

Rabbi Kalman Topp
Senior Rabbi

Rabbi Adir Posy
Associate Rabbi

Arik Wollheim
Cantor

Jack Fenigstein
President

Rabbi Simon Dolgin *ז"ר*
Rabbi Emeritus

PRESS RELEASE

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BETH JACOB CONGREGATION TAKES LEAD AMONG SYNAGOGUES TO ATTRACT “JEWS OF NO RELIGION” WITH FOCUS ON MUSICAL PROGRAMS, EVENTS

Beth Jacob’s Cantor Arik Wollheim strongly believes that music can be the vehicle to bring together Jews of all backgrounds and interests and create a sense of belonging. Since beginning his tenure as Cantor of Beth Jacob Congregation eight months ago, he has made it his goal to bring music to the forefront of the religious experience.

“The Pew Research Center results are in – now what? What are we going to do about the trends the study has brought to light?” says Wollheim. “We live in a time where many find it difficult to connect with Judaism via only prayer and Torah study,” he says, alluding to the 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews, which found that for most American Jews, ancestry and culture matter more than religion. “We have to find other avenues so people can stay connected and music has that ability,” he relates. “I would like to see Beth Jacob become a center for Jewish music where people can hear and experience different styles of Jewish music and yes, perhaps even find it spiritually uplifting.”

Cantor Wollheim has made efforts to increase participation and enthusiasm among Beth Jacob members during weekday and Shabbat services. This past March, with the help and support of Beth Jacob’s Senior Rabbi, Kalman Topp, and synagogue President Jack Fenigstein, Cantor Wollheim led “Harmony Shabbat” services with the Maccabeats, a Jewish a capella group that became famous through several hit videos on YouTube. The Maccabeats returned to lead High Holiday services with Cantor Wollheim as well. Wollheim has also sought to make the weekday and Shabbat liturgy more interactive and accessible for synagogue members, posting text and tunes of prayers online, and introducing new melodies that lend themselves well to singing along.

Cantor Wollheim is now seeking to bring Jewish music to the community outside of the traditional service, with a focus on Jewish themed concerts and cultural events. On Sunday November 17, Israeli megastar Dudu Fisher will be performing live in concert in Beth Jacob’s Shapell Sanctuary.

“Many find their spirituality in concert halls and not in synagogues, and my goal is to give stage to the beautiful music of ours,” says Wollheim. “Jewish music contains many different styles: traditional and contemporary, Eastern and Western, classic and popular and they all have beauty and connection to our tradition.”

Dudu Fisher has spent his career bringing traditional Hassidic, Yiddish and cantorial music to new audiences. Fisher is best known for his performance as Jean Valjean in the Hebrew production of “Les Miserables,” which became the longest running show in Israel. He went on to play the role on Broadway and London’s West End. The singer has also held starring roles in productions of “The Hunchback of Notre Dame,” “Kol Nidre,” and “Over the Rainbow,” among others, and sang the role of Moses in the Hebrew version of Steven Spielberg’s “The Prince of Egypt.” He has sung with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore and Queens Symphony Orchestras, and has performed for Britain’s royal family, the Thai royal family and Presidents Clinton and Obama.



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Cantor Arik Wollheim was born and raised in Israel, and served as the head soloist of the Israeli Military Choir, as well as Cantor of Congregation Agudath Sholom of Stamford Connecticut from 2001 to 2012. He has performed in a variety of over 30 roles both in opera and concert works and holds Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Music and Opera Studies.

Beth Jacob is a Modern Orthodox congregation which has played a pioneering role in the development of Jewish life in Southern California. Beth Jacob is dedicated to creating a community of engaged, Torah educated, socially conscious, Zionist and caring Jews. Beth Jacob strives to provide members of all generations, and the broader Jewish community, a spectrum of spiritual, educational, social, *chesed*, and cultural opportunities.

For more information, please contact Beth Jacob at (310) 278-1911, or visit www.bethjacob.org.