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## **From Superior to Manhattan – Wisconsin native’s journey to cantor at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue**

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Sofia Rubinson (mailto:) | April 14, 2022 | 13 Nisan 5782 | 13 Nisan 5782

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Daniel Singer, a Wisconsin native, has been a cantor at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City, a historic place of worship, for 16 years. His journey has taken him from growing up without Jewish community to serving a synagogue in Manhattan.

“All of my formative years were in Superior, Wisconsin. I was born in Milwaukee, lived in Eagle River for a year when I was 4-years-old, and I grew up Jewish in Superior, which was unusual,” Singer said.

Like many small Wisconsin towns, Superior had a very small Jewish population when Singer grew up there.

“My mother was the only Israeli in town, and my dad was sort of the resident Jew that the community would look to as a rabbinical figure,” Singer said. “He would speak at local churches about antisemitism. He was the local scholar on Jewish subjects.”

Singer’s father was the research librarian for the local Carnegie Library in Superior and was even named employee of the year by the city of Superior. His father was passionate about local history and created two documentary films about the role of shipyards in Superior during the World War II war effort.

Despite his Jewish roots, Singer did not have a Jewish community in Superior.

“Because there was no rabbi or cantor in town, I didn’t really have much of a Jewish upbringing aside from what I had at home,” said Singer. His parents were involved in a local Torah study, but Singer did not even have a bar mitzvah until he finished graduate school.

Singer attended the University of Wisconsin-Superior for his undergraduate education before going to the University of Michigan for a master’s program to study opera. During his time in Michigan, he met a cantor who went on to serve as his mentor.

“He was a pivotal figure in my decision to become a cantor,” Singer said. At his father’s deathbed, Singer told him he was going to cantorial school.

Now, Singer is the cantor at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, a Reform synagogue on the upper west side of Manhattan. The synagogue was founded by Rabbi Stephen Wise in 1905 who yearned for a “free” congregation where anyone who addresses the congregation can say what he or she wishes, the first of its kind.

When Singer first joined the congregation in 2006, the synagogue was discussing the possibility of shutting down. Singer worked closely with Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch to revitalize the community.

“My rabbi felt that music was integral to the rebirth of the congregation and that the worship itself is key to synagogues,” Singer said. “It differentiates us. It distinguishes us from just regular Jewish communities.”

Singer said he misses the natural beauty of Wisconsin and was happy to bring his children to his home state on a road trip. It was on his bucket list to show his children the House on the Rock, which he was able to check off on their latest trip. Connecting his passion for music, Singer wrote a tongue in cheek song (<https://soundcloud.com/swfsnyc/a-jew-from-wisconsin-dan-singer>) about being a Jew from Wisconsin.

Singer has a passion for tracing the origins of his family’s genealogy. Through the wonders of genealogical research and drawing off of his father’s research, Singer has been able to trace his family’s roots to many prominent Jewish figures.

“I can trace all of my connections to Bob Dylan, to Billy Crystal, to Barbra Streisand, to all of these different celebrities, which is lovely,” Singer said. “But for me, the biggest part was realizing just how closely connected we are to other people and how destined I was to be doing what I’m doing.”

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