

Cantor Rachel Harrison Rhodes - Vision Statement

I have always felt called to express myself through song. While most of my musical friends longed for the stage, I found myself uniquely at home on the *bima*. It is in the reverberation of voices joined together in meaningful prayer that fills my soul. Throughout my years of study and in my nine years of congregational service, three particular Jewish tenets have infused my cantorate with meaning: *T'fillah* (prayer), *Dor Habah* (the next generation), and *Asiya* (the Kabbalistic concept of action).

T'fillah (prayer)

T'fillah, prayer, is one of the most exquisite gifts Judaism offers us. The combination of prayer and music catalyzes entry into the spiritual realm of liturgical poetry. Music is a conduit for prayer to enter our souls and open us up to the deepest parts of ourselves. Music has the power to connect us to our ancestor's journeys and allows us a window into our children's future. Within one Shabbat service, music has the unique power to reach each individual and provide what they need in that moment: healing, guidance, inspiration, hope, or meditation.

Crafting *T'fillah* is at the center of my cantorate. I aim to introduce modern Jewish compositions while staying grounded in our diverse musical history. I see richness in a service that places a composition by Josh Warshawsky alongside a setting by Abraham Binder, or a new melody by Elana Arian intertwined with *nusach*. I aim to uplift voices other than my own; congregants, youth or adult choir, lay-led band- because the voices of the Jewish people are more powerful than one voice can ever be alone. By thoughtfully connecting congregants with traditions new and old, I hope to inspire all who choose to join in prayer.

We are in a new era of worship. Jewish life is flourishing online in a way we have never seen before. It is part of my practice to enliven the dialogue to keep Jewish music relevant and meaningful to those within and outside of the synagogue walls. I currently serve as an integral part of bridging in-person and virtual Jewish practice, and this kind of creative thinking excites me. I love dwelling in the liminal space and taking time to explore new innovations for *T'fillah*. Music can and should be used to bring people together- and it has the power to do so in-person *and* virtually. By engaging in the creative process of adapting age-old Jewish traditions to our modern world, we find ways to keep congregants tethered to Jewish practice and community, whether or not they choose to physically walk through our doors.

Dor Habah (the next generation)

I find it immensely meaningful to watch *Dor Habah*, the youth of the congregation, grow to be young leaders. Jewish music can serve as an onramp for a love and knowledge of Judaism that can last a lifetime. I have seen passion sparked in the eyes of a sixth grader who now sings in our adult choir. I have watched how Torah cantillation can deeply expand the meaning of the words of *V'ahavta* for an adult studying for Bat Mitzvah. Embodying Jewish text through singing is a majestic way to continue *shalshet hakabbalah*, the link in the chain of Jewish tradition and inter-generational connection.

The next generation of Jews will be completely different than the one that has come before. There will be more diversity in racial and religious backgrounds. Families will seek unorthodox paths of engagement. Congregants will come to us looking for both deep acceptance and a call to be their best selves. Every person who walks through the Temple doors (either physical or virtual) must feel nurtured by the congregation and its leadership. I will always meet the next generation of Jews where they are and engage with them at the level of their choosing. Music is a powerful way to accomplish these goals because, as DFSSM Professor Merri Arian

says, it “levels the *praying* field.” It is one of the central threads that binds us together and creates the pathways for the next generation.

Asiyah (action/doing)

According to the Kabbalistic tradition, the realm of *Asiyah* is God’s support of our endeavor to heal the fissures in our world. *Asiyah* has come to fruition in my cantorate through my dedication to social action and climate justice in particular. I appreciate how living in the DMV gives us special access to the government to make our voices heard. I have seen the power of song bring a group of people together as they strive to better the world. Temple Sinai’s Davis Center holds an esteemed place among houses of worship in our area, and as such, adding my musical and environmental leadership to this institution would be an incredible *z’chut* (privilege).

Asiyah is also leading and collaborating with a synagogue team. As Senior Cantor, I would devote myself to gaining trust within the congregation and its leadership, listening for what has been successful and beloved. I would honor the incredible foundation that Cantor Laura Croen has built and expand upon it. I would delight in the opportunity to join new colleagues as together we build on the core values of Temple Sinai.

I am committed to continuing a musical legacy within a congregation that is excited about a new era of synagogue worship, engagement, and social action. In this pivotal moment in society, I am called to continue crafting meaningful *T’fillah* using the inspirational power of music. I will continue finding new and exciting ways to help *Dor Habah* find their Jewish voices in song and study. Through *Asiyah*, I will join you in our work for justice. I am excited to think about the next phase of Temple Sinai’s musical journey, and am honored to be in conversation with your congregation.

L’shalom,

Cantor Rachel Rhodes