Judaism 101 for the Rest of Us

Including the World’s Fastest Hebrew Crash Course for Choral Conductors for Chorus America 2016 Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio

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Annotated Bibliography

Judaism 101, Jewish Music, etc.

  - You might consider this the “New Grove for Jewish Music.” This one-volume historical survey attempts to answer the question, “How have the values and traditions of Jewish people been reflected in music produced throughout the world and throughout history?” Chapters on psalmody (what we can know of it), music in the diaspora, issues of modernity, Jewish concert/art music, Yiddish Theatre, synagogue music in the USA, music of Israel, and American popular music. Edelman brings a keen ear and a thorough historical and cultural grounding to her book.

  - A somewhat unusual but helpful book, Rabbi Neusner discusses Judaism in terms of “the story it tells”—the narrative of the Jewish people. He outlines the ways in which various groups of people identify with and tell the story for themselves, which leads to the tremendous variety in Jewish practices found around the world.

  - A compelling collection of theological essays by Heschel, one of the greatest Jewish figures of the 20th century. He was—among other things—a Chassidic rabbi, beloved seminary professor, and force for social justice (including marching with Dr. King in Selma in March, 1965). A must-read if you want a sense of contemporary Jewish morality, told with tremendous dignity and without polemics.

  - A fabulous book. Does a better job of explaining the contradictions of Israel than anything I’ve read so far, based on a thorough, even-handed understanding of history from before the partition of Palestine. It will break your heart and open your mind, whatever you happen to think of the political situation there.

  - A non-technical, well-written introduction to the inner world of the Talmud, told in a way that I’ve found engaging and enlightening. The author is “on fire” about the
aliveness of the Talmud and sees Talmud study as a vital force for the future of Judaism. If you’ve ever wondered why Jews are so inquisitive, this may help you understand.

- Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, That Doesn't Sound Jewish*. SUNY Press, 20004
  - Very inventive book on the connections between synagogue melodies, Yiddish theater, and the beginnings of Tin Pan Alley and Broadway musicals. A little exaggerated in places, but his overall theme is wonderful and infectious.

**Additional Resources**

  - A significant collection of 173 songs for Reform worship. Headings include:
    - Kabbalat Shabbat (welcoming Shabbat)
    - Birchot HaShachar (morning blessings)
    - Sh’ma and its blessings
    - Torah service
    - Concluding Blessings
    - Sabbath songs for group singing

  - Zamru Lo is an anthology by which cantors, music directors, and laypeople in synagogues can introduce new melodies to their congregations. This is a 3-volume collection of congregational melodies (with volumes for Shabbat, for High Holidays, and for Hallel/Festivals/Weekdays). It’s a treasure-trove of melodic material.

  - A good resource for 19th- and early 20th-century choral settings of liturgical texts.
  - “Ephros” (which is how one usually refers to it) is an old-school, dense, comprehensive set. As with Zamru Lo, there are different volumes for different times of year; some focus mostly on choral settings of the prayers.
    - **Strengths**: Composers include some of the greats: Sulzer, Lewandowski, Zilberts, Sulzer, Gerovitsch, Nowakowsky, and others.
    - **Weaknesses**: Pronunciation/lyrics primarily in outdated Ashkenazic spelling. The overall musical style is not exactly zippy and upbeat. That said, if you want some music with real gravitas and substance, reflective of great European traditions, you can spend many happy hours with Ephros.
Hebrew Song Texts to Explore

**Essential Prayers**

Much of the traditional Jewish worship service is either recited silently or sung in congregational unison melodies. Since the mid-19th century, however, certain prayers for the Sabbath and the High Holidays have been popular with choral composers. These include the following:

**Shabbat Eve (Friday evening)**
- Welcoming the Sabbath: L’cha Dodi and Shalom Alechem
- Ahavat Olam, Mi Chamocha, Hashkiveynu
- Amidah (central prayers), ending with Yih’yu L’ratzon and Oseh Shalom
- Kiddush (prayer over wine)

**Shabbat Morning (Saturday morning)**
- K’dushah (Sanctification – the source of the Latin “Sanctus”)
  - Sim Shalom

**High Holidays**
- Rosh Hashanah: Hal’luyah (Psalm 150) – celebrating the blowing of the shofar
- Yom Kippur: Kol Nidre and Avinu Malkeynu

**Festivals (Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot)**
- Hallel psalms (Ps. 113-118)

**Popular Prayers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Settings by:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shalom Aleychem</td>
<td>Goldfarb; Sharlin (SATB a cappella); various folk melodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shalom Rav</td>
<td>Steinberg (classical); Klepper/Freelander/Jacobson (folk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mah Tovu</td>
<td>Lewandowski; Janowski; Sargon; Klepper/Freelander/Jacobson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sim Shalom</td>
<td>Janowski (2 versions); Steinberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’chu N’ran’nah</td>
<td>Carlebach/Jacobson; S. Richards; S. Cohen; J. Miller; Janowski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oseh Shalom</td>
<td>Hirsch, arr. Broad Ginsberg (TMP); Applebaum; others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birchat Havdalah</td>
<td>Debbie Friedman, arr. J. Miller (SATB a cappella)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shehecheyanu</td>
<td>J. Miller; Collins (CME); Corrsin (TMP/ACC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Chanukah Song Texts to Explore

**Prayer**

- Haneirot Halalu
- Shehecheyanu
- Al Ha-nissim
- Aleih Neiri

**Settings by:**

- Applebaum; J. Miller; N. Ginsberg (trad. melody)
- J. Miller; Collins (CME); Corrsin (TMP/ACC)
- Levine; Barnett; Schoenfield (SATB w/piano)
- Chaim Parchi, arr. Jacobson

Passover Song Texts to Explore (melodies)

- Echad Mi Yodea
- Chad Gadya
- Dayenu
- The Four Questions

The World’s Fastest Hebrew Crash Course for Choral Conductors

A few pointers as you work with your choirs:

- **Do your own homework** on the text and its pronunciation! Do not assume, unless you know and trust the composer/arranger/publisher, that the Hebrew will be written out in a way that will give a clear and accurate performance.
- **Do your own homework** on which version of the text you’re using. Has your text changed recently based on a prayerbook revision?
- **Make a choice** about how you want the *sh’va* pronounced in each case, and make sure your singers are clear about what you want.
  - Example: *Sh’mah* = [SEma] or [SIma] or in-between?

Resources:

  - The authors give a thorough approach to the world of choral texts in Hebrew. Hugely helpful and accurate Hebrew pronunciation guide, given in IPA and transliterated English. Includes a pronunciation CD with spoken examples by Joshua Jacobson
- Online Pronunciation Guides:
  - [www.virtualcantor.com](http://www.virtualcantor.com)
    - My go-to resource when I’m looking for a melody.
  - [www.mechon-mamre.org](http://www.mechon-mamre.org)
    - Complete online resource for the Hebrew Bible
    - All texts are read out loud by an enthusiastic speaker.