

**Contrafact, Country Music, and Challah:  
An Analysis of the Influence of Nashville's Popular Music on  
Liturgical Music of Reform Jewish Temples in Nashville**

By

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*Thank you to my partner, Emma Lloyd, for greeting me into your culture with open arms, your endless support, and all of the wonderful Challah.*

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## ABSTRACT

Even within a city as varied in its musical history as Nashville, Tennessee, few religious congregations utilize medieval-style musical techniques, hits from Walt Disney Animation's *Frozen*, and songs from Hollywood's Golden Age, all in the same service. In this paper, I will analyze the music of the two Reform Temples in Nashville, Congregation Ohabai Sholom (also known as Temple Nashville), and Congregation Micah. I do this through interviews with Cantor Josh Goldberg from Congregation Micah and Cantor Tracy Fishbein and Rabbi Mackler from the Temple Nashville. I also analyze the use of lyrical contrafaction in the two Temples, as well as an analysis of the history of the cantors in these temples. Through these interviews and analyses of their liturgical practices, I have found a clear connection between the popular music of America and the liturgical music of the Reform congregations of Nashville.

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## I. Introduction

*“As many places in the world that have Jews, there are that many types of Jewish Music.”*

- Cantor Josh Goldberg, Congregation Micah

The southern United States is known for its religiosity, even being coined as the “Bible Belt” by journalist H. L. Menkin in 1924, and an important aspect of this religiosity is music.<sup>1</sup> Of course, a musician’s religion contributes to who they are or what music they create, and it is incredibly prevalent in the popular music of the south. Particularly in “Music City,” Nashville, Tennessee, where popular music (specifically country music) permeate the environment. Country music legends like Blake Shelton and Carrie Underwood have released songs like “God’s Country” (2019) and “Jesus Take the Wheel” (2005) respectively, songs with overtly Christian influence, that have become top-rated songs and sold millions of copies each.

While lesser known than their Christian counterparts, popular Jewish musicians who insert their Jewishness overtly into their music do exist in Nashville. Examples of these can be found at the annual Nashville Jewish Arts & Music Festival, a music and Nashville hot chicken festival hosted yearly by the Gordon Jewish Community Center.<sup>2</sup> Here, musicians and groups like Yosha, Distant Cousins, Shlomo Franklin, and others are featured as performers and speakers from all walks of Jewish life. Many of these musicians call Nashville home, but many of them do not, which helps one to understand the musical environment of Nashville. Like many

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<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, Fred R. *Yale Book of Quotations*. Yale University Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> “Nashville Jewish Arts and Music Fest.” Gordon JCC Nashville - Gordon JCC Nashville. Accessed April 3, 2023.

large American cities, Nashville has a diverse culture. There are people of all races, creeds, and ethnicities that make Nashville their home, bringing their music with them. This holds for the Jewish music of Nashville as well.

The term “Jewish” does not only describe a religious population, however. Judaism is what is referred to as an ethnoreligion, meaning that within the *ethnicity* of Jewish people, there is a religious component.<sup>3</sup> Some claim that this ethnic component has become less required to participate in the Jewish experience, especially the experience of the Reform temples in America.<sup>4</sup> Both of the two Reform Temples in Nashville have foundational beliefs that anyone is welcome to attend their services, as well as become members of their congregations. Temple Nashville states that they welcome, “...newcomers and long-time members, children and adults, individuals and couples and families, multi-racial families, gay and straight, Jews by birth and by choice, non-Jewish partners and spouses.”<sup>5</sup> Congregation Micah, while not explicitly displaying messages regarding ethnicity, was founded on the principles of equality in the faith, and they have phrases like “inclusive” and “diverse” throughout their website.<sup>6</sup> The cantor of Congregation Micah, Cantor Josh Goldberg, says of the Friday night services, “We try to make everyone feel welcome, and sometimes that means combining English and Hebrew for those that might not be as fluent.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Winter, J. Alan. “Religious Commitment, Zionism and Integration in a Jewish Community: Replication and Refinement of Levine’s Hypothesis.” *Review of Religious Research* 33, no. 1 (September 1991): 47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3511260>.

<sup>4</sup> Winter, J. Alan. “The Transformation of Community Integration among American Jewry: Religion or Ethnoreligion? A National Replication.” *Review of Religious Research* 33, no. 4 (June 1992): 349. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3511605>.

<sup>5</sup> “Membership.” The Temple, December 27, 2021. <https://templenashville.org/community/membership/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Congregation Micah.” Congregation Micah. Accessed November 18, 2023. <https://www.congregationmicah.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> Childress, William P. Interview with Cantor Josh Goldberg, cantor of Congregation Michah. Personal, February 26, 2024.

The concept of an ethnoreligion allows a more obvious comparison of the ideas of cultural exchange with other ethnicities in Nashville. There are many different kinds of cultural exchange in Nashville, even if one only considers music. There are examples of African American music including the National Museum of African American Music, the only museum of its kind in the country.<sup>8</sup> There is also Asian music in Nashville, represented by organizations like the Chinese Arts Alliance of Nashville.<sup>9</sup> Not to be forgotten, Latin American music can also be found at many venues throughout the city, like Plaza Mariachi for example, which hosts many different artists.<sup>10</sup> The NMAAM, CAA, and performers at Plaza Mariachi all bring a culture from outside Nashville, or Tennessee, that offer the residents of Nashville a series of new music that would otherwise be less attainable. The idea of cultural exchange is not new to a multicultural city like Nashville.

This cultural exchange, the religious cultural exchange rather than the ethnic, raises a question: is this cultural diffusion one-way? Is the usage of religious themes and ideas in popular music, something that is certainly proven to happen on multiple accounts, mirrored in liturgical music's use of popular music? Do musicians in liturgical settings take popular music and form it into their ideas of spreading the word of their respective religions? The answer is given in the idea of the "Worship Band," a group of, usually Christian, musicians whose mission is to spread the word of their religious ideas through their songs. This is not the goal of Jewish religious music, however. In Judaism, there is no "mission" to spread the faith as there is in Christianity,

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<sup>8</sup> "National Museum of African American Music." National Museum of African American Music | Nashville, TN. Accessed March 21, 2024. <https://www.nmaam.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> Chinese Arts Alliance of Nashville. Accessed March 21, 2024. <https://www.chineseartsalliance.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Plaza Mariachi Events." Plaza Mariachi. Accessed March 21, 2024. <https://plazamariachi.com/events/category/latin-music/>.



for example. There are also composers doing the opposite: creating true liturgical music that serves the same function as traditional melodies that are designed for a modern audience.

Within the practices of the Reform Temples of Nashville one can observe this idea reversed to get contrafaction. Contrafaction, broadly defined, is a melody with a change in lyrics.<sup>11</sup> Examples of non-religious contrafaction include a large exploration into jazz music that falls outside the scope of this study. There is a wide usage of non-liturgical melodies, as well as new compositions in popular and liturgical styles, in the liturgical music of specifically Reform congregations of Judaism in Nashville. Within this paper, I explore the uses of this music of Nashville within both of the Reform Temples in Nashville. I do this through exploring the ideas of multiculturalism, contrafaction, and interviews with both of the current cantors of Temple Nashville and Congregation Micah, as well as an additional Rabbi from Temple Nashville. Through this research, I have found that the music of the Reform Temples of Nashville utilizes this local music to connect their worshipers to the worship taking place.

## **II. History of Cantors in the Reform Jewish Temples of Nashville**

Dubbed “Music City,” Nashville, the capital of Tennessee, has a long history of being a hub of colliding and combining musical genres and artists. This music does not only include the well-known country music that calls Nashville its home. The famous Tennessean Davey Crockett was known for his fiddle playing, while the first worldwide music performance tour was completed by Fisk Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, a historically black university whose main goal was to educate those who were formally enslaved before the American Civil War.<sup>12</sup> As of 2015, the general population was around 681,000, and the Jewish population was around

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<sup>11</sup> “Contrafact.” *Oxford Music Online*, 2003.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.j543100>.

<sup>12</sup> “The Story of Music City.” Visit Nashville TN, January 16, 2024.

<https://www.visitmusiccity.com/explore-nashville/music/story-music-city#>.

11,000.<sup>13</sup> Religious music, specifically Reform Jewish music, can, and has, been influenced by the regional music of Nashville.

The first Jews in the United States arrived in September of 1654 from Brazil and brought with them the practices of the Spanish and Portuguese, or Western Sephardi, tradition.<sup>14</sup> These musical practices chanted hymns, prayers, and psalms in a free and melismatic way. This untethered aspect should not be equated to freedom, however, as there was a prohibition on celebratory music in the synagogue. This included a ban on using instruments, with an exception being made for the *shofar*. In early American practices, most temples could not acquire a rabbi to lead the congregation, so this responsibility, among many others, fell to the *hazanim* (Hebrew term for cantors) of the temple.

