

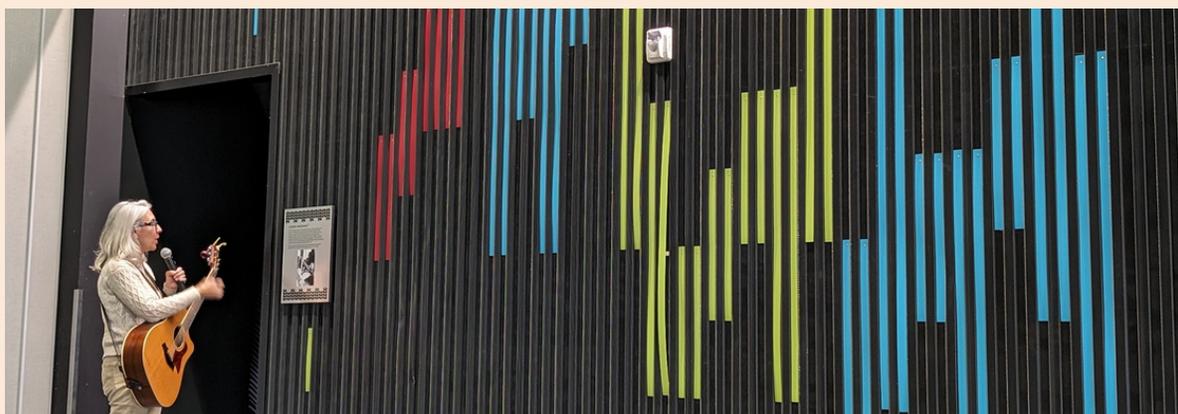


Year in Review



2023

Opening Notes



Sing Unto God stands on the shoulders of all who came before. The photo above comes from Shabbat Shira at OSRUI this past October. Their new Cultural Center offers a beautiful tribute to Debbie Friedman, with an art installation that represents the song that gave us our name and, really, our mission.

2023 proved to be an important year for our little organization, as our purpose came into focus, our programs reached farther and deeper, and our momentum accelerated significantly.

On the following pages, you'll find highlights from both our work and the building of Sing Unto God, along with photos of some of the people who give our community its power.

And, of course, this is the point: community.

We are interested not in showcasing great performers, producing concerts, or even teaching how to write the next interpretation of L'Cha Dodi.

Rather, we're interested in how we spread the magic that happens when a talented, committed songleader and a congregation, classroom, or camp sing together - finding a shared connection in Jewish music and tradition that elevates everyone.

This is how we create foundational experiences for children, bring new life to worship spaces, and build Jewish communities of all ages that are strong, vibrant, and involved in the work of healing the world.

It would be negligent not to acknowledge that 2023 also saw great loss and pain in our community and world. How each one of us responds individually is up to us alone, but as a people we found that, once again, it is song that brought forth healing, comfort, and the strength to carry on.

We are steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that those who stand on OUR shoulders have the skills and resources to lead this important work. Thank you for supporting us.

Cathy Rosalie Will

The Portable Magic of Hava Nashira

Concerned that too large a share of Jewish communal resources were going to only the most obvious places, we looked for a new thriving Jewish community that would welcome our communal vision. No surprise, we found it in Texas.

Truth be told, we were apprehensive about moving the beloved songleading conference to URJ Greene Family Camp from its midwest home of over 30 years. But, from the beginning, the response was overwhelmingly positive.



Starting with a Jewish hoedown in Austin a few months before the main event, we found a community and region ready to sing and welcome peers from across North America. In the end, we sold out Hava Nashira with 120 attendees.

This year's conference culminated in a powerful campfire singalong (yes, that's Cantor Jeff Klepper singing Dylan above). Best of all, we learned that—with the right intentions—the unique power of Hava Nashira can be recreated anywhere.

Professional Development

We offered songleaders and educators lessons and support in sharpening their skills, expanding their repertoire, and revitalizing their vision for worship and education.

The goal was to help them build thriving singing communities where they work, and to create the spaces, programs, and events that leverage Jewish content to bring healing and inspiration through music.

Shabbat Shira

With the Jewish community reeling from October 7th, 50 longtime and new friends gathered in Oconomowoc at OSRUI to celebrate Shabbat, learn from one another, sing, and heal.

A retreat in the truest sense of the world, staff and attendees alike were nourished and refreshed, with the crisp Wisconsin fall air rejuvenating our bodies and souls.

A beautiful complement to Hava Nashira, we are thrilled to offer this intimate, powerful Shabbat weekend every fall.

“I spent two years in the Sing Unto God Teen Songleader Fellowship and I learned so many skills. This time prepared me to songlead with youth groups, summer camps, and now on college campus. Sing Unto God has left a very positive impact on me and my Jewish faith.” - Shayna Suddeth, University of Georgia

Pipelining the Next Generation

Almost all of the great Jewish clergy, educators, and communal leaders who utilize music in their work sat at the feet of a mentor who taught them the value of Jewish community building, and how to transform a room from just leader and audience into a single collective, reaching for something higher, something deeper.

This work is central to the mission of Sing Unto God, and we are advancing it through three growing programs.

Teen Songleader Fellowship

We were thrilled to welcome more than 20 teens for this year’s national cohort. The training kicked off with a retreat in Atlanta in October, hosted by The Temple.

Through a mix of in-person retreat, online coaching, special guest teachers, and support of dedicated mentors in each teen’s home congregation, we will provide meaningful and useful lessons, real-world experience, and peer camaraderie that will last a lifetime.

