

Incandescent Cantor Caps Jewish Culture Fest

By Suzanne Thompson

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Joseph Malovany, the "Pavarotti of the synagogue" and by general consensus the finest cantor in the world, will appear in concert here this Sunday to cap off a 12-day festival of Jewish culture in celebration of the 3,000th anniversary of the founding of Jerusalem.

Malovany will perform in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with the Evgeny Svetlanov Symphony Orchestra, directed by Arnold Katz, and the Jewish Male Choir of the Moscow Academy of Cantorial Arts. The concert, featuring Jewish liturgical and folk music, will crown the festival's series of film showings, photo and art exhibits, and concerts.

Malovany comes to Moscow from New York, where he has been cantor at the Fifth Avenue synagogue since 1973 and teaches liturgical music as a distinguished professor at Yeshiva University. Born in Tel Aviv, he trained as a pianist and vocalist in Israel, South Africa and England. His rich, velvet spinto tenor has won him a wide following through numerous recordings and concert appearances in the Middle East, North America and Europe.

The first half of Sunday's concert will feature Malovany and the chorus — which he helped found in 1989 — in mostly a cappella works. The second half will pair cantor and chorus with the much-heralded Svetlanov ensemble.

Several years ago, a concert of this kind — much less an entire festival — would have been difficult indeed to present. But during the Gorbachev era and the subsequent relaxation of religious intolerance, Russia's Jewish community began to enjoy a religious and cultural renaissance.

Malovany stepped into the Jewish cultural vacuum, arriving first in 1989

under the auspices of the American-based Joint Distribution Committee, known also as Joint. He performed in Leningrad at the Great Choral Synagogue in the first concert of Jewish liturgical music held there since the Bolshevik Revolution.

"They [the members of Joint] felt that the way to get through to as many people as possible would be through music, because the Russian people are very musically inclined," Malovany said Thursday after arriving in Moscow.

"Philosophically speaking, it was a very important move," he said of the decision to bring his music to what was then the Soviet Union. The cantorial tradition thrived in Russia at the end of the last century, but many of its practitioners left Russia with the outbreak of the revolution. One of those who left was Solomon Ravits, who had sung in Kharkov and Odessa. He settled in Israel and taught the younger generation — including Malovany — the secrets of this age-old vocal art. Malovany feels that in coming to this country he is "bringing back to Russia the music that we got from them."

When he was last here, in April 1995, Malovany conducted a seminar in cantorial music. He wanted to remain "incognito," to focus on his teaching without having to perform. His fans, though, insisted on a performance, and he gave a concert in the Conservatory's Small Hall. Of his Sunday concert, he says, "I'm delighted to be going from the Minor [Small] Hall to the Major [Great] Hall."

Malovany is a musician of considerable breadth, known not only for his cantorial prowess but for his performances of opera arias, oratorio works and lieder. But he decided not to pursue a career on the stage, because such a lifestyle — including requisite performances on the Sabbath — was inconsis-

tent with his duties and responsibilities as a cantor and Orthodox Jew.

The male chorus accompanying Malovany has thrived since its founding in 1989 under the artistic direction of Vladimir Pliss, cantor at the Moscow Synagogue, and the baton of Alexander Tsalyuk, a doctoral candidate in choral conducting at the Moscow Conservatory. Established with assistance from Joint, the chorus performs locally in synagogues and on tours throughout Europe. The choir has a rich repertoire, including the standard liturgical and folk pieces,

along with 20th-century works such as Joseph Dorfman's "Spiritual Dialogues."

For those eager to experience more of Jewish culture, a presentation of photos, "The Spirit of Jerusalem," is on display at the Central House of Artists, on Krymsky Val, through April 7. The exhibit celebrates the visual intricacies of a city that has for millennia been the center of Jewish life, and is now a crossroads for the region's Jews, Christians and Moslems.

The Moscow celebration of Jerusalem's founding is sponsored by the

Russian Jewish Congress, the Jewish Arts Center, the Culture Ministry and the office of Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

Joseph Malovany and the Evgeny Svetlanov Symphony Orchestra, directed by Arnold Katz, and the Jewish Male Choir of the Moscow Academy of Cantorial Arts will perform Sunday at 7 p.m. in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory at 13 Bolshaya Nikitskaya. Tickets available at the Conservatory or from the Jewish Arts Center, tel. 912-0470. Metro: Pushkinskaya.

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