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## Pray it with music



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MUSICIAN Shannyn Gelbart of Melbourne is ready to set worshippers' feet tapping as a songleader for Australia's Progressive synagogues.

The former Brighton Secondary College and RMIT student has just been appointed Jewish Life Fellow at the Centre for Living Judaism (CLJ) and is the first Australian-born musician to fill the post. Songleading will be one of her activities in her new role.

The CLJ, a partnership between the Union for Progressive Judaism (UPJ), Progressive Judaism Victoria (PJV) and The King David School, is a

think-tank for creative programming in Progressive synagogues in Australia, New Zealand and the region.

For Gelbart, who is joining CLJ fellow Stephanie Gratch at the centre, it's a dream come true that began with a chance encounter at Temple Beth Israel some 18 months ago.

"I was told there was an alternative service upstairs so I went to check it out. [Former CLJ fellow] Marshall Voit was running the service, with melodies I'd never heard before, accompanied by guitar, which was a bit different and I loved it," she says.

"I introduced myself afterwards and he said they were running a Shabbat Shirah workshop and as a musician I should come. As soon as I heard the songs and saw what they were doing, I thought this is my dream job: it's musical, it's about Judaism, and it's working with people, which are three of my favourite things."

Gelbart says that the songleader concept was developed in American Reform congregations as "someone who's not singing to the congregation, but teaching a melody and encouraging everyone to join in".

As a CLJ fellow, she is also involved in classroom music teaching, especially on Shabbat and festival themes.

"I've been singing since I could talk and grew up in a musical family," she recalls.

Six years of formal musical training and an advanced diploma in sound engineering have added to her skills.

Visiting the United States, she was the music specialist at a Jewish summer camp in Pennsylvania, and attended the Hava Nashira Jewish music conference in Wisconsin, and a songleader boot camp.

PJV president Brian Samuel says Gelbart's appointment enhances the CLJ significantly.

"When it was started, the CLJ was designed to act as a centre for training young, passionate Jewish individuals in Progressive Judaism.

"It is now evolving as a resource for the current community and also for the wider Jewish community in suburban and regional areas where the Jewish population is not high. It is providing a Jewish presence for Jews who may have grown up in a secular background."

**REPORT** by Peter Kohn

**PHOTO** of Shannyn Gelbart. Photo by Peter Haskin

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