URJ Creative Arts Academy

This past summer, thanks to a grant from the Jonah Maccabee Foundation, we partnered with URJ’s newest camp to create a dedicated songleading track.

As many of us know, there is nothing like a summer songleading intensive at camp. We expect to grow this program with CAA next summer and beyond, and are looking for more communities to send teens for life-changing bonding, growth, and songleader skill and character development.

Summer Sparks

Since our founding, one of our priorities is rebuilding the camp songleader pipeline, which has atrophied due to funding challenges as well as an assumption that “great songleaders” would always be available. It is hard to quantify the immediate value of quality camp songleading until its absence is felt years later in the dearth of young Jewish communal leadership.

We are approaching 2024 with new models based on participant feedback and community input. Our goal is both to support emerging songleaders as well as to facilitate thoughtful community-wide consideration of the relationship between singing at summer camp and strong, future-focused congregations and organizations.





Responding to Crisis

As news of the terrorist attacks in Israel began to sink in, SUG's board and staff sprang into action. We called on our wide and deep network of colleagues and peers, coordinating a musical response to cushion the shock.

Our Hearts Are in the East, streamed live just three days after the news broke, featured 22 performers from across the Jewish community, and was viewed by more than 26,000 people.

One of the many highlights of the evening was a performance by Chava Mirel of her stirring song Our Hope is Not Lost (screenshot below), the winner of the 1992 NFTY Song Competition. It was a prime example of what can happen years down the road when the Jewish community nurtures a teen's talent and interest.

The evening reinforced the incalculable value of great songleading. Plus, we were able to pass through almost \$5,000 in donations to JFNA and American Friends of Sheba Medical Center from viewers.



Reactions from Social Media to SUG Israel Solidarity Event

Thank you for your leadership in bringing calm and space for all of of us with song and prayer. There is comfort in the melodies, songs, and people of my childhood to young adulthood.
- Debra Feldstein

This couldn't have been a more moving evening. Thank you, each one of you for doing your bit to help heal our hearts and souls.
- Elly Sherman-Weisz

Thank you all, friends and colleagues, for coming together and bringing poetry and music...it is through peaceful expression - like this - that the world will heal, even in this moment when it is so hard to comprehend that.
- Mitch Gordon

I'm grateful this program will be available for us to revisit when ever we need to feel closer to Israel and Our People. Thank you again!
- Debbie Percelay

Just so beautiful and soulful. Wish we could all be in a circle arm and arm singing with you.
- Tracy Sarner Kahn

This is EXACTLY what I need tonight ... my heart is broken and I feel so helpless. Thank you all.
- Karen Hayes Chapman

Thank you to all who participated for sharing your heartfelt musical contributions. Thank you to Sing Unto God for organizing this beautiful and deeply meaningful evening of music.
- Rob Aronson



Building a Sustainable Business

Thanks to two substantial grants from Upstart as part of their Venture Accelerator Cohort, we were able to work with top consultants to sharpen our mission, map out the next few years of growth, and build a fundraising plan that will expand our reach and impact.

Additionally, Executive Director Rosalie Will continued to deepen her professional relationships, leading to participation in a Jews of Color Shared Leadership Community of Practice with our Board Chair Gina Drangel, and a place in the Jewish Women in the Leadership Suite program at Elluminate.

We also grew our staff, with the addition of two powerful Jewish women: Debra Winter, our new Program Director, leads the Teen Songleading Fellowships; and Rabbi Melissa Zalkin Stollman takes over as Conference and Operations Manager from Rose Snitz. We can't thank Rose enough for her integral role in bringing SUG to life.

In the next two years we have dreams to expand our reach with teens who lead in your communities, begin deep cohort work with college age and young adult songleaders on campus, camps and full time in your congregations. We can't do

this without your support for building our capacity and resources.

This winter marks two years for Sing Unto God. We were lucky to have an inaugural Board of Directors that was deeply experienced in Jewish music, community building, strategic planning, and business development. We want to express our sincere appreciation for their belief in the need for this organization.

If you are interested in serving as a Board Member for the next phase of SUG, let us know. There's lots of work to do!

Come join us.



SUG Staff and Board Members gather with consultant Avi Oltzky to plan the future.

Acknowledgements

We have been honored to have countless folks on our team - with formal roles, or as thought partners, dreamers, and cheerleaders.

In daily conversations with camp directors, congregational educators, and communal workers, Rosalie hears, "Thank you for doing this work. We know that without strong communal singing, we can't build the meaningful Jewish impact we must, and we need strong songleaders to do that!"

Our committed teachers, facilitators, mentors, and musicians continue to support our work by recommending songleaders of all ages to join in our learning together, and are committed to helping us build more dynamic and thriving communities with song at the center. We are grateful for their guidance and commitment.

Our Clergy Campaign donors provide needed funds to run teen songleading programs, to help us rebuild the much needed pipeline.

Our partners in all movements and seminaries dream with us about what's possible. We are grateful for JCCA and FJC, Upstart and Elluminate, our consultants Avi Oltzky of Oltzky Consulting Group and Lauren Brownstein of Pitch Consulting, and invaluable sources of guidance and advice in Lisa Messinger, Rabbi Ramie Arian and Mark Pelavin, to name just a few.

We are indebted to the URJ for being a sponsor of Hava Nashira, and to generous underwriters of that program Barbara and Phil Melzer, through their the Make it a Bridge Fund.

Special thanks go to each and every member of the Sing Unto God community. Your talent, voice, spirit, and deep commitment to Jewish community building is our strength and inspiration. It is what makes us greater than the sum of our parts.



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