Eventually, Reform Jews arrived in the United States with a newer, liberal-leaning ideology that began in Seesen, Germany in 1810. As the Union for Reform Judaism states on their website,

“Reform Judaism affirms the central tenets of Judaism... while acknowledging the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices. We believe that Judaism must change and adapt to the needs of the day to survive, and we see the Torah as a living, God-inspired document that enables us to confront the challenges of our everyday lives.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Nashville-Davidson Metropolitan ...” United States Census Bureau. Accessed January 15, 2024.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/nashvilledavidsonmetropolitangovernmentbalances Tennessee/PST045222>.

Boxer, Matthew, Janet Krasner Aronson, Matthew A Brookner, and Ashley Perry. “The 2015 Nashville and Middle Tennessee Jewish Community Study.” Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, May 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Frühauf, Tina. *Experiencing Jewish Music in America: A Listener’s Companion*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> “What Is Reform Judaism?” Reform Judaism. Accessed March 31, 2024.

[https://reformjudaism.org/what-is-reform-judaism?\\_gl=1%2A1ch5xi2%2A\\_ga%2ANzM3MjczMDExLjE3MTAxMTAzNjg.%2A\\_\\_ga\\_6WX143SJW5%2AMTcxMTg5NzQ5Ni4zLjEuMTcxMTg5NzUxMS40NS4wLjA](https://reformjudaism.org/what-is-reform-judaism?_gl=1%2A1ch5xi2%2A_ga%2ANzM3MjczMDExLjE3MTAxMTAzNjg.%2A__ga_6WX143SJW5%2AMTcxMTg5NzQ5Ni4zLjEuMTcxMTg5NzUxMS40NS4wLjA).

Essentially, this means that Jewish people who belong to the Reform movement do not take the Torah and other writings as literal, but rather as stories and advice on how to live one's life. Other Jewish denominations can and do take these writings as literal, for example, members of the Orthodox sect of Judaism believe the Jewish Law, or *Halakha*, outlined in the Torah, Talmud, and other Rabbinic writings are to be taken literally even in the modern world. The Jewish Reform Movement was brought about by Napoleonic reforms instituted in the early 19th Century that freed the Jews from the ghettos.<sup>16</sup> As stated by Cantor Tracy Fishbein of The Temple Nashville, Reform Judaism took many cues from Protestant Christianity.<sup>17</sup> These congregations added major changes to the temple experience, including the organ and professional choirs. Reform Judaism made its way to America in 1841, and with it, the organ entered the American synagogue in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>18</sup> The change in adding more forms of music-making brought with it a larger appreciation for different types of music in the temple. This included the Western art music of the European lands that these Ashkenazi Jews came from.

Moving from the East Coast, in 1848, the first official group of Jewish people gathered for worship in Nashville, Tennessee to pray in a community member's home. By 1853 the group had hired a Rabbi and in 1857 had rented a space away from a community member's home to worship in. The community grew, and in 1907 the Reform congregation of Ohabai Sholom, eventually known as "The Temple," grew to be the largest in Nashville. After World War II, Nashville's Jewish population grew, giving Ohabai Sholom over 1,000 members. While this was

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<sup>16</sup> Englander, Lawrence A. "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead." Reform Judaism. Accessed January 11, 2024.

<https://www.reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/what-reform-judaism/history-reform-judaism-and-look-ahead-search-belonging>.

<sup>17</sup> Childress, William P. Interview with Cantor Tracy Fishbein, cantor of Temple Nashville. Personal, March 7, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> "Reform Judaism." Encyclopædia Britannica, March 15, 2024.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Reform-Judaism>.

a tiny fraction of Nashville's population, it was the majority of Nashville's Jewish population at the time.<sup>19</sup>

The multicultural aspects of Nashville include the cantors of the Reform temples in Nashville. The majority of the cantors in Nashville's Reform history have been from outside the city. "The first cantor in Nashville in 127 years," meaning the first and only cantor in Nashville's Jewish history, was Cantor Sheila Cline.<sup>20</sup> One of the first two female cantors in the United States, she was a native of New Hampshire. She attended Brandeis University and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion before coming to Nashville in 1978 to become a cantor at the Temple Nashville. In the early 1980s, Cantor Peter Halpern took the reins of the Temple Nashville. He was a native of Brooklyn, New York, and had attended the Eastman School of Music where he received a degree in vocal performance. After his stint at the Temple Nashville, Cantor Halpern traveled back to New York to begin studying at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in the summer of 1983. Cantor Bernie Gutcheon took over in July of 1983 after Cantor Halpern's departure. Cantor Halpern also attended the New York Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Cantor Halpern is now Cantor Emeritus of the Temple Nashville, having served as Cantor from 1983 to 2003.<sup>21</sup>

The Temple is not the only Reform congregation that has called Nashville its home, however. In 1992, Congregation Micah split off from the Temple due to the Temple's Rabbi, Stephen Fuchs, refusing to perform interfaith weddings. This stance has since changed, but Congregation Micah remains to this day. From 1994 to 1998, Micah hosted the musician Dan

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<sup>19</sup> "ISJL - Tennessee Nashville Congregations Encyclopedia." Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Accessed November 26, 2023.

<https://www.isjl.org/tennessee-nashville-congregations-encyclopedia.html>.

<sup>20</sup> "Sheila Cline Obituary - Brookline, MA." Dignity Memorial. Accessed January 13, 2024.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/brookline-ma/sheila-cline-9887224>.

<sup>21</sup> "Clergy & Staff." The Temple, February 10, 2023.

<https://templenashville.org/about/clergy-staff/>.

Nichols.<sup>22</sup> Cantor Nichols's sound can be summarized by the statement "religious Jewish music for the MTV generation."<sup>23</sup> This can be exemplified by Cantor Nichols's creation of the Jewish rock band Eighteen which was aimed at reaching the Jewish youth with whom he came into contact.<sup>24</sup> Cantor Nichols has spent his time since serving as a cantor touring Jewish summer camps across the country and making music as well.

In 1998, however, Cantor Nichols left to be, in the words of a future Cantorial Soloist of Congregation Micah, Cantorial Soloist Lisa Silver, "a touring Jewish rock star" so Cantor Daniel Leanse filled his spot.<sup>25</sup> Cantor Leanse served a short three years as Micah's cantor, moving to California to serve with Kehillat Israel in Los Angeles.<sup>26</sup>

Congregation Micah then became home to one of the most prominent Jewish artists in Nashville, Lisa Silver. Detroit native Lisa Silver served as the Cantorial Soloist at Congregation Micah from 2002 to 2022 and is currently writing and releasing music. Her first musical love was the violin, which she followed to the University of Michigan School of Music where she began to play the fiddle. She then followed the fiddling sound to Nashville in 1972. Later, she worked with the children's choir at Micah where she became their cantorial soloist.<sup>27</sup> Silver has been writing and recording music for decades, having recorded with Garth Brooks, Dolly Parton,

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<sup>22</sup> "Dan Nichols - Raleigh, North Carolina, United States." LinkedIn. Accessed January 15, 2024. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dan-nichols-04760294>.

<sup>23</sup> Daniels, Cynthia. "Teenagers Get Down With Jewish Rock." *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Nichols, Dan. "About." Dan Nichols & Eighteen. Accessed January 16, 2024. <https://www.dannicholsmusic.com/about>.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, Claudia. "...And a Cantorial Soloist." Lisa Silver Songs, June 24, 2022. <https://lisasilversong.com/how-i-became-a-cantorial-soloist/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Who We Are." Who We Are - Kehillat Israel. Accessed January 16, 2024. <https://www.ourki.org/who-we-are/#staff>.

<sup>27</sup> Dab, Barbara. "Lisa Silver Retires as Cantorial Soloist at Congregation Micah." Lisa Silver Retires as Cantorial Soloist at Congregation Micah - The Jewish Observer, May 2, 2022. <https://www.jewishobservernashville.org/article/2022/05/lisa-silver-retires-as-cantorial-soloist-at-congregation-micah>.

Vince Gill, Reba McEntire, and Willie Nelson, and enjoying a successful career writing and singing children's music. Silver also has enjoyed quite a successful singing career in Nashville's studios. Of a 2007 CD titled *Mosaic*, Silver says,

“The Nashville connection unlocks tremendous talent in the studio production and with the talent of the musicians. Lisa, however, returns to her love of incorporating children's voices in the music. This l'dor v dor [from generation to generation] has made these versions of the liturgy a routine part of Congregation Micah's services.”<sup>28</sup>

The “Nashville Connection” that Silver mentions is the thread that weaves together this tapestry of music and community within Jewish Nashville. This thread extends beyond the bonds of the synagogue and through Nashville's well-known country music scene. People like the Jewish artist Victoria Shaw, songwriter to Garth Brooks and singer-songwriter in her own right, have been making waves in Nashville's music scene for decades.<sup>29</sup> Shaw in particular has written or co-written music for Garth Brooks, Olivia Newton-John, and Earl Rose, among many others.

