

## Cantor Charles Davidson (z"l)

JTS mourns the passing of Cantor Charles Davidson, a revered composer, cantor, JTS alum, and H. L. Miller Cantorial School professor. One of the earliest graduates of JTS's Cantors Institute, he later earned his doctorate in sacred music and then went on to serve on the faculty as the Nathan Cummings Professor.

In his early career, Davidson became music director and conductor for several organizations, including the International Zionist Federation Association Orchestra at the University of Pittsburgh, the Hadassah Choral Society, and the Pittsburgh Contemporary Dance Association.

Cantor Davidson was a prolific composer and arranger who began his journey in composing while singing in a high school chorus in Pittsburgh. His most renowned composition, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly," is a poignant musical setting of children's poetry from the Terezin concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. This piece, marked by its tragic history of only 100 survivors out of the 15,000 children imprisoned, has received worldwide acclaim with over 4,500 performances.

JTS was fortunate to have Cantor Davidson join its faculty in 1977. Chancellor Shuly Rubin Schwartz called him, "a dear man with a wonderful smile." She was fortunate to know Cantor Davidson as he was the hazzan in the synagogue where her father was the rabbi when she was a child. She fondly remembers Shabbat meals with Cantor Davidson's family and many fun musical moments over the years. "In the young, growing Conservative synagogue, bursting with children where he was the hazzan, he and my dad were a great team, and he filled the congregation with music –through the choirs he led, the liturgy he composed, the concerts he mounted, and the b'nai mitzvah students he trained." she said.

Chancellor Schwartz described how delighted she was to work with Davidson when he began to teach in the Cantorial School. "I was so happy to reconnect with him as a colleague during those years. May his memory be a blessing to all whose lives he touched."

Cantor Nancy Abramson, who served as the director of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School for many years, recalled how Cantor Davidson was her *nusah* teacher when she was a JTS student. She shared that, "he was beloved by his students over the decades, and many referred to him as "Uncle Charles."

Cantor Davidson's impact was felt by countless students throughout the years. Cantor Riki Lippitz said, "he was a mentor to multiple generations of cantors, modeling musical creativity as the natural complement to the sounds of traditional *nusah*" and added "To us, he was a gentle teacher with high expectations, who treated his students with respect and affection. He encouraged the early female students to excel, held us to the highest standards, and rejoiced in our success. His spirituality and *mentschlichkeit* will live on through the many lives he touched, and through the beautiful music for cantors and choirs that he birthed into the world."

Rabbi Hazzan Jeffrey Myers, of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, shared a story about how he influenced his future as a young man when they met. "He was warm and welcoming, and after several hours together I decided that becoming a Hazzan was what I was meant to be. I had the privilege of not only studying with him for four years at the then Cantor's Institute, but of becoming a lifelong devotee. The world is less blessed with his passing."

May the memory of Cantor Charles Davidson always be a blessing.