

There are a number of people in the room for whom when we say their name, before we see their face, we hear their music. Ben Steinberg. Are you hearing Shalom Rav? Perhaps one of his duets, choral works? As much as Ben's music has been the score of generations of Jewish communities, it was Ben, the gentle, patient man, the consummate teacher, and mentor that today we truly miss.

As a young cantor at Temple Sinai congregation of Toronto, I vibrated in fear at singing Shalom Rav in front of The Ben Steinberg. He had a clear, loft vision for service music. His aesthetic was beautiful, rich, layered and honest to the text as he understood it. How could I possibly live up to the level of this master?

What happened next seems to have happened to others and to so many of his students. David shared a similar story with me. He gave me a compliment. Goodness, when Ben gave you a compliment you knew it was genuine and authentic. For me, the oversized cantor shoes began to fit my feet knowing Ben had confidence in me.

Ben's first cantor was his father. Perhaps that is why he created music that so beautifully amplified the cantorial voice in harmony with the congregational voice. I like imagining little Ben singing in his choir and then conducting the choir by 12 years old, planting seeds of melodies we would one day sing in synagogues around the world.

Ben had a deep love for Israel and Japan. Singing Shalom Rav with the Shinonome choir of Japan, while on tour in Toronto, under Ben's baton was an unforgettable experience. As much for watching Ben lead this beloved choir as it was to watch the choir members in deep awe and reverence for their beloved composer, conductor, and teacher. When I sang again with them in Japan and saw Ben's picture on the wall of their church, I began to realize he was something of a patron saint of music.

A last story about the humble man who won some the greatest awards our people give to our greatest leaders and teachers. Ben came home for lunch one day while he was teaching music at the local high school. He was composing a new piece for Cantor Severin Weingort. Before he went back, he complained to his beloved wife and partner, Machi that he didn't think there was any future for the piece. She listened and said he should stick with it. It's very good. We now know it as... (sing) 'Shalom Rav....'

Cantor Katie Oringel