Returning to the current setting of Jewish liturgical music in the Reform temples of Nashville, the current cantor of the Temple Nashville is Cantor Tracy Fishbein, who joined the clergy of the Temple Nashville in February 2012. Cantor Fishbein is a native of St. Louis, Missouri, and graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a degree in vocal music education. She, like many of her predecessors, attended the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.<sup>30</sup>

Another member of the Cantoral Staff, Ayla Schwartz, is a new addition to the Temple. She began her internship in May of 2023 before beginning her senior year at Belmont University,

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<sup>28</sup> Johnson, Claudia. “Mosaic: Pieces of Jewish Music in New Settings.” Lisa Silver Songs, April 11, 2022. <https://lisasilversong.com/mosaic/>.

<sup>29</sup> Harris, Stacy. “Kosher Country: Success and Survival on Nashville's Music Row.” *Southern Jewish History: Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1999): 111–28.

<sup>30</sup> “Clergy & Staff.” The Temple, February 10, 2023.

a private Christian university in Nashville.<sup>31</sup> Her duties at the Temple include some of those that are usually given to full-fledged cantors; helping with Sunday school and learning how to teach Torah and Hebrew to both young people approaching bar and bat mitzvahs and members of the congregation. She is the Temple's first cantorial intern. This partnership with Belmont is not something unique to Cantorial Intern Schwartz, however. In 2022, Cantor Fishbein partnered with Belmont's music department, specifically Assistant Professor Jane Warren, who also assists in a community member capacity at the Temple, to have an entire concert of Jewish music. Professor Warren said of the concert that it was,

“A chronological and topical retrospective of Jewish music and [began] with the 16th Century Italian Jewish violinist and composer Salamone Rossi, and progress[ed] through to current popular music from Hollywood and Broadway. The program includes prayers used in services, such as Mah Tov, Oseh Shalom, and Avinu Malkeinu, as well as selections from the film *Schindler's List*, and music from Stephen Sondheim, Oscar Hammerstein, and Irving Berlin.”<sup>32</sup>

This concert is one of many ways that the Temple Nashville is reaching out to the Nashville community outside of its temple's doors, one more of which will be discussed later. This motion for partnership follows a recent trend of Belmont University, as they have recently made a move to hire Jewish faculty.<sup>33</sup> The move comes, as Sara Weissman states, while Belmont has a

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<sup>31</sup> Zoe Bell, “The Temple Introduces First Cantorial Intern: Aspiring Cantor Ayla Schwartz”, Nashville Observer, August 3, 2023,

<https://www.jewishobservernashville.org/news/the-temple-introduces-first-cantorial-intern-aspiring-cantor-ayla-schwartz>.

Note, the above article has since been removed from the *Jewish Observer's* website, but it is still available on internet archive services like the “Wayback Machine.”

<sup>32</sup> Dab, Barbara. “Cantor Tracy Fishbein to Perform Jewish Music in Concert.” Cantor Tracy Fishbein to Perform Jewish Music in Concert. The Nashville Observer, March 31, 2022.

<https://www.jewishobservernashville.org/article/2022/03/cantor-tracy-fishbein-to-perform-jewish-music-in-concert>.

<sup>33</sup> Weissman, Sara. “Belmont Plans to Hire Jewish Faculty for the First Time.” Inside Higher Ed | Higher Education News, Events and Jobs. Accessed April 8, 2024.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/01/13/belmont-plans-hire-jewish-faculty-first-time#:~:text=Belmont%20University%2C%20which%20solely%20employed,far%20or%20not%20far%20enough.&text=Belmont%20University%20students%20attend%20chapel>.

discrimination article in their bylaws, allowing the university to discriminate against someone in hiring practices due to religion.

The current cantor of Congregation Micah is Cantor Josh Goldberg, who has held the mantle since 2022. He is a native of Dallas, Texas, and studied popular music performance at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music before coming to Nashville to make music and to serve as Congregation Micah's cantor and musical director. Cantor Goldberg, like his predecessor Cantorial Soloist Silver, is an accomplished musician with many published albums that heavily feature Jewish themes that go back to 2010.<sup>34</sup> Currently, along with duties that he completes at Micah, he is producing *Morning: A Visual Album*.<sup>35</sup>

### III. Context and Current Standard Practices Within the Reform Temples of Nashville

The current "standard" within Reform synagogues is an extremely difficult idea to quantify, according to Cantor Fishbein.<sup>36</sup> In an interview, Cantor Fishbein stated that "so much is based on the cultures, customs, and traditions of that congregation," meaning that each congregation has its own unique sound. While standards are hard to set in Reform congregations, standard practices at a Reform service in Nashville can be summarized with this excerpt provided by The Temple Nashville:

"[The evening] service opens with songs and special readings to welcome *Shabbat*. The Rabbis and Cantor lead the congregation in prayers praising God on the themes of creation, revelation, and redemption.

The congregation then rises for the *Amidah*, the central prayer of Jewish worship. On the Sabbath, it contains seven basic themes: 1) Heritage, 2) God's Powers, 3) God's Holiness, 4) Holiness of the Sabbath Day, 5) Responsibility of Worship, 6) Thanksgiving, and 7) Peace.

<sup>34</sup> Goldberg, Josh. "Discography." Josh Goldberg, September 24, 2022. <https://joshgoldbergmusic.com/music/>.

<sup>35</sup> Goldberg, Josh. "Morning, A Journey: A Visual Album [Official Trailer]." YouTube, May 2, 2023. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0vJ\\_decB4I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0vJ_decB4I).

<sup>36</sup>



At the close of the service, the Rabbi recites the names of the Temple members and relatives of members who died at this period in years past, as well as those who passed away this week. The congregation then rises for the *Kaddish* prayer, which is connected with mourning, but contains no reference to death. Instead, it praises God and in doing so, the congregation gives thanks for the gift of life. The service concludes with a closing song and benediction.<sup>37</sup>

These “songs and special readings to welcome *Shabbat*” include the *Kiddush*, a candlelight blessing at the beginning of the temple service after lighting candles. The text of the *Kiddush* as given in the text that Temple Nashville uses: *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*, both in a Hebrew transliteration on the left and English on the right, is provided below.<sup>38</sup>

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech  
haolam  
Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'zivanu l'hadlik  
ner shel Shabbat*

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Sovereign  
of time and space.  
You hallow us with Your *mitzvot* and  
command us to kindle the lights of *Shabbat*.

*Mitzvot* here means commandment.<sup>39</sup> In this case, referring to the Fourth Commandment as stated in Exodus 20:8-11, to take the Sabbath as a holy day.<sup>40</sup> Cantor Tracy Fishbein of the Temple Nashville says that the reason to have music at all during service is to connect with the prayer. She views music as her way to speak to Adonai (the Hebrew name for God) and a way to connect with the congregation as well. Her advice is to “Make the music about the prayer, not the prayer about the music,” which summarizes the usage of music in these temples.

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<sup>37</sup> Temple Nashville. *Interfaith Unity Build Shabat Service with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Nashville*. Nashville, TN: Temple Nashville, 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Frishman, Elyse D. *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur: Services for Shabbat*. New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> “Jewish Concepts.” *Mitzvot*. Accessed April 3, 2024.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/mitzvot>.

<sup>40</sup> *The Torah: The five books of moses*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000.

A relatively common criticism of Reform Jewish music is that it is not Jewish enough, with some critics even saying that the music is “even anti-liturgical.”<sup>41</sup> As Cantor Fishbein states in an interview, this is because many Reform Jewish liturgical compositions, especially early on, took after the model put forth by the German Protestant chorales.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Reform Judaism itself was founded by German Jews who wanted to move away from the standard, German-style musical practices that they had inherited from their ancestors. According to Cantor Fishbein, in general, during the 1940s to 1980s, the music of American Reform Judaism was extremely performative. It was meant to create an “ethereal” feeling for those who sat in the congregation, and in order to achieve this, the congregation refrained from participating. This was, according to Rabbi Mackler of Temple Nashville in an interview, a turning point for the congregation in a place that matters to every congregation of any religion: the children.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a rise in Jewish summer camps in the South, meaning that more children came home singing Jewish songs.<sup>44</sup> The Rabbis of the time had the idea to bring these songs into the temple, and re-engage the children and their families in worship. This is when the only Reform temple of Nashville of the time, Temple Nashville, came under fire. There were many members of the congregation who were opposed to these new, liberal changes that were taking place in the temple. As a result, the Temple created a new kind of *Shabbat* service, the “Blue Jean *Shabbat*.” These special *Shabbats* are more casual *Shabbats* where

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<sup>41</sup> Binder, Abraham Wolf. *Studies in Jewish music: Collected writings of A.W. Binder*. 81. Edited by Irene Heskes. New York, NY: Bloch Pub. Co., 1971.

