

Nicole Siegel, "Cantors on Trial: The Jazz Singer, Its Responses and the American Jewish Experience, 1927-1937"

In 1927 *The Jazz Singer* took the world by storm. Its simple story of a cantor's son torn between his religion and the modern secular stage resonated with audiences everywhere, but particularly Jewish audiences, who saw themselves in the film. When it first came out, no Jewish organization or paper complained about the film. However, this changed over the next ten years, as communities used the story to form a basis for analyzing and talking about the American Jewish experience, both the positives and the negatives. During this ten year period, there were two major responses to the message of the *Jazz Singer*. The first response was a short film produced in 1931, *A Cantor on Trial*, which took ideas from the *Jazz Singer* and incorporated them into a different response to the message of assimilation espoused by the *Jazz Singer*. The second film response, *The Cantor's Son*, produced in 1937, was seen as a direct response to the *Jazz Singer*. It took a more religious approach to the question of assimilation and American identity. This paper argues that these three films represents three distinct and different approaches to the question of what it means to be Jewish and American. Specifically, it looks at how the films utilize the ideas of authenticity and nostalgia to present varying understandings of the Jewish situation in America.