

Cantor Benjamin Z. Maissner

<https://www.cantorbenymaissner.com/>

Cantor Emeritus

Holy Blossom Temple
Toronto, Canada

To my dear friends at the Villa Seligmann,

It is such an honour for me to send my humble and sincere congratulations, on the occasion of your 10th anniversary.

Faculty (part-time)

Abraham Geiger
College
Potsdam, Germany

My association with the Villa Seligmann is much longer than these 10 years. It stretches back to my ancestral connection with the city of Hannover, the home of my parents until 1936 when they fled Germany. My Uncle, Israel Alter, was Hannover's last great *Oberkantor*, serving the community from 1925 to 1935.

In the mid-1980s, Professor Andor Izsak kindly invited me to Hannover, to sing in the *Lola Fischel Altersheim*. He was already dreaming of creating a European centre for Jewish music.

Conductor & Music Director

LACHAN Jewish
Chamber Choir
Toronto, Canada

Over the next several years, I visited many times at Andor's invitation to participate in *Kristallnacht* commemorations. In 2012, I saw the raw spaces and empty walls of an unfinished building, known as the Villa. I witnessed its reshaping and development, as it rose to physical and spiritual glory. I was honoured to meet dignitaries, mayors, presidents, and religious leaders who were associated with the Villa, and was blessed to forge close relationships and acquire new friends. It is always a privilege to perform at the Villa, and especially emotional to perform Israel Alter's secular and liturgical music, which my uncle also sang in Hannover, decades earlier.

The decision to donate my personal family treasures to the Villa Seligmann and European Centre for Jewish Music was an easy one to make. These treasures included the original recordings of Israel Alter, dating back to 1925, and my uncle's personal scrapbook that was beautifully published. I strongly believe these monumental heirlooms belong where they were created and performed and that they should be made accessible to those who are interested.

The Villa's illustrious past, however, does not overshadow its present. I am overwhelmed, time and time again, by the new initiatives of the current Director, my dear friend Eliah Sakakushev-Von Bismarck. With his creativity, vision, leadership, and musicianship, Eliah has widened the scope of Jewish musical experiences. The international artists and the music they bring to the Villa serve as a global beacon for those passionate about Jewish music and they ensure the Villa maintains the highest standards and a dignified profile.

My heart is with you all, as you celebrate this milestone, the Villa's exceptional past and present, and what I know will be an extraordinary future. I am deeply honoured to have been part of the Villa Seligmann and look forward to our continued collaboration.

As we say in Hebrew, *mazal tov!*

With affection, your loyal friend,

Beny