<sup>42</sup> Weisser, Albert. *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music: Events and Figures Eastern Europe and America*. 137. New York: Da Capo Press, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> While Rabbi Mackler is not herself a performer of music, she does like to play Jewish music on her guitar and uses it to teach the children of the Temple.

<sup>44</sup> Childress, William P. Interview With Rabbi Mackler of Temple Nashville. Personal, February 27, 2024.

congregants are encouraged to attend the service as they come, rather than in formal dress, and are events that still happen today.

These Blue Jean *Shabbats* also brought a new kind of music to the temples as well: Rock and Roll. Drum sets and guitars filled the temple, understandably angering the more conservative members of the congregation, but they remained confined to the Blue Jean *Shabbats* at first. In this new environment, many people were happy with the new sound. After 2012, the Temple hosted a band that performed at the Blue Jean *Shabbats* as a regular event. Unfortunately, in an email Cantor Fishbein stated that she has not been able to schedule this band consistently after the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>45</sup> Cantor Josh Goldberg of Congregation Micah states his opinion regarding the development of Reform music in his interview, “Christian music is ten years behind pop, Jewish music is ten years behind Christian, and Southern music is ten years behind that.”<sup>46</sup> While this is only one of many opinions regarding the development of popular and liturgical music, it does reflect the general want within congregants for new music. This discrepancy in the change of music left more liberal congregation members clamoring for the newer sounds that surrounded them outside of the temple. Growing excitement over the new musical elements led congregation members to volunteer with the band and lend their musical talents to the musical elements of the Temple. This led to more innovative sounds that would go on to slowly influence the music of the temple until the addition of Cantor Tracy Fishbein in 2012. Cantor Tracy Fishbein’s ideas changed the Temple through connection with the congregation. One way that she innovated the Temple was the founding of the Mazeltones, a youth singing group that is meant to get youth excited about the idea of Judaism, as well as to have fun. The name being a portmanteau of the Hebrew words *mazal tov*, meaning

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<sup>45</sup> Fishbein, Tracy. Letter to William P Childress. *Additional Questions*, April 2, 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Childress. Interview with Cantor Josh Goldberg, February 26, 2024.

congratulations, and tone. She also has changed the sound of the congregation in a more modern way, even with the addition of popular music to the liturgical rotation, as will be discussed later.

Before Cantor Fishbein's addition, however, as stated previously, Congregation Micah was created in 1992. Congregation Micah brought on Cantoral Soloist Lisa Silver, whose music changed the sound of the congregation completely. Silver brought her own sound to the temple, one that pulled from the ideas of childhood set before her in the temples with the children who attended the Jewish summer camps of the nation. For example, the album *Kabbalat K'tan Shabbat: Welcoming Shabbat with Music* is designed to "capture the essence of the liturgy in an engaging and memorable way..." for children.<sup>47</sup> With four other children's albums, *Kabbalat K'tan Shabbat: Welcoming Shabbat with Music*, *My Forever Family*, *Sleepy Time Songs*, *My Very Very Busy Day*, and *Got Blues* listed on her website, along with five albums of Jewish music (including *Kabbalat K'tan Shabbat* and *Got Blues*), *Mosaic*, *Mosaic 2*, the aforementioned *Kabbalat* and *Got Blues*, and *Best-Loved Jewish Songs*, Silver has left her mark on the music scene of Nashville through her service as a Cantorial Soloist with Congregation Micah. This is something that Cantor Goldberg has had to adapt to and adopt after joining the clergy of Congregation Micah in 2022. In an interview, Cantor Goldberg states that he still uses some of Silver's melodies in the services that he runs, as well as composing his own. Cantor Goldberg has brought his own compositional style to the music of Micah, including the use of acoustic guitar, occasional piano, a full band, themed services, and even backup singers. Cantor Goldberg adds this style, which just so happens to be the local music of Nashville, to his services, and says that he is also inspired by the community of the city around him.

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson, Claudia. "Kabbalat K'tan Shabbat: Welcoming Shabbat with Music." Lisa Silver Songs, May 6, 2022. <https://lissilversong.com/kabbalat-ktan-shabbat/>.

One interfaith worship center in Nashville in particular inspired Cantor Goldberg with the constant use of a full band and large amounts of music technology, which Cantor Goldberg says is the eventual goal of Congregation Micah. At present, Micah does use a more high-tech form of worship than Temple Nashville, displaying lyrics and information on screens that adorn the sanctuary of the temple. Something that Cantor Goldberg mentions as well in his interview is the Nashville Number System. This system is a commonly used way of notating chords based on the scale degree that it is on in the key. For example, a C Major chord in the key of C would be notated as “1.”<sup>48</sup> This system was cultivated and is mainly utilized in Nashville, and is extremely common in studios.<sup>49</sup> While this was not an adjustment that needed to be made for the congregation, it had to be made for Cantor Goldberg, as he is a Los Angeles native.

Cantor Goldberg also mentions the influence of the wider world of Reform Judaism, citing his participation in the Union for Reform Judaism, of which both Congregation Micah and Temple Nashville are members. The Union for Reform Judaism hosts events that Cantor Goldberg uses to grow the repertoire for Micah like the Song Leader Boot Camp and song-swapping workshops.<sup>50</sup> The Song Leader Boot Camp in particular is a national convention held every February that offers opportunities for religious leaders to broaden their horizons through training with “nationally renowned” cantors, Rabbis, and other religious professionals. The “Boot Camp” is organized into “tracks,” Worship Leader, Jewish Educator, Early Childhood, Day School, or Songleader tracks specifically, that put leaders into their preferred path of learning.

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<sup>48</sup> Martin, Dave. “The Nashville Number System Demystified.” inSync, October 10, 2022. <https://www.sweetwater.com/insync/the-nashville-number-system-demystified/>.

<sup>49</sup> Blackmon, Odie. *Music Theory and the Nashville Number System for Songwriters & Performers*, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> “Jewish Leadership Training.” Songleader Boot Camp. Accessed March 21, 2024. [https://www.songleaderbootcamp.com/#:~:text=Songleader%20Boot%20Camp%20\(SLBC\)%20provides.and%20veteran%20and%20new%20songleaders.](https://www.songleaderbootcamp.com/#:~:text=Songleader%20Boot%20Camp%20(SLBC)%20provides.and%20veteran%20and%20new%20songleaders.)

While most songs used on a normal Friday night at Congregation Micah are standards in Reform Judaism at this point, they are usually also from the past fifty to sixty years in an attempt to “...balance tradition with innovation.”<sup>51</sup> These songs are also usually participatory, as Congregation Micah loves to participate in their worship, according to the same interview. Overall, Micah’s sound on a normal Friday night was summarized by Cantor Goldberg with a quote from Cesar A. Cruz, that music should “comfort the disturbed and disturb the comforted,” and that the goal of his cantoral pursuits is exactly that. He says that he “never lets anyone get too comfortable.”

Contrary to the criticism levied against it, others claim that “the finest contribution to American synagogal song in [the twentieth century]... has been accomplished by the Reform movement.”<sup>52</sup> Debbie Friedman, a composer that the Temple Nashville programs quite frequently during their services, made a number of these contributions. Debbie Friedman, (1951-2011), was an American Jewish singer/songwriter who, in the words of Rabbi Eric Yoffie, “...reminded [Jews] how to sing... What happens in the synagogues of Reform Judaism today - the voices of song - are in large measure due to the insight, brilliance and influence of Debbie Friedman.”<sup>53</sup> According to Cantor Fishbein’s interview, she applied to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's School of Sacred Music in New York as a young woman to further her cantoral pursuits and was denied. The college is now named the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. Her compositions are regularly featured in the services of the Temple Nashville, especially the worship song, *Mi Shebeirach*, loosely translated to “May he who blessed [our

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<sup>51</sup> Childress. Interview with Cantor Josh Goldberg, February 26, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Albert Weisser, *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music* (1954; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, Incorporated, 1983), 133–61.

<sup>53</sup> reformjudaism.org. “Debbie Friedman | Reform Judaism.” Accessed March 10, 2024. <https://reformjudaism.org/debbie-friedman>.

fathers],” with melody by Friedman.<sup>54</sup> This is a prayer for healing that is sung at all regular *Shabbat* services of Temple Nashville. The Hebrew text to this song dates to the tenth or eleventh century and is a wonderful example of the practice of setting sacred Hebrew text to modern music.<sup>55</sup> The melody and harmony of this version are not from the tenth or eleventh century, however, this version was released by Friedman in 1989.

