

Music is integral to The Village Temple. This year we are pleased to have Cantor Nancy Bach on the bimah every Friday night, and for the High Holidays. Cantor Bach has been part of our Shabbat services and B'nei Mitzvah training program for the past two years. Collaborating with Anita Hollander, director of children's choir and accompanist, and jazz pianist Hila Kulik, Cantor Bach brings intellectual depth, enthusiasm, creativity and spirituality to our services.

What makes a great service from your perspective?

One that provides a number of different doorways - spoken, musical, intellectual - where people can find a way to enter, based on their own background and preferences. Since music is my area, I'll start there. Music should touch people's hearts and bypass that intellectual place that we all need to leave behind every once in a while. And from there I hope that a good service will teach about how to reach out of ourselves toward something larger and broader than all of us. and will elevate the prayer moment. Perhaps from there **transformation and even transcendence**, in the words of Merri Arian, one of my favorite teachers, can happen. If there is a connection to the liturgy and our Jewish history - or a new lightbulb that flashes for someone - then that is wonderful.

You had an entirely different career before you decided to enter cantorial school at Hebrew Union College. What were the pros and cons of being a more experienced person as you took on the role of cantor?

I gave a career in musical theater a good 4 year shot right after my undergraduate years at Brown University, then convinced myself that being a corporate event producer would be a natural segue! After working at Lehman Brothers in that capacity and then at a variety of PR firms, and then finally at the NY Times producing arts and literary festivals, I wound up running my own business doing a combination of all of those - marketing, PR, event production, promotions and sponsorships. It was from there that I decided to make a change, and I'm so glad I did.

Being able to understand more about the world and any organization from a business and budget perspective, from a public relations perspective and frankly from any angle where people need to work as a team to get anything accomplished, has been a benefit of my past experience that I am grateful for.

Rabbis and Cantors train for a minimum of 5 years to be able to have the knowledge we need to at least start our careers. It was hard to be a student about 20 years older than most others, but I pinch myself on a daily basis that I came to this work exactly when I did. Our world is broken, and I've never felt more fortunate than I do now to be able to make my small contribution to helping those I serve, to find at least a small semblance of peace and wholeness, if only for the moment.

Cantor Bach, you became a single mother at age 47, not that long after you became a cantor.

Tell us how you balance these two demanding jobs, being a cantor and being Caleb's mother?

The challenges that I didn't anticipate have centered around just how busy life is as a Cantor, or for any Clergy person. As an educator and care-taker for others, there's been a lot of learning in regard to finding the balance between self-care and making sure I'm there for those that I'm serving. Particularly now with a small child - my son is almost 4 years old - I've learned that without putting real time aside to eat well and to exercise and to take some breaks from work to

do many other things I love, I am really not serving anyone for the best. I am so grateful for Shabbat every week. As one of my colleagues just reminded me, it is truly amazing that Judaism gives us a direct order to relax and find joy and fun for one full day each week!

Could you tell us about your Jewish upbringing and what inspired you to become a cantor?

I was raised as part of a Reform/Secular Jewish family here in NYC – in Manhattan. While Jewish practice and synagogue life were not a prominent part of my daily upbringing, I did identify strongly with Jewish culture, and was raised in an immediate family with decidedly Jewish values – my mother is a social worker with a giant sense of empathy, whose work has centered around helping homeless women with children and also counseling prisoners as they transition out of incarceration; my father is a musician – and had a career as a banker — and my sister is a civil rights lawyer and journalist who is dedicated to exposing and reforming injustice in our society. I did have a home-based Bat Mitzvah, held in my family's living room, but it's very safe to say that my own spiritual growth and real Jewish knowledge and experience did not begin until later in life, by about my mid-30's. I was climbing the proverbial corporate ladder, taking pride in getting things accomplished, but something wasn't right. I wanted to connect to the world in a quieter, more loving, and peaceful way. The catalyst to my spiritual journey was a deeply personal one – a divorce. What came of that experience was a passion for self-exploration that led to learning about my roots, about spirituality and about what God and a higher Source mean. Hand in hand with this quest came a 2nd passion – to return to what had always been my first love, which is music. This combination led me to cantorial school. So for me, a sense of faith has developed in different layers of experience and connection and meaning.