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Moscow's Jewish choir

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It's no longer a problem for the all-male Jewish choir named Hassidic-Cappella to perform in its home-town of Moscow. After all, Jewish music and culture are no longer forbidden in the Russian capital. That wasn't always the case. But that didn't stop the group's leader from singing anyway. Daniel Rosenberg has our story. -----
 Moscow's Male Jewish Choir, Hassidic Cappella is busy rehearsing for their annual Chanukah concert at Manezh Square, right near the Kremlin. The group specializes in both Jewish liturgical music and Yiddish folk songs. Its leader is Alexander Tsaliuk. His family managed to secretly observe Jewish holidays through the entire Soviet era. Alexander Tsaliuk
 Tsaliuk described how he celebrated holidays like Passover and Chanukah with his grandfather. Tsaliuk: "Because it was forbidden, he invited the whole family, closed the curtains, we brought our telephone into the bathroom and opened the water because we knew that the telephone was being listened to by the KGB." Indeed, Tsaliuk's grandfather, Leyb was arrested in 1952 when the KGB learned of his religious practices, and was released the following year after Stalin's death. In 1989, when American Jewish institutions began funding cultural organizations in the Soviet Union, Leyb encouraged his grandson, Alexander Tsaliuk to launch a Jewish Choir. That year, Tsaliuk met Mikhael Gorbachev. Tsaliuk: "In 1989, when Gorbachev gave us permission to re-establish the choir. he also gave

permission to go to the archive of the KGB and see "arrested materials" they opened for us the basement of the Lenin library, It was deep underground near the Kremlin, and the KGB guy brought several boxes full of dust." For Tsaliuk, this was a goldmine: sealed dusty boxes that hadn't been opened since the 1930s full of religious texts, folk songs, and even scores for Jewish choirs that had existed in Russia before the Communist Revolution. Tsaliuk: "It was like a hidden and lost slice of culture: for us, like the Egyptian pyramids." Tsaliuk then bribed the guard with carton of Marlboro cigarettes to allow the group to mimeograph these precious materials. Today, the songs from the Soviet vaults, and ones that Alexander Tsaliuk's grandfather risked arrest to preserve are part of the repertoire for the Hassidic-Cappella Chanukah concert. For the World's I'm Daniel Rosenberg in Moscow.

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