

INTRODUCTION

Projects do not always begin in the same way. There are some, that from the very start carry a special human energy, and as if that weren't enough, they spring forth to occupy a special place among us. In general, any project starts with someone interested in achieving something and then beginning to work for it, searching for the right people and focusing effort and resources into that goal. Sometimes, not always, that effort is rewarded with something similar to what was originally planned.

Few projects—like this book you hold in your hands—can boast of beginning unsuspectedly during the childhood of two people who couldn't have imagined while they were kicking around a ball in La Paternal neighborhood in Buenos Aires, that throughout their lives they would be bound together by two interests that were of crucial importance to both of them: music and Judaism.

Ari Litvak and Gastón Bogomolni have known each other for as long as they can remember. Each is present in the other's memory as someone who "was already there" since the beginning. Coming from the same city and brought up in the same neighborhood, their roots began to intertwine from elementary school on; despite the fact they were attending different schools (Litvak attended Herzlia Integral School, while Bogomolni went to the Tel Aviv School). During their teen-age afternoons they spent time together in the classrooms of Herzlia High School, as well as in religious services where Litvak was the organist and musical director and Bogomolni, the assistant cantor. When the morning Shabbat Kiddush was over, Litvak, Bogomolni and the synagogue's senior cantor Jaime Halperin sat down at the piano to sing and share classical cantorial pieces they had learned from the recordings of Dudu Fisher.

So, along with the shared experiences, their Jewish background was bound to be strengthened, since both were children of morot (teachers) and related to people who were always involved in Jewish education. Later, after their almost simultaneous bnei mitzvahs, the two were profoundly influenced by several hazzanim; Bogomolni by Hazzan Mario Solarz, and both by Hazzan Jaime Halperin and later Hazzan César Belenisky, also a vocal coach, and a decisive figure in Litvak and Bogomolni finding their vocation as hazzanim.

Coincidentally, the synagogue musical tradition wasn't the only thing that influenced the professional development of the two. Also important was their shared taste for great Latin American band leaders and singers with international impact, like Mercedes Sosa and León Gieco, or local, like Juan Carlos Baglietto, or even Argentine pop rock stars, like Charly García and Fito Páez.

With so much in common, such parallel lives, we could imagine them as two very close friends. However, it didn't happen that way: Litvak and Bogomolni both remember they used to know each other when they were growing up, but nothing

more than that. In fact, the ties that were to lead to this book were still developing, and more and more important coincidences were necessary to reinforce the earlier connections, as yet still fragile.

The turning point was the course for Hebrew music teachers of Editti Mayanot and the Hallelujah Festival in 1994, where the two “met again” and started a friendship that eventually became very close. Geography didn’t help: Bogomolni continued his career as a cantor first in the Dominican Republic, then in Spain, and finally in the United States. Litvak left his native Argentina to establish himself in Mexico.

Nevertheless, the coincidences continued: in the same period of time, they both recorded a compact disc to promote music for synagogal use, with a Latin American character and, naturally, written by composers from the continent. The only difference was that the Bogomolni’s CD Ta’am Latino had a more folkloric sound, while Litvak’s Shirá Jadashá heavily influenced by Latin pop. Everything that followed seemed to be the natural continuation of these works. In 2007, the rabbinical convention of the Conservative Movement was held in Mexico City. There Hazzan Litvak conducted a workshop together with Rabbi Darío Feiguin about the music in the synagogues of Buenos Aires, entitled "Davening La Vida Loca" (Davening the Crazy Life).

This workshop was so successful that an extended version, with a spelling change in a genuine playful spirit (Davenin’ La Vida Loca) was presented at the Cantors Convention in New York in 2010, where Litvak and Bogomolni teamed up, and the workshop’s printed materials 20 scores—became the basis for the marvelous collection compiled in this book.

This new workshop was also a success. The conference presentation was followed by concerts and classes in different parts of the United States. The Cantors Assembly charged Litvak and Bogomolni with the task of assembling the material formally as a book. Naturally, both cantors agreed with the fact that the collection, as it was then, was barely a minimal fragment of an unlimited world, which is the Latin American synagogue music of the last 50 years. With an almost frenetic urgency they began to search for and collect all the material they could find.

They contacted more than three hundred people from all around the world, and received more than three hundred scores. The job wasn't easy, because of the fact that many songs had not been written down. Many Hazzanim, musicians, Morim, and rabbis, coming from a traditional background, composed, learned and played “by ear,” without writing down a formal score. Therefore, it was necessary to collect homemade recordings and then transcribe the contents. As most of the compositions were based on the Shabbat liturgy, they decided to divide the project in a series of volumes, and to dedicate the first one entirely to the Shabbat. Future volumes will be focused on compositions for wedding ceremonies, the High Holidays and even secular Jewish songs. On the second stage of the project a companion website will be created to compliment the

richness of the books' content: including audios, the composers' biographies, and more.

The result is in your hands, something completely unheard of: a collection of synagogue music, influenced by the sonority and style of Latin American music. However, many of these compositions weren't directly influenced by Latin American folkloric music but rather by a variety of international musical styles. The Jewish people have always known how to learn the best from each place where they have lived. It is perfectly natural that by this time in the 21st century, a great number of cantors and composers have created a great quantity of music for liturgical use with an identity and sonority fully Latin American and Jewish. It is a tapestry of seminal music of the Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi worlds brought by immigrants, echoes of Zionism, the Hassidic Festivals of the sixties and seventies, the North American ballad, the outstanding influence of the Tango's syncopation and phrasing, as well as the harmonic progressions derived from Argentine pop music. In every way, this material is an invaluable treasure. It is the cultural manifestation (and perhaps, the one that will endure for the longest time) of a whole era in the millenary history of the Jewish people. Therefore, the importance of collecting this legacy in the best way the Jews know how to do it: with a book. This is a book that not only records the best of a cultural patrimony through several generations, but also comes from the combined experience and work over many years of two men who were born and grew up very close to each other, who were nurtured by the same streets and by the same experiences and influences, and—most importantly— who learned to take advantage of this connection, at first involuntary, and later turned it into a vocation.

Gastón and Ari