Debbie Friedman is not the only artist whose music Temple Nashville has utilized, however. Nashville is a diverse city with music and musical ideas that change and evolve constantly. One of these artists that Temple Nashville has brought in in the past year, in this case for their Hanukkah Service on December 8th, 2023, is Rabbi Noam Katz.<sup>56</sup> Rabbi Katz is a Canadian singer and songwriter of Jewish music that is unique in its heavy use of African drumming and drum patterns due to Rabbi Katz’s 2003 visit to the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda.<sup>57</sup> For example, in his 2005 setting of “Am Yisrael Chai” utilizes the Luganda dialect, a native dialect of Uganda that adds vowel sounds to words that end in a consonant, something that influences the pronunciation of Hebrew. This is reflected in the melody reading, “Ameh Yisraeleh chai,” as opposed to omitting the “eh,” as is traditionally done.<sup>58</sup> Another example of this polystylistic music is Rabbi Katz’s third album, *A Drum in Hand*, which “blends Jewish prayers with the live energy of a drum circle.”<sup>59</sup> This is a unique scenario because the Temple routinely programs Katz’s music for their normal Friday services, especially the song *Roll Into*

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<sup>54</sup> Temple Nashville. *Shabbat Service Pamphlets*. Nashville, TN: Temple Nashville, 2023-2024.

<sup>55</sup> Eisenberg, Ronald L. *The JPS Guide to Jewish traditions*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004. 461.

<sup>56</sup> “Congregations December 2023.” Congregations December 2023 - The Jewish Observer, December 20, 2023.

<https://www.jewishobservernashville.org/article/2023/12/congregations-december-2023>.

<sup>57</sup> Bio | Noam Katz. Accessed March 18, 2024. <http://www.noamkatz.com/bio/>.

<sup>58</sup> Noam Katz. *Am Yisraeil Chai*. YouTube. Transcontinental Music. Accessed April 8, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrFB53WpPF8>.

<sup>59</sup> Bio | Noam Katz. Accessed March 18, 2024

*Dark*, which is sung quite often at services. This, of course, rings true with the ideas of multiculturalism that have been discussed throughout the paper.

#### IV. Extraordinary Practices Within the Reform Temples of Nashville

The COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020 undeniably altered the landscape of all music, not only the Jewish music of Nashville. Among these alterations was the virtualization of worship in temples. For example, Temple Nashville's Cantor Fishbein participated in the American Conference of Cantor's virtual "Come Together in Song" series on May 1st, 2020.<sup>60</sup> This was a nightly virtual series of worship songs put on by the ACC during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In line with the pandemic, but preceding it, the Temple Nashville broadcasts its major life events, concerts, lectures, and weekly services on its website. These include events like the "Songwriter's *Shabbat*" on July 21st, 2023. The Songwriter's *Shabbat* was an event that featured the music of many of the Temple's congregation. These included most performers on guitar and voice who, in the words of Cantor Tracy Fishbein, care about having good lyrics in their music. At first, the songwriting in the Temple Nashville did not have its own service. It began with songwriters coming to the clergy, who then prepared and sang them in lieu of the songwriters themselves. Later, in the words of Rabbi Mackler, "[The Temple's clergy and congregation] are in Nashville, let's celebrate who we are!"<sup>61</sup> This event is ongoing, usually occurring in the summer of the given year.

Looking to the extraordinary days that are built into the Jewish calendar, the holidays and the High Holy Days are very important and special days in the Jewish faith and ethnicity. During these holidays, both Temple Nashville and Congregation Micah have practices that skew more conservative, and liberal at the same time. For example, According to Cantor Fishbein, there is a

<sup>60</sup> *Come Together in Song and Welcome Shabbat*. Facebook. American Conference of Cantors, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=271212303918537>.

<sup>61</sup> Childress. Interview With Rabbi Mackler. February 27, 2024.



great effort made to preserve the idea of the organ and choir, even if they are not technically used for the service, while Cantor Goldberg's programming choices might go back to the 1800s. Both of these, of course, skew conservatively when looking at musical style. But there is a curious phenomenon that also happens during these services: contrafaction.

While one type of contrafaction is used in jazz and medieval and Renaissance music, the type of contrafaction that is used in the context of this paper is the process of taking an existing melody and adding new words to it. For example, taking the melody of *Ah vous dirai-je, Maman* and adding the lyrics "twinkle, twinkle, little star..." to it. Lyrical contrafactum is a relic of the medieval era of music. Seemingly beginning with contrafaction of sacred melodies with secular texts, this practice began with parody. For example, there is a drinking song from the sixth century that uses the first line of a hymn, *Iam lucis orto sidere* as the introduction.<sup>62</sup> The first three lines of the text are reproduced below in Latin and an English translation. The top stanza is the original hymn, while the right is the parody drinking song.

Iam lucis orto sidere  
Deum precamur supplices  
ut in diurnis actibus

Now at the dawning of the day  
To God as suppliants we pray  
That from our daily round he may

Iam lucis orto sidere  
statim oportet bibere;  
Bibamus nunc egregie

Now at the dawning of the day  
We must start drinking straight away;  
Let's drink now till the drink's all gone<sup>63</sup>

Of course, there is humor in this parody as well, as the hymn tune has text relating to the restraining of oneself from excess in eating and drinking.

Becoming more common later in the Medieval era, the opposite form of contrafact began: secular melodies with sacred text added to them. While occurring later than the late Medieval

<sup>62</sup> Millett, Bella. What is a Contrafactum?, September 9, 2014.

<http://wpwt.soton.ac.uk/notes/contraf.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> Gaselee, S. *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

era, the popular English folk song “Greensleeves,” composed around 1580, was contrafacted in this way to create the religious song and Christmas carol “What Child is This?” written in 1871.<sup>64</sup> This use of contrafaction is more accurate to what the Reform Temples of Nashville have used in their services. While this is not as inherently amusing to us in the present day, and may very well have not been to those of the time when “What Child is This?” was contrafacted, there is inherent humor in some of the popular music that is chosen by the Reform Temples of Nashville to contrafact for their services, specifically in the idea that songs like “Barbie Girl,” with the lyrics of “undress me everywhere” are not commonly seen in a religious setting.

Lyrical contrafaction is often done in the world of Jewish liturgical music. To quote Cantor Fishbein in an email,

“The melodies used for our liturgy are reminiscent of and influenced by melodies from the world we live in. Sometimes that influence is acknowledged, other times it isn't. In general, though, Jews have long adapted melodies to fit the liturgy that were never intended to be sung with liturgy.”

For example, Cantor Fishbein has previously set the words of *Adon Olam*, a hymn tune from the fifteenth century, to the Taylor Swift song “Shake It Off.”<sup>65</sup> Taylor Swift also has close Nashville ties, as she rented an apartment there to grow her music career. Cantor Goldberg has based entire *Shabbats* around the usage of contrafaction. For example, an extremely ‘Nashvillian’ *Shabbat*, the Country *Shabbat*, featured quite a bit of contrafaction within the realm of country songs, while taking place in the city of country music. He has also led his congregation through an 80s *Shabbat*, taking the same ideas of contrafact and applying them to music from the 1980s.

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<sup>64</sup> Kidson, Frank, and Mary Neal. *English Folk-Song and Dance*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor Swift. *Taylor Swift - Shake It Off (Taylor's Version) (Lyric Video)*. YouTube. Max Martin, Shellback. Accessed April 1, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVVBuG4IOW4>.

Upcoming, as of writing, Congregation Micah also has a Broadway *Shabbat* that will happen shortly, also using the ideas of contrafact.

Another example of song use, this time without contrafaction, is for Rosh Hashanah, Cantor Fishbein has programmed Sara Bareilles's "Brave," a song that is not Jewish, is not written by a Jewish person, and simply applies good lessons and words of motivation to the New Year brought forth by Rosh Hashanah. In fact, Cantor Fishbein does this quite frequently. She has taken songs like "God Bless America" written by Irving Berlin, a Jewish man, and programmed it on Veteran's Day in order to tell the story of how Jewish people have helped to shape America and its music. On the same note, during late December, she will take songs that are traditionally Christmas songs and program them because they are written by Jews in some capacity. For example: Felix Bernard's "Winter Wonderland," Buck Ram and Walter Kent's "I'll Be Home for Christmas," and Johnny Marks's "A Holly Jolly Christmas" are all written by Jewish people. This act of taking music into a new context in order to give it a new meaning is something relatively common in the music of the Temple Nashville, however, Cantor Fishbein says that she does not use it very often. When she does use these pieces, she usually champions it as a "sermon anthem" rather than the prayer that is used in the usual *Shabbat* services.

