

Liturgical Music for Synagogue and Concert by Cantor Shlomo Mandel

Forward By: Cantor Paul Kowarsky

President Toronto Council of Hazzanim

September 1984

The Toronto Council of Chazzanim's publication of this volume of music by my beloved mentor, Cantor Shlomo Mandel, fills me with a sense of tremendous pleasure and extreme pride, albeit with a tear of sadness for his absence. Shlomo Mandel was born in Poland in 1909, and grew up in an ultra-orthodox environment. At the age of 14, he composed his first liturgical composition. In 1933, he was appointed Cantor of the Moriah Synagogue in Warsaw. In 1938, he accepted a call to become the Cantor of the prestigious Berea Hebrew Congregation in Johannesburg, South Africa, a position he occupied until his retirement in 1974, when he went on Aliyah with his dear wife, Giza.

Cantor Mandel's fame spread rapidly, and thousands of people from South Africa and abroad flocked to the Berea Synagogue.

Cantor Israel Alter, the doyen of Chazzanim and liturgical composers, once wrote:

"Cantor Shlomo Mandel is one of the very few select Chazzanim of our present era who is a leading master of the school of prayer-interpretation based on the happy merger of Chazanut and Chassidism. Blessed by the Almighty with a rich voice of superlative quality, he has open to him the ways of two rich traditions - that of the Chazzan who works with choral compositions based on methods of systematic music, and those of the Chassid who draws from the glow of the G-d searching soul, reaching out to ethereal heights of enthusiastic "Devekut" (cleaving to G-d). This is combined with the sincerity of the true artist. At the height of his virtuosity, he is not aiming at a popular effect but "the holy fire burneth within him" with natural innocence and simplicity."

I was blessed with the singular privilege of singing and studying with Cantor Shlomo Mandel from my early childhood, when I was boy soloist in his Berea Synagogue Choir. I was mesmerized by this unique human being, to whom I owe my entire Cantorial career.

Shlomo Mandel was possessed of a magnificent "instrument-like" tenor voice that seemed to know no limit in beauty and range. His masterful singing, outstanding musicianship and artistic genius, blended with his innate Cantorial ability and inimitable talent for liturgical improvisation. Shlomo Mandel had a profound knowledge of the liturgy and "nusach," together with an in-depth understanding of, and devotion to, the prayers of our people.

Liturgical Music for Synagogue and Concert by Cantor Shlomo Mandel

The warmth, sincerity and soul-searching quality of his "davening" permeated the services in his Synagogue, creating an aura of unparalleled sanctity and inspiration. He seemed to pray with a sense of piety - preserved only for the Divine Presence. He was always completely absorbed and totally emotionally involved when he prayed. Shlomo Mandel was indeed the true "Sh'liach Tsibbur," the emissary of his people in prayer. To have the "z' chus" (honour) to pray in the Berea Synagogue with Cantor Mandel and the eminent Rabbi I. Aloy, was an unequalled worship experience. Cantor Shlomo Mandel was a true gentleman, cherished and loved by all who knew him. His untimely death in Johannesburg, erev Rosh Hashanah in 1981, was a tremendous blow to South African Jewry, and to the international Cantorial community.

Although many of Shlomo Mandel's original manuscripts were unfortunately lost, I have been able, with the help of my colleagues in Canada and abroad, to put together this outstanding collection of "Liturgical Music for Synagogue and Concert" by Cantor Shlomo Mandel. The music was beautifully transcribed from various manuscripts by Toronto composer and choir conductor, Charles Heller.

Of particular interest are "Shoshanas Ya-akov" for Purim, "Acharei' Moti" for memorial gatherings, and "Es Tsemach Dovid" and "Ha-azinu Hashomayim" for concerts. Shlomo Mandel's final composition was appropriately "Ovinu Malkeinu, Z'chor Rachamecho." Of all his compositions, perhaps the greatest is his "Ribono Shel Olam" from Yom Kippur Katan.

Without the dedication and efforts of my esteemed colleague, Cantor Eliyahu Greenblatt of Tel-Aviv, I doubt whether this project would have been completed. My heartfelt thanks to Cantor Greenblatt for collecting and transcribing much of the material used.

My sincere gratitude goes to all my colleagues of the Toronto Council of Chazzanim who assisted me in this project; particularly to Vice-President, Cantor Benjamin Z. Maissner, and to Cantor David J. Nemtzov for designing the cover.

We, of the Toronto Council of Chazzanim, proudly present this volume of music by one of the great Cantorial masters of all times.