

*Temple Sinai Music Committee member Kent Allen had a chance to talk with Cantor Mann about this year's special Shabbat Shira on February 6, 2026.*

For composer and cantor Becky Mann, tradition is important, but context is key. While the words in the Talmud may remain unchanged, the world never stops evolving. Mann's task: Finding the words in our modern-day lexicon to relate the lessons and tales of the past to the present.

"I've always been drawn to writing Jewish music, particularly with my own interpretive English," says Mann, who is Temple Sinai's cantor-in-residence for five weekends over the course of this year. Among those weekends is Shabbat Shira (Sabbath of Song), which takes place the evening of February 6.

Making the evening featuring her compositional work unique will be a string quartet, small band and choir. "We wanted to add a different musical texture to elevate Shabbat Shira," Mann says. "We hope that [those additions] will truly make this a special night of song."

The cantor, who is now assistant cantor at Temple Israel in Westport, Connecticut, grew up in Las Vegas, where she was part of a teen choir at her family's temple, eventually leading services on occasion. She then earned a degree and was enrolled in the pre-cantorial program at Indiana University before attending Hebrew Union College and earning a master's degree in 2023 from the HUC Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. Along the way, Mann developed a strong interest in composing music and lyrics, especially by connecting age-old Jewish lessons to a contemporary audience. Mann cites Debbie Friedman's approach.

"Each time a composer produces a piece, they're doing their midrash," Mann says. "I like to take a line of text and see how it's relevant to today." (Mann's cantorial school thesis focused on Friedman's influence on today's Jewish music via her students and followers.) One of those "midrash" songs Mann will be performing is "Ozi V'Zimrat Yah" (roughly "God Is My Strength and My Song"). In one of the verses, Mann ties her lyrics to the Israelites' rejoicing after crossing the sea.

Maker of changing tides,  
Maker of every wave we ride  
Oh, we ebb and we flow,  
But we grow through the highs and the lows.

"Our people have been singing ever since that first moment of freedom," Mann points out. It is no surprise to Mann, noting that "our songs give us so much strength as people." Besides Temple Sinai, Mann has had the opportunity for similar stints elsewhere

throughout the country. Everywhere she finds that in a post-October 7 challenging climate for Jews, music is fundamental to resilience. “It’s really healing in so many ways.”

In her brief introduction last summer to the Temple Sinai community, Mann says she was happy to see an environment where “meaningful and intentional prayer” is stressed, and often through music. For her part in that focus, “I lean into how we can look into our tradition … at how our ancestors struggled. This isn’t a new story.”

And for the shy in voice, she is reassuring: “I want people to be able to sing along; I want people to join in.”