#### V. A Case Study in Contrafact: Purim 5784 at Temple Nashville

Purim is an important holiday in the Jewish faith celebrating the Torahic story of Esther. It is usually accompanied by the wearing of costumes and celebratory foods like *hamantaschen*, a sweet cookie-like pastry.<sup>66</sup> For the Purim service of 2024, 5784 in the Hebrew Calendar, Cantor Fishbein programmed a *Shabbat* with a Red Carpet theme.<sup>67</sup> During these holiday services, there

<sup>66</sup> "The Book of Esther: Full Text." Esther: Full Text, 1998.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/esther-full-text>.

<sup>67</sup> "Purim Service." March 22, 2024.

are a large number of people attending. In services at the Temple Nashville, and most Reform services, there is participation encouraged in signing, and this service is no different. Especially due to the large number of references to films, there was quite a bit of participation, including with noisemakers called “groggers” that were provided by the temple. There were also service pamphlets that detailed the song lyrics. In terms of instruments, a piano and guitar were used, which is somewhat standard in The Temple. The Temple also used a clarinet during this service, something that is not unknown in Jewish music, specifically music like the Klezmer style, a style of music from the Ashkanazi Jews of Central Europe. This, and other rare services, are unique in that they also include the singing of the Rabbis, who sang with Cantor Fishbein.

The choice of music reflects a sentiment that Cantor Fishbein stated in her interview, that there is, “something that makes everyone happy every service.”<sup>68</sup> This can be shown by the song selection used by the clergy, as they span generations. The films used included 2023’s *Barbie*, in particular, the song “Barbie World” as sung by Ice Spice, Nicki Minaj, which is essentially a cover of Aqua’s, the most profitable Danish pop group in history, 1997 single “Barbie Girl.”<sup>69</sup> The version that Cantor Fishbein contrafacted was not the version by Spice and Minaj, but the 1997 version. While none among Ice Spice, Nicki Minaj, or Aqua’s members are Jewish, it is a commonly known fact that the creator of Mattel’s Barbie Doll is an ethnically Jewish woman named Ruth Handler.<sup>70</sup> Handler was also featured as a character in the 2023 film *Barbie* as an important symbol of strong womanhood and therefore fits one of the themes of Purim’s story.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Childress. Interview with Cantor Tracy Fishbein. March 7, 2024.

<sup>69</sup> *Barbie World (with Aqua)*. YouTube. Accessed March 27, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUj2AWEJnwQ>.

Aqua. “Barbie Girl.” *YouTube*. Copenhagen: Universal Music. Accessed March 27, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyhrYis509A>.

<sup>70</sup> Altman, Julie. “Ruth Mosko Handler.” Jewish Women’s Archive. Accessed March 27, 2024.

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/handler-ruth-mosko>.

<sup>71</sup> *Barbie*. Film. United States of America: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023.

The contrafacted lyrics are below, with the contrafacted lyrics on the left and the original on the right.

I'm a Shushan Girl, in my Shushan World	I'm a Barbie girl, in the Barbie world
Haman's plans are drastic, not so fantastic	Life in plastic, it's fantastic
My people everywhere, fell into despair	You can brush my hair, undress me everywhere
So I must save my nation from annihilation	Imagination, life is your creation

Shushan refers to the city that Esther, Haman, and the King of Persia reside in in the story of Esther which is currently in the modern-day Iranian town of Susa.<sup>72</sup>

Another song that was contrafacted within this service was “(I've Had) The Time of My Life” from the 1987 film *Dirty Dancing*.<sup>73</sup> While the performers of the song, Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes are not Jewish, the writer of the film, Eleanor Bergstein, and one of the costars, Jennifer Grey, who portrays the Jewish main character Baby, are both Jewish.<sup>74</sup> Once again, the lyrics are stated below.

Tonight, we'll have the time of our lives	Now I've had the time of my life
No we've never looked this way before	No I never felt like this before
Yes we swear, it's the truth	Yes I swear it's the truth
But we do it for the Jews...	And I owe it all to you
With our bodies and souls.	We saw the writing on the wall
We'll make more noise than you'll ever know.	As we felt this magical fantasy
Tonight we'll just let it go	Now with passion in our eyes
Don't be afraid to lose control.	There's no way we could disguise it secretly
Yes we know it's on your mind.	So we take each other's hand
When you see this mishegas tonight	'Cause we seem to understand the urgency

<sup>72</sup> “Jewishencyclopedia.Com.” SHUSHAN - JewishEncyclopedia.com. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13621-shushan>.

<sup>73</sup> *(I've Had) The Time of My Life*. YouTube. Los Angeles, California: Michael Lloyd, 1986. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eyCDj1s4NI>.

Bergstein, Eleanor. *Dirty Dancing*. DVD. United States of America: Vestron Pictures, 1987.

<sup>74</sup> *Patrick Swayze: The Heart Of Dirty Dancing*. YouTube. The American Film Institute, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usT4UMaIIJE>.

Just remember  
 Purim's the one night  
 When we laugh and have fun  
 But it tells us something  
 'Bout how the Jews won  
 And so...

We'll have the time of our lives  
 With our groggers, masks, and treats galore  
 Yes we swear, it's the truth  
 And we'll do it all for you...

Just remember  
 You're the one thing  
 I can't get enough of  
 So I'll tell you something  
 This could be love because

I've had the time of my life  
 No I never felt this way before  
 Yes I swear it's the truth  
 And I owe it all to you

*Mishegas* is from the Yiddish *mishegoss*, meaning craziness. “Losing control” is a large part of Purim, being a huge celebration. This film also relates to the story of Purim. One of the characters in *Dirty Dancing*, Max, is notoriously demeaning to staff lower than himself, and more importantly, a harsh womanizer, telling other men to try and court all of the single girls at the resort they are staying at. Both of these traits, minus the modern take on it, fit with the main antagonist of the *Book of Esther*, Haman, as he also used women in his schemes. However, in the Torahic case, there were significantly fewer group dance sequences.

A common thread of Jewish stories is “Stayin’ Alive.” This theme is present in many examples like the survival of the Jewish people in the stories of Exodus, Esther, and even in recent history with stories of survival against antisemitism. In the case of Purim, which celebrates the story of Esther, with the Jewish people trying to escape eradication at the hands of Haman. To begin their Purim service, Cantor Fishbein utilized the song “Stayin’ Alive” by the Bee Gees as used in the film *Saturday Night Fever* (1977).<sup>75</sup> While the film does not have

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<sup>75</sup> *Saturday Night Fever*. Film. United States of America: Paramount Pictures, 1977.

close ties to Judaism, the idea of staying alive permeates the stories of their culture. For example, the story of Moses in the book of *Exodus*. Lyrics are once again provided below.<sup>76</sup>

Well you can tell by the way we're dressed tonight That Purim's here We're quite the sight	Well, you can tell by the way I use my walk  I'm a woman's man, no time to talk
Music loud, our hearts are warm We've been prepping for this since we were born	Music loud and women warm, I've been kicked around since I was born
But it's alright, it's okay We don't do this everyday Just don't try to understand This holiday's effect on man	And now it's alright, it's okay And you may look the other way We can try to understand The New York Times' effect on man
Whether you're a brother or whether you're a mother Jews are stayin' alive, stayin' alive Feel the groggers shaking and everybody's quaking And we're stayin' alive, stayin' alive	Whether you're a brother or whether you're a mother You're stayin' alive, stayin' alive Feel the city breakin' and everybody shakin'  And we're stayin' alive, stayin' alive
Oy, oy, oy, oy, stayin' alive...	Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive, stayin' alive

In this context, the “groggers” mentioned are noisemakers that are used as instruments during religious holidays, in Judaism and in Medieval Christianity.<sup>77</sup>

The candle blessing and *Kiddush* mentioned above were followed by “Fame” by Irene Cara, as used in the film of the same name.<sup>78</sup> The lyrics are once again given below.

<sup>76</sup> Bee Gees. *Stayin' Alive*. Miami, Florida: Bee Gees, Albhy Galuten, and Karl Richardson, 1977.

<sup>77</sup> Florida International University - Digital Communications. “The Art of Noise: Groggers throughout the Diaspora.” Jewish Museum of Florida | Florida International University. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://jmof.fiu.edu/exhibitions-events/exhibitions/the-art-of-noise-groggers/>.

<sup>78</sup> Irene Cara. *Irene Cara - Fame (Live)*. CD. *YouTube*. Michael Gore. Accessed April 6, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChhCpSVrjvU>. and *Fame*. Film. United States of America: United Artists, 1980.

