

L'dor vador: From generation to generation
By RSA Guest Blogger, Robert Bargard,
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One family's ancestor remembered... a shared culture preserved.

The music of the traditional synagogue in America has strong roots in the culture and shtetls of 19th and early 20th century Eastern Europe. Like many of the greats of the Golden Era of Hazzanut, Cantor Gedalie Bargad was a gifted hazzan who grew out of the Chassidic environment.

Cantor Gedalie Bargad

Cantor Bargad was born in 1898 on Kol Nidre evening in the small town of Slavuta (Volhynia Province, Russia). War, civil strife, and his family's struggle for survival disrupted his promising career as a cantor. Eventually, Bargad and his bride were able to obtain travel documents and arrived in Boston on May 25, 1921.

He found work in the shul in Lynn, MA, almost immediately, and by 1926, he was officiating at the Elm Street Synagogue in Chelsea, MA., where he sang until 1963. His son, Dr. Warren Bargad, former director of the Center for Jewish Studies, University of Florida - Gainesville, reminisced about those days.

Cantor Bargad went on to serve at Temple Emanuel in Chelsea, MA until he died in 1968. His grandson, Robert Bargad (Professor of Jazz Piano at Karntnerlandeskonservatorium in Austria), remembers his grandfather "leading the congregation in the singing of prayers with very beautiful melodies, many of which he had composed and arranged.



"As a youth, I remember the shul packed with people about 500 to 600. My father was a commanding presence on the bima.

When he sang, he would often send shockwaves through the eardrums of the choirboys who stood near him.

There was a bit of the actor in him [but] he was also down-to-earth, a great storyteller, and often quite comic (album liner notes, 1980)."