

Shlom Bayyit

There's Jewish Music in the Air

Hear it at synagogue every Shabbat.....and let its sounds echo in your home. Thanks to the loving efforts of so many, a CD collection of our music has come this year with membership at TBR. Play it at home to develop a familiarity when you pray with us in our sanctuary; play it at home and bring a spiritual dimension into your daily life. As a people, Jews have found a clear expression of the most complex of emotions through music, both religious and secular. This connection spans our history from biblical to modern times.

Liturgical Music:

The Torah and Talmud record that ancient Jews used both vocal and instrumental music to mark all their important celebrations. Ritual music was at first recitative chanting of the Torah and later came to include prayers and biblical poetry. According to the Mishnah, the 2nd Temple had a choir of 12 Levites and an orchestra. After its destruction, as an act of mourning, instrumental music was forbidden. Among traditional Jews this ban is still maintained. King David is described as a skilled musician who utilized his gift to praise God. He is described as the author of the majority of Psalms. *Psalm 150*: "Praise God with lyre and harp...with drum and dance.....with organ and flute... with clanging cymbals... with resonant trumpets.

Cantorial Music:

It is recorded in the Mishnah that poet-performers, *paytanim*, with trained voices led congregations in poetic prayers, *piyutim* - the best known of which may be Adon Olam. (See our CD #22) As knowledge of Hebrew began to decline in the Middle Ages, they became permanent members of the clergy and may have been the forerunners of the modern day *hazzan*/cantor. Although traditionally cantors were men, women now serve this role in liberal congregations. During the "Golden Age" of *hazzanut*, great cantors included the famous opera singers Jan Peerce, Robert Merrill and Robert Tucker.

Reform Movement music:

This movement pushed the liturgical music boundaries by adding organ accompaniment and trained choirs who sang in the vernacular during 19th century German worship. A more moderate reform has evolved in recent years.

Hasidic Music:

The Hasidic movement was founded by Rabbi Israel Baal

Shem Tov (1700 - 1760) who preached that joy not sadness should dominate our relationship with God. Consequently, music dominates Hasidic life. Hasidim treasure the human voice, through which they believe one can attain salvation, remove evil, and reach the ultimate communion with God. The essence of Hasidic music centers around the *niggun*, a wordless repetitive melody that is meant to lift you beyond yourself. *Ay-ay-ay, ya-ba-bim, bim-bam* – said repeatedly, in community and you come to know a deep spiritual sense.

Klezmer music:

This style of secular, mainly instrumental music developed during the 15th century. It is often referred to as "Yiddish Music" due to its Ashkenazi (Eastern European) lineage. A typical orchestra includes a violin, a bass or cello, a *tsimbi* (dulcimer) and a flute. Much of the music is for dancing – perfect for weddings and other celebrations.

Ethnic Jewish Music:

Jews scattered in the Diaspora have assimilated the sounds of their new homes into their Jewish traditions. The music that originated in Eastern Europe (the Balkans, Romania, Bulgaria) and moved westward and northward throughout Europe and later into North America, belongs to the Ashkenazi tradition. Sephardic sounds originated when Jews, expelled from Spain, took with them a version of Spanish called *Ladino* (Judeo-Spanish). As they assimilated in countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Turkey and Greece, they incorporated new melodies and rhythms into their musical expression.

Jews in Music:

Shlomo Carlebach (1925 – 1994) was a man with a unique personality who used his music to reach Jews of all backgrounds. He wrote and sang purposely repetitive Hasidic-style songs interspersed with stories and inspirational messages. Carlebach is considered by many to be the foremost Jewish religious songwriter in the second half of the 20th century and his melodies continue to have wide popularity and appeal. Carlebach Shabbats are commonplace.

The ritual committee applauds all those who have donated their collective talents and resources to make Shirat Rishon: A Celebration of Shabbat Through Song "come to life." It is living proof of what we can do as a Jewish community and how essential a role music plays in our Jewish tradition. We at TBR take to heart the injunction of Torah, "Let us sing to God a new song."