Baby look at these  
 And tell us what you see  
 Our candles burnin', the Kiddush is set  
 It's Sabbath time, it helps us remember to rest

Baby, look at me  
 And tell me what you see  
 You ain't seen the best of me yet  
 Give me time, I'll make you forget the rest

The week's been long you see (and messy?)  
 Shabbat can set us free!  
 We'll feel the warmth and joy through the land  
 As we obey God's command (to)  
 Remember this day!

I got more in me  
 And you can set it free  
 I can catch the moon in my hands  
 Don't you know who I am?  
 Remember my name

Flames! We'll see them glowin' forever  
 Shabbat has helped us survive  
 With candles and sweet wine together  
 We'll praise God for helpin' us thrive (bein' alive?)

I'm gonna live forever  
 I'm gonna learn how to fly  
 I feel it coming together  
 People will see me and cry

Flames! Shabbat is day number seven  
 We'll consecrate and drink wine  
 Shabbat will live on forever  
 Our island of space and of time

Fame! I'm gonna make it to heaven  
 Light up the sky like a flame  
 I'm gonna live forever  
 Baby, remember my name

The connection to Judaism is prevelant in the film, with the character of Doris Finsecker having central character themes of being a Jewish girl. Although, she was played by an Irish actress, Maureen Teefy.

The *Bar'chu*, or call to prayer at the beginning of the Jewish service, is preceded by a contrafaction of "It Had to be You," this version credited to Frank Sinatra, as used in the films *Casablanca* and *When Harry Met Sally*, both of which were directed by Jewish men.<sup>79</sup>

It's time for the Jews  
 To rise for Bar'chu  
 The whole world around  
 And all over town.  
 Our praise is due

It had to be you,  
 It had to be you  
 I wandered around,  
 And I finally found  
 The somebody who  
 Could make me be true

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<sup>79</sup> Frank Sinatra. *It Had To Be You (2009 Remaster)*. *YouTube*. Accessed April 6, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w6StE9NFs>. and *Casablanca*. Film. United States of America: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1942. and *When Harry Met Sally...* Film. United States of America: Columbia Pictures, 1989.



We'll focus our thoughts.  
Our hearts will be filled.  
With all our faults.  
You love us still

And could make me be blue  
And even be glad  
Just to be sad  
Thinking of you

It's time for the Jews to rise for Bar'chu.  
Please rise for Bar'chu.

For nobody else gave me a thrill  
With all your faults, I love you still

Bar'chu et Adonai  
Hamevorach  
Baruch Adonai hamevorach l'olam va-ed  
It's time for the Jews to say Bar'chu  
To whom our praise is due!

It had to be you  
Wonderful you  
It had to be you  
It had to be you, wonderful you  
It had to be you

The last stanza contains a prayer to God, as is customary.

The *Mi Chamoca*, or Song of Moses, is the next portion of the service. This is a song that appears in the book of Exodus, 15:1-18. This is the song that celebrates the freedom of the Jewish people from the Egyptians. This, aside from being a standard part of the service, also relates to Purim, as the theme of freedom prevails throughout the two stories. In this version of the song, Dolly Parton's "9 to 5" from the movie of the same name.<sup>80</sup> While this film does not have heavy ties to Judaism, the theme of the song fits the purpose of the service. The lyrics are displayed below.

Freed from our work so we ran to the kitchen  
Baked ourselves the bread of affliction.  
Backs bent, we stretch and try to come to life

Tumble out of bed, and stumble to the kitchen  
Pour myself a cup of ambition  
And yawn and stretch and try to come to life

Jump in our tents because the plagues are  
coming  
out in the streets the frogs are jumping.  
Oh to be free with a job from 9 to 5

Jump in the shower, and the blood starts  
pumpin'  
Out on the streets, the traffic starts jumpin'  
For folks like me on the job from 9 to 5

Working 9 to 5

Workin' 9 to 5

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<sup>80</sup> Dolly Parton. *9 to 5*. *YouTube*. Gregg Perry, 1980.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4OzdyxbOuU>. and  
*9 to 5*. United States of America: 20th Century Fox, 1980.

What a way to make a living  
Barely getting by  
Pharaoh taking but not giving

Work us to the grind  
And he barely gives us credit.  
It's enough to drive us crazy if we let it.

Oh Adonai  
Take our service and devotion  
Make the sea divide.  
On dry land we'll be in motion.

Want to move ahead.  
Egyptians won't seem to let us.  
We swear sometimes Pharaoh is out to get us

Mi chamocha  
Baeilim Adonai  
Mi kamocho  
Ne'edar bakodesh  
Norah t'hilot oseh feleh  
Adonai yimloch l'olam va-ed!

What a way to make a livin'  
Barely gettin' by  
It's all takin' and no givin'

They just use your mind  
And they never give you credit  
It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it

9 to 5  
For service and devotion  
You would think that I  
Would deserve a fat promotion

Want to move ahead  
But the boss won't seem to let me  
I swear sometimes that man is out to get me,  
hmmm

Workin' 9 to 5  
What a way to make a livin'  
Barely gettin' by  
It's all takin' and no givin'  
They just use your mind  
It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it

The *Hashkiveinu*, or prayer for continued life, is next. This time, the prayer is contained in the chorus of Ben E. King's "Stand by Me," also used in the 1980 film of the same name, which was directed by Rob Reiner, the same Jewish man who directed *When Harry Met Sally*.<sup>81</sup>

The lyrics are contrafacted below.

When the night has come  
And the land is dark  
And the moon is the only light we'll see  
No, I won't be afraid  
Oh, I won't be afraid  
Just as long as You stand  
Stand by me

Hashkiveinu Adonai

When the night has come  
And the land is dark  
And the moon is the only light we'll see  
No, I won't be afraid  
Oh, I won't be afraid  
Just as long as you stand  
Stand by me

So darlin', darlin', stand by me

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<sup>81</sup> Ben E. King. *Stand by Me*. Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, 1960. and *Stand by Me*. Film. United States of America: Columbia Pictures, 1986.

Eloheinu l'shalom  
V'hamideinu Shomreinu l'chayim

If the sky that we look upon  
Should tumble and fall  
Or the mountain should crumble to the sea  
I won't cry, I won't cry  
No, I won't shed a tear  
Just as long as You stand  
Stand by me

Oh, stand by me  
Oh, stand, stand by me, stand by me

If the sky that we look upon  
Should tumble and fall  
Or the mountain should crumble to the sea  
I won't cry, I won't cry  
No, I won't shed a tear  
Just as long as you stand  
Stand by me

Now proceeding and containing the *G'Vurot and Kedusha*, prayers that affirm God's love and absolute power over the world, is, fittingly, "The Power of Love" by Huey Lewis and the News as heard in the film *Back to the Future*.<sup>82</sup> Once more, the lyrics are given below.

The Power of God is a curious thing  
Makes a person weep,  
Makes another one sing  
Change your heart  
With strength from above  
It's more than a feeling,  
That's God's power and love

Lifts up the fallen, helps us heal,  
Frees the captive, God's faith is real  
Makes us aim for the good  
Makes us fight for what's right  
We feel God's power and love All day and all night  
Don't need idols, don't need names  
Don't need no middleman to link this chain  
Jews call on God often  
And it's hard sometimes  
But it might just save your life....  
That's God's power and love.

Atah kadosh, v'shimcha kadosh, uk'do-shim,  
Bchol yom, y'hallea-lucha, selah...  
Ba-ruch A-ta A-do-nai ha-Eil ha-ka-dosh.  
That's God's power and love!

The Power Of Love is a curious thing;  
Make a one man weep,  
Make another man sing;  
Change a hawk  
To a little white dove.  
More than a feeling,  
That's the power of love.

Tougher than diamonds, rich like cream;  
Stronger and harder than a bad girl's dream.  
Make a bad one good, mm,  
Make a wrong one right.  
Power of love that keep you home at night.  
You don't need money, don't take fame.  
Don't need no credit card to ride this train.  
It's strong and it's sudden  
And it's cruel sometimes.  
But it might just save your life.  
That's the power of love.

But you won't feel nothing till you feel,  
You feel the power, just feel the power of love.  
That's the power, that's the power of love.  
You feel the power of love.

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<sup>82</sup> *Back to the Future*. Film. United States of America: Universal Pictures, 1985.

Of course, the connection of the idea of “The Power of Love” is self explanatory. In terms of connections to the Jewish community, one of *Back to the Future*’s writers, Bob Gale, is Jewish.<sup>83</sup>

Cantor Fishbein has also used the song *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* in her services, including in the aforementioned Purim service. There, she placed the ideas, not the lyrics alone, of *Rainbow* into Hebrew, and are given below as before.

