

JEWISH BULLETIN
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San Francisco CA

Sol Zim

Congregation Sherith Israel
2266 California St., San Francisco

Peninsula Temple Sholom
1655 Sebastian Dr., Burlingame

'America's Super Star of Jewish Music' coming here

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Bulletin Staff

Sol Zim's voice rings with authority, sure of its place in the world — which shouldn't come as a surprise from a man who bills himself as "America's Super Star of Jewish Music."

The surprising thing is that this promotional genius really is a musical maven, as San Franciscans soon will learn. Anyone



Sol Zim

with a penchant for good old Jewish music, the kind that has you wiping a tear for your "Yiddishe mameh" one moment and belting "biddy-biddy bum" the next, should expect a rollicking good time Sunday.

Local audiences can catch Zim's act at 2:30 p.m. at Congregation Sherith Israel in San Francisco or at 7 that night at Peninsula Temple Sholom in Burlingame.

Temple Sholom's Cantor Barry Reich is particularly impressed by Zim's works for children. "It's not easy to write a song that kids can learn in two settings — and still remain in the right *nusach*," he says, referring to the traditional cantorial modes used by Conservative and Orthodox congregations.

Zim makes it a point to sing with children's choirs wherever he goes, and the Bay Area is no exception. He will perform with the Sherith Israel Youth Choir that Sunday afternoon and, in the evening, will share the stage with a joint 80-voice choir from Temple Sholom, the North Peninsula Hebrew Day School and Peninsula Temple Beth El.

Whether he's writing for children or adults, Reich says, Zim's liturgical compositions are strictly kosher. "I would say without exaggerating that every synagogue in the United States does eight or nine of his songs" as part of the service.

Like Reich himself, Zim comes from five generations of cantors and has been the cantor of Hollis Hills Jewish Center in New York for almost 30 years. He also teaches at the Conservative movement's Cantors

Assembly and his 12 songbooks and original music are used by cantors, music teachers and choral directors everywhere.

"He's a world-class cantor," Reich says.

Sherith Israel's Cantor Martin Feldman is equally enthusiastic, citing Zim's versions of *Shalom Aleichem*, *V'Shamru* and *Sim Shalom* as synagogue standards.

But Sunday's shows are concerts, not prayer services, and audiences will hear a variety of Jewish music, including Israeli and Yiddish folk songs, popular ballads, pop and show tunes, even operatic arias.

"He's terrific," Feldman says. "He's a real stage presence, real *shmaltsy*." And "he's written a lot of snappy Chassidic tunes."

Zim himself will tell anyone who asks — and no doubt anyone who doesn't — about the prizes his music has won at Israel's annual Chassidic Music Festival.

"I was the first American composer to be accepted by the Chassidic festival," he says from his home in New York. "I want joy in song. I'm a Chassid in my heart."

But Chassidic modes are only part of his repertoire.

"I'm a man with a message," he says. "It's not just doing a concert, it's bringing Jewish music and commanding involvement on the part of the audience or congregation."

Refrains that employ "easy-to-repeat

Chassidic syllables like bim-bam" draw non-Hebrew-speakers into the prayer service while, during concerts, English makes old Yiddish favorites accessible.

Zim's versatility comes from a lifetime of study with some of Jewish music's greatest names, including Cantor Moshe Koussevitsky and Yiddish theater composer Sholom Secunda.

Born in Montreal soon after his parents arrived from Europe in 1939, he was sent to Torah Vodaath Yeshiva in New York at age 7.

"The purpose was not only to send me to yeshiva but to make me part of a choir," he says. "I became the top soloist and a child protégé cantor and gave concerts to raise money for the school."

The son of Samuel and Ida Zimelman has been working hard ever since, taking his music throughout North America,

South Africa, Europe and, of course, Israel, where he once led a havdalla service at the home of the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin — an event Zim considers the highlight of his career.

"I have a mission," he says. "I want to reach the Jew in Omaha, Nebraska. I want to reach the Jew in Seattle, Washington."

And he wants those Jews to discover "Oh my God, I love Jewish music," Zim says. "That's what I want to hear."

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