally.” Bat-Ami has been a guest artist, prayer leader and scholar-in-residence at synagogues throughout the country.

Hazzan Michael Zoosman, 2007 Recipient

“After my decision to shift from the cantorial pulpit to full-time chaplaincy, my path has brought me to the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center in Bethesda, MD, where I serve full-time as a multi-faith staff Chaplain. In my personal life, my wife Molly and I were married in 2012 and have two daughters.” A former prison chaplain, Michael is a co-founder of L’chaim—Jews Against the Death Penalty. He also continues to serve as guest cantor for high holidays and Passover community seders, as well as performances in the greater DC metropolitan area. Regarding the Briskin program he added, “May you go from strength to strength in the next 25 years...and beyond!”

Hazzan Magda Fishman, 2010 Recipient

Magda is the Senior Cantor at B’nai Torah Congregation in Boca, Raton, Florida. She is married to Yair and has a young son who often sings with her during services. Born in Israel, Magda has had an extensive career as a vocalist performing in Europe, Canada, England and in the USA. After cantorial school, Magda’s career took off in all directions, performing on stages across the country including Lincoln Center, the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. As part of a group called “Divas on the Bimah” Magda performed at a recent Cantors Assembly concert. She remembers fondly her weekend at Beth El, and sends her love to the wonderful Cantor Leubitz.

Past Briskin Award Winners

Cantor Matt Austerklein, 2011 Recipient

Please see Guest Cantor bio.

Hazzan Sarah Meyerson, 2015 Recipient

Having served a variety of communities in the New York area and in Boston, Sarah currently holds a cantorial position at the Kane Street Synagogue in the heart of brownstone Brooklyn. Sarah serves as Liturgical Director, utilizing her skills as a performer, composer, musician, speaker, educator and Yiddish dance teacher. Her musical compositions are written mostly in Hebrew and in Yiddish, and she sings often with her Klezmer musician husband.

Cantor Jacob Agar, 2019 Recipient

Jacob was destined for the opera stage, and actually sang with several opera companies after college graduation. Because of his love for Judaism, Jacob realized that he could use music to uplift the Jewish people and bring them closer to Judaism by becoming a cantor. Jacob currently serves as cantor at the Temple Beth Shalom Congregation of Elkins Park, PA. He is also a composer and musical arranger.

Hazzan Daniella Risman, 2021 Recipient

Daniella was a 4th year cantorial student when she was selected to be a Briskin Cantor-in-resident. When Covid struck down all activity, the weekend program was cancelled. Daniella agreed to return the following year, in person (we thought). Instead she was the first virtual recipient of the award, performing the Sunday concert from the HL Miller School, rather than flying to Rochester. After graduating and having had her second child, Daniella accepted a position at The Emanuel Synagogue in West Hartford, CT. Her love of music has grown to include art songs, jazz, Yiddish, opera, and liturgical music, Daniella looks back fondly to her virtual cantorial weekend in Rochester.

Cantor Noah Rachels, 2022 Recipient

Noah decided to go into the cantorial world after spending years in two unrelated careers, opera and nonprofit fundraising. He excelled in cantorial school, graduating in 2023, and recently began his first full-time position in Sacramento, CA at the Mosaic Law Congregation. While in New York, Noah participated in services at Park Avenue Synagogue, Congregation Rodeph Sholom and the Reform Temple of Forest Hills. In addition, he was featured as a soloist in light opera productions. Noah is married to his wife, Amy, and together they are enjoying parenthood. His experience as a Briskin award winner was extremely meaningful, and one that he said he will not forget.

Cantor Josh Ehrlich, 2023 Recipient

Josh has always been involved with music, developing his skills as a composer, lyricist, pianist, musical arranger, music educator. His most recent achievement was composing the Choral Torah, a song cycle of fifty-four eclectic settings of biblical text, one for every Torah portion. He and his partner, Leilah Rosen, also developed the Choral Torah Collective, a choir of musical educators that performs and promotes musical and biblical literacy in communities across the country. Since graduation in 2023, Josh has served as cantor at Shaarei Tikvah in Scarsdale, NY. He plans to continue his mission “using fresh four-part harmony to reanimate our most ancient worlds and transcend religious boundaries through shared harmony.” Josh had this to say about his weekend at Beth El: “We had such a wonderful time. What a sweet community and what strong leadership. We could not have asked for more considerate hospitality and care with all of our needs. Such a memorial weekend and a true honor to receive this distinction.”

The Richard W. Briskin Cantor-in-Residence Memorial Fund was established to help underwrite the costs of this annual program. The Briskin family wishes to thank all those who have contributed to the fund since its inception. Ongoing contributions to Temple Beth El are appreciated as they ensure future Cantor-in-Residence programming.



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