

CANTOR BRUCE L. RUBEN, Ph. D.

Biography

(686 words)

Bruce L. Ruben has been a national leader of American Reform Judaism, a dynamic director of the Cantorial School of Hebrew Union College, a master teacher at Hunter College for almost thirty years, and a guest lecturer at prominent universities in the United States and Great Britain. He is a published scholar and mentor to many young academics. At the same time, he has served with distinction as a cantor in both large and small congregations on the East Coast. Through all these activities he has created powerful and enduring connections with thousands of students, congregants, rabbis, cantors, and national leaders.

Bruce was raised in Portland Oregon, not an obvious starting point for this career. There were very few Jews in his public school and his family observed minimal Jewish rituals. After his bar mitzvah, he promptly quit Hebrew School to learn to ski at nearby Mt. Hood on the weekends. Surprisingly, he became involved in Judaism at Indiana University, where he pursued Bachelors (music) and Masters (comparative religion) degrees. When the Hillel director found out he was a voice major, he urged him to learn the melodies of the services so that he could lead them. As fate would have it, his voice teacher, to whom he was assigned arbitrarily, had been a part time cantor as well as an internationally acclaimed opera singer. He taught Bruce the melodies for the High Holy Day services. Leading these services was so satisfying that he decided to attend the Jewish Theological Seminary to become a cantor.

Bruce gained a much-needed grounding in traditional Judaism at the Seminary. However, after serving Conservative synagogues as a student cantor, he elected to audition for a Reform congregation. He became the cantor of Temple Shaaray Tefila, a large East Side New York City synagogue, for the next twenty-four years. He conducted three choirs, taught many adult education courses, trained over 1500 Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, and inspired congregants with his singing. He also fostered interfaith relations as a member of the Board of Directors of the Yorkville Christian-Jewish Council and was active for many years in community activities at a neighborhood senior citizen center.

During those years he also earned a Ph.D. in Jewish History and began teaching at Hunter College of the City University of New York. He published his dissertation, *Max Lienthal: The Making of the American Rabbinate* at Wayne State University Press. He would have stayed at Hunter and Shaaray Tefila for the rest of his career if he not been offered the opportunity to become the director of the School of Sacred Music, the cantorial school for the Jewish Reform Movement. Over the nine years of his directorship, he created a new Core Curriculum to bring

cantorial education into the twenty-first century. He established a Distance Learning Program, a pre-cantorial program to prepare undergraduates for cantorial school, created a Leadership Fellows program, instituted master classes to introduce students to important synagogue composers, along with many administrative and fundraising activities. He spoke at national conventions and was instrumental in raising the status of cantors in the Reform Movement.

After retiring from the directorship Bruce served several synagogues in a part-time capacity and returned to teaching Jewish History courses at Hunter, where he was interim director of Jewish Studies for three years. Currently he serves as sole spiritual leader of Temple Beth Am in Parsippany New Jersey and continues to teach at Hunter.

Bruce has continued to publish articles and give lectures on many aspects of Jewish history and music in synagogues and universities around the country. During Covid he embarked on a many-year project to write a history of antisemitism, which he teaches yearly at Hunter. Unhappy with the texts available for undergraduates, he has written an accessible narrative which is still grounded in extensive research. As antisemitic rhetoric and violence continues to increase, the need for an account of the underlying dynamics of this ancient scourge becomes more and more pressing.

Bruce is married to the prominent musician Judith Clurman. They enjoy their son Ari and his wife Alexandra and their two grandchildren, Penelope and Oscar.

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Short Biography

(344 words)

Cantor Bruce Ruben was raised in Portland Oregon. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in music and a Master's in religion from Indiana University. He went on to the Jewish Theological Seminary where he became a cantor. He served Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell New Jersey his last year of cantorial school and his first year after ordination. Then he began a twenty-four-year tenure at Temple Shaaray Tefila in New York City. He trained 1500 B'nai Mitzvah students, directed a professional quartet, as well as adult and children's choirs. He also taught a wide range of adult education courses from the history of Jewish Music to Jewish Mysticism. Cantor Ruben was also active in interfaith work, serving on the board of the Yorkville Christian Jewish Council.

While serving as the congregation's cantor, he earned a Ph.D. in history from the Graduate School of City University. Dr. Ruben's dissertation was on the early American Reform rabbi Max Lillienthal, which was subsequently published as *Max Lillienthal: The Making of the American Rabbinate* by Wayne State University Press. He has presented papers at scholarly conferences and been a guest lecturer at the University of Virginia, The Juilliard School, and Cambridge University. Cantor Ruben has published articles on Jewish music and Reform Jewish history in numerous scholarly journals and taught Jewish history at Hunter College since the 1990s.

Beginning in July of 2006 Cantor Ruben became the Director of the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. He revamped the curriculum to reflect the changing cantorate and started a distance learning program. Leaving the DFSSM in 2015, Cantor Ruben was interim director of Jewish Studies at Hunter College for three years and cantor at Brooklyn Heights Synagogue for five years. He continues to teach Jewish history at Hunter, covering the entire range from the biblical to modern periods, including yearly courses on the History of Antisemitism. Bruce is married to the prominent musician Judith Clurman. They enjoy their son Ari and his wife Alexandra and their two grandchildren, Penelope and Oscar.