

Cantor Henry Shapiro

Background & Pre-Cantorial School Experience Cantor Henry Shapiro grew up in Worcester, Pennsylvania. He participated in a variety of Jewish activities and programs, including BBYO and USY teen trips.

Cantor Shapiro obtained a BS in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Pittsburgh but didn't find an engineering career meaningful, gravitating instead toward his passion for music. He began his musical career by attending Berklee College of Music in Boston. His career focused on Jewish music, performing in Jewish institutions, and organizing musical programs with synagogues and youth.

Cantor served as musical director for three synagogues. He developed musical erev Shabbat services, composing and arranging much of the music, and led and participated in both professional and volunteer vocal and instrumental groups. Cantor Shapiro, for nine years, served as Music Director/Educator at the School for Advanced Jewish Studies in Pittsburgh, a program designed to engage post-b'nai mitzvah students. He provided private and classroom instruction in guitar/music for children, adults and Jewish clergy.

Cantor composed film scores including an award-winning film shown at the Ashkelon Film Festival and a Holocaust documentary, and individual compositions in diverse musical genres. He is skilled in guitar, bass, and mandolin. He has played in a bluegrass band, and has lead both klezmer and swing bands. He continues to perform klezmer, swing and jazz, with influences from classical to tango to salsa and beyond.

Cantorial School Cantor Shapiro's progression in his career and communal involvement led to his decision to become a Cantor. He elected to pursue a dual degree, leading to Cantorial ordination and a Masters of Jewish Education. He had substantial experience in educating youth and adults, and saw training in education as an important adjunct to his cantorial training. He began his cantorial studies with a year at Machon Pardes in Jerusalem and spent the following four years at Hebrew College in Massachusetts, earning his degree and ordination in 2012.

Cantorial Experience During cantorial school, Cantor Shapiro had multiple jobs and internships, giving him in-depth experience in leading Shabbat and holiday services and leyning Torah, teaching religious school and adult education, and tutoring b'nai mitzvah. He has taught fourth, sixth and seventh grades; special needs students; guitar and song leading to Jewish clergy and professionals; and served as songleader for kindergarten through sixth grade classes. He has conducted weekly b'nai mitzvah tutoring at two large synagogues. His ritual/service-leading experience includes co-leading davenning and leyning Torah on a weekly basis for regular Shabbat, family and holiday services; co-leading, arranging and accompanying an original klezmer-style Kabbalat Shabbat service; and serving as the High Holiday Cantor at three synagogues, leading all services, delivering all sermons, and leyning Holiday Torah readings.

Since ordination, Cantor Shapiro has served in two concurrent roles for the past four years. He is sole clergy for a small Conservative synagogue, Parkway Jewish Center, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He leads all Shabbat and Holiday services; writes and delivers all d'verei Torah/sermons; leyns the entire Triennial Torah portion each Shabbat and holiday; organizes and leads special musical services and programs; teaches adult education classes including Hebrew reading and Gabbai training; visits the sick and mourners and provides pastoral counseling; conducts funerals and other life cycle rituals; and develops and implements holiday programs, cultural events, concerts and speakers. He also serves as a representative to Jewish and inter-faith organizations and as a service to the community, he leyns Torah on Monday and Thursday mornings with the downtown congregation minyan.

Currently, he serves as the b'nai mitzvah tutor for a small Reform synagogue. In that capacity, he works with students to strengthen their Hebrew reading skills and to learn required prayers, Torah and Haftarah.

Cantor Shapiro's Application to Temple Beth-El Cantor Shapiro has not been asked to leave either of his current positions, nor is he unhappy in his current roles. Both institutions in fact would like him to continue, although they understand why he is considering other opportunities. Because Parkway Jewish Center is a small congregation with declining membership, its future is uncertain. Further, Cantor Shapiro would relish the opportunity to collaborate with other clergy and professional staff, rather than as the sole clergy. When asked what would most influence his decision to join Beth-El, he stated that he would know from a visit "if it felt like home to me and I felt like family to you." He believes his role as cantor is to support and guide people in their praying and singing together to make something greater than themselves.

The many professional references to whom the Search Committee has spoken praised him as warm and personable, "an incredible musician," knowledgeable of myriad musical genres and the ability to meld them, a skilled teacher, a prepared and proficient Torah-reader, someone who connects well with people of all ages, someone with creative ideas who follows through to implement them, and who prepares diligently and takes his duties seriously.