Somewhere over the rainbow  
Way up high  
And the dreams that you dream of  
Once in a lullaby

Somewhere over the rainbow  
Way up high  
And the dreams that you dream of  
Once in a lullaby

Somewhere over the rainbow  
Bluebirds fly  
And the dreams that you dream of  
Dreams really do come true

Somewhere over the rainbow  
Bluebirds fly  
And the dreams that you dream of  
Dreams really do come true

Someday I'll wish upon a star  
Wake up where the clouds are far behind me  
Where trouble melts like lemon drops  
High above the chimney tops that's where  
You'll find me

Someday I'll wish upon a star  
Wake up where the clouds are far behind me  
Where trouble melts like lemon drops  
High above the chimney tops that's where  
You'll find me

Oseh shalom bimromav  
Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu  
V'al kol Yisrael v'al kol yoshvei teivel  
V'imru: Amen

Somewhere over the rainbow  
Bluebirds fly  
And the dream that you dare to  
Oh why, oh why can't I?

If happy little bluebirds fly  
Beyond the rainbow  
Why oh why can't I?

While this is only arguably contrafaction as it serves this time as a way to transport a prayer to the congregation, it still holds the same reasonings for using contrafaction, it makes the music fun and memorable for the congregation.

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<sup>83</sup> Suman, Michael. *Religion and Prime Time Television*. Westport: Praeger, 1997. and Huey Lewis and the News. *The Power of Love*. YouTube. Huey Lewis and the News, 1985. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBl2QGA1x1s>.

To close out the service, the earworm “Let it Go” from Disney’s *Frozen* (2013) was also included.<sup>84</sup> Elsa, the queen of the fictional Aredelle and performer of “Let it Go,” also represents a female empowerment narrative, although this time there is the added element of a close family bond, something that is also prevalent in the story of Esther in the bond with her cousin Mordecai. Contrafactual lyrics are compared below in the same manner as above.

In every generation	The snow glows white on the mountain tonight
We find another foe	Not a footprint to be seen
Endeavors to control us	A kingdom of isolation
You think by now they’d know	And it looks like I’m the queen
With faith in God we kept our heritage alive	The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside
Above our enemies heaven knows we rise	Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I tried
We told our tale with play and song	Don't let them in, don't let them see
We hope we didn’t keep you here too long	Be the good girl you always have to be
We had such fun and still you see...we’re free!	Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know
We’ll let you go, let you go	Well, now they know
Let you leave before it’s dawn	Let it go, let it go
Let you go, let you go	Can't hold it back anymore
Let you eat before it’s gone	Let it go, let it go
There’s lots of treats	Turn away and slam the door
Enjoy a vast array	I don't care what they're going to say
Bring the oneg on	Let the storm rage on
Services are almost done anyway!	The cold never bothered me anyway

Oneg here refers to a selection of foods that are given after the services at Temple Nashville, and other temples.<sup>85</sup> This is a more celebratory song that discusses the miracle of being Jewish through all the hardships that they face. The actress, Idina Menzel who plays Elsa is also a prominent Jewish woman in Hollywood. When asked in an interview if she would like to raise her children in a Jewish environment she responded, "I am a Jewish woman and I feel strong

<sup>84</sup> Disney’s *Frozen* “Let It Go” Sequence Performed by Idina Menzel. YouTube. Accessed March 27, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moSF1vxnbqk>.

*Frozen*. Film. United States of America: Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Hosting an Oneg or Kiddush. Accessed April 3, 2024.

<https://www.bethisraelmedia.org/worship/shabbat-services/hosting-oneg-or-kiddush>.

connections to my culture and, so yes, I would like to bring them up with knowledge of the stories and awareness of the history.”<sup>86</sup> The styles of music that are chosen for contrafaction seem to reflect, at least somewhat, a connection to the Jewish community, or at very least a connection to the community of the temples in question. They also represent songs that are at least multiple decades old, except the extremely popular examples like “Let it Go.” This makes these examples advantageous for congregants of all ages to sing along to.

## VI. Conclusion

While this study focused heavily on contrafact and the idea of popular music use from the *cantoral* side, there is much room left for the *congregational* testimonies to be heard. There are also other congregations in Nashville to study, the Conservative congregation of West End Synagogue, the Orthodox Congregation Sherith Israel, the Messianic Congregation Kol Dodi, and other congregations that showcase a variety of beliefs, and while beyond the scope of this study, they should be discussed in future research. Change of music over time should also be taken into consideration. While the songs utilized for contrafaction in the Purim case study in Part V span the generations, examples like “Let it Go” reflect a newer addition to the minds of the congregation than “It Had to Be You,” for example. This would also be an interesting topic to discuss in future research.

The story of liturgical Jewish music in the Reform temples of Nashville is a complex one. It ranges from historical pieces that span hundreds of years to contrafaction of Taylor Swift music, to new compositions by emerging composers and cantors. Music has the power to touch the soul and leave the congregation truly changed. Whether it be old, new, traditional, or

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<sup>86</sup> “Interview: Idina Menzel.” Interview: Idina Menzel - The Jewish Chronicle, November 24, 2016. <https://www.thejc.com/life-and-culture/interview-idina-menzel-bmcrdkrh>.

nontraditional, all of the music is somehow in service of Adonai and reflects the community that these temples have built in Nashville through style, song choices, contrafaction of melodies commonly known to the audience, or instrument choice.

## VII. Appendix A: Glossary

- Adonai (אֲדֹנָי) n. From Hebrew. A Hebrew name for God.
- Bar/Bat Mitzva (בֵּר מִצְוָה) n. From Hebrew. A coming-of-age ritual in Judaism. Bar Mitzvahs are for young men and Bat Mitzvahs are for young women.
- Cantor (חזן) n. From Hebrew. Prayer leader in Judaism, musical leader. English term for “Hazzan”.
- Halakha (הֲלָכָה) n. From Hebrew. Jewish Law.
- Hazzan (חזן) plural; hazanim. n. From Hebrew. Hebrew term for “cantor”
- Hebrew (עִבְרִית) n. The language of Jewish people, the original language of the Torah and other Jewish religious texts.
- High Holy Days (יָמֵי נוֹרָאִים) n. From Hebrew. The time of year including, and between, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.
- Klezmer (קלעזמער) n. From Yiddish. A musical style from Central Europe created by the Ashkenazi Jewish people that resembles dance music.
- Mazal Tov (מזל טוב) From Hebrew. A phrase meaning ‘congratulations’ or ‘good luck.’
- Mikvah (מִקְוָה) n. From Hebrew. A ritual immersion bath to achieve purity in Judaism.
- Mishegoss (משוגעות) n. From Yiddish. Foolishness
- Nusah (נוסח) n. From Hebrew. Melodic patterns that are often specific to a congregation and holidays.
- Oneg (borrowed from the Hebrew עֵנֶג) n. From Hebrew. A festive gathering after Shabbat services.



- Purim (פּוּרִים) n. From Hebrew. A holiday celebrating the freeing of the Jewish people from the Persian Empire, specifically a man named Haman, as told in the *Book of Esther*.
- Rabbi (רַב) n. From Hebrew. Spiritual and religious leader in Judaism.
- Rosh Hashanah (רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה) n. From Hebrew. The New Year in the Jewish calendar.
- Shabbat (שַׁבָּת) n. From Hebrew. The Sabbath in Judaism. Traditionally observed from Friday night at sundown to Saturday night at sundown. The most traditional Jewish people do not do any work or use any electronic devices on this day.
- Shofar (שׁוֹפָר) n. From Hebrew. An ancient horn that is typically made from a ram's horn and is used in religious circumstances.
- Talmud (תַּלְמוּד) n. From Hebrew. A piece of Rabbinic writing that is at the center of Rabbinic Judaism. Also holds much influence over Jewish Law, or Halakha (see above).
- Torah (תּוֹרָה) n. From Hebrew. The first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- Yiddish (ייִדיש) n. From Yiddish. A language traditionally spoken by the Ashkenazi Jews of central Europe.
- Yom Kippur (יוֹם כִּפּוּר) n. From Hebrew. The last of the High Holy Days and the holiest of all days in the Jewish calendar.

**VIII. Appendix B: Interview Questions for Cantors**

1. What, in your experience, is the "standard" for music in Reform synagogues in America if one even exists at all?
2. History of Jewish Music in Nashville
3. How, in your opinion, does the temple music of the southern United States differ from this established standard, if so, how?
4. How, in your opinion, has the music of Nashville influenced the music at your temple, if at all?
5. What makes the sound of your temple unique? Artists, instruments, other factors?
  - (Further question added for Cantor Josh Goldberg)
6. What about your own personal musical career?

**IX. Appendix C: Interview Questions for Rabbis**

1. How, if at all, do you use music in your portions of services?
2. Do you ever incorporate the music of the southern US in your readings or teachings?
3. If so, how?

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