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A German Tour

When Jews and Christians join together in concert

For the first time, seventy Jewish cantors travel throughout Germany – and in Berlin

Hebrew songs on the one side, Gregorian chant on the other. Every last seat in the nave of the Berliner Dom was filled as these sounds filled the cathedral. The light and clear female voices alternated with the dark and strong male voices, and ultimately joined together in song. More than one thousand attended the ecumenical gala concert presented by the “Cantors Assembly”, including Federal President Joachim Gauck with his partner Daniela Schadt, along with ambassadors from the United States and Canada.

This concert marks the first German tour for these seventy Jewish cantors from the USA, Canada, Europe and Israel. Together with twenty professional singers from Berlin, the program was presented under the direction of cathedral cantor Tobias Brommann and cantor Nick Strimple. Entitled “Shared Music-Shared Message,” this unique concert was the first such event in Germany’s history.

“It is something special when Jews and Christians give a concert together that highlights a shared tradition,” said the cathedral cantor before the performance. Cathedral pastor Petra Zimmermann mentioned in her greeting that on such a day specific liturgical protocol be momentarily set aside. Indeed, adherence to such rules would not allow for this joyful presentation of centuries-old shared psalm settings by Jewish cantors and Christian singers. With this presentation in the Berlin Cathedral the “Cantors Assembly” has attempted through very specific means to inform the audience of “the vast amounts of textual and musical material that has been shared by the Jewish and Christian traditions throughout the thousand-year history of Jews in Germany.” Above all the concert should serve to deepen a mutual understanding between the two religious groups.

The interest in this ecumenical gala concert was enormous. One hour before the concert began visitors had already begun streaming through the front gate. Among these visitors was Ute Doepner who, along with her husband, hurried to secure a seat in the nave. The married couple had travelled from Westhavelland, having read about the concert in their local church bulletin. “I am quite interested in this joint presentation of Jewish and Christian music,” said Ute Doepner. Although she admitted to knowing little about Jewish music, she expressed excitement at the

opportunity to learn more about it. Inspired by a feature on the radio program "Kulturradio," Holger Dornbusch made his way to the Berlin Cathedral. Karlshorster mentioned that he enjoyed the similarity between the different sounds and that he was very interested in hearing more. He plays piano himself and often makes music with his girlfriend who plays violin.

For the seventy Jewish cantors this presentation was no doubt the highlight of the concert tour. The group has been on the road for several days and plans, after additional stops in Hannover and Berlin, to visit Munich. The "Cantors Assembly," with its almost 600 members, is the world's largest organization for Jewish cantors.