

Shani Cohen  
Bible Final Project: Ruth  
4/24/18

**Torah of Chesed: Ruth in Concert, Featuring Women's Voices**

**Program:**

Lifting Female Voices

“Song of Ruth” by Maurice Goldman

“Al Tifg'i Vi” by Lawrence Avery

“Song of Ruth” by David N. Childs

*Featuring the women's choir*

Building a Community

Selections from *The Ballad of Ruth* by Stephen Richards

“Entreat me Not to Leave Thee” by Ben Steinberg

*Featuring the chamber ensemble, organ, and mixed choir*

“Entreat me not to Leave Thee” by Dan Forrest

*Featuring the mixed choir*

Torah of Chesed

“Here I Am” by Sue Horowitz

"Let There be Love/Hashkiveinu” by Noah Aronson and Cantor Jodi Sufrin

“Open Up (Let it in)” by Angela Buchdahl and Yoshi Zweiback

“Olam Chesed Yibaneh” by Rabbi Menachem Creditor

*Please join in singing*

**Notes:**

I would like this concert to be a celebration of women's voices, as well as a different approach to learning Jewish text on Shavuot. Ideally, this would take place in the evening, as part of our congregation's Shavuot Torah study, a musical "Tikkun Leil." This would be an opportunity to feature the cantor, as well as the choir and other musicians in the community. I would ideally like to have the rabbi or another cantor introduce each set with a brief teaching. The pieces I chose are mostly written for solo women's voice and piano, with two choral works towards the end. We will break up the concert into three main sets, with the clergy giving some context and teachings in between each set. The concert will be about 60 minutes.

The first set will be called "Lifting Female Voices," and will comprise various settings of Ruth 1:16. I will start with two solo pieces: Maurice Goldman's "Song of Ruth" and "Al Tifg'i Vi" by Lawrence Avery. These two pieces are in a more classical style, written by two of the great Classical Reform composers. The Avery is a setting of the Hebrew text of verse 1:16, while the Goldman uses an English translation, "Entreat me not to Leave Thee." From these solo pieces, I will end this first set with David Childs' Song of Ruth for treble choir. Although not written by a Jewish composer, this beautiful piece is a majestic way to literally lift women's voices, portraying the female-oriented nature of this story.

Set two, "Building a Community," brings together various instruments and voices to express the value of community. Shavuot is an opportunity to bring people together to develop our Jewish connections, and the Book of Ruth exemplifies the Jewish community values towards which we aspire. Stephen Richards' *The Ballad of Ruth* is a complete opera telling the story of Ruth through music. As part of this set, I will sing the duet between Naomi and Ruth with another cantorial colleague, bringing together two different voices. From there, our voices will

expand to a small chamber ensemble, organ, and choir in “Entreat me Not to Leave Thee” by Ben Steinberg. Each part converses and interweaves with the other, creating for that moment our own, unique musical community. We would then transition into Dan Forrest’s “Entreat me not to Leave Thee” for SATB choir. While the audience will now have heard numerous settings of this famous passage, this choral work is extraordinary in the way it can transport the listener to another world, a world in which everything is in harmony and peace. If we are supposed to read the Book of Ruth as a metaphor for God’s love for us, then this piece is an embodiment of that divine love and compassion.

The final set of the evening is named “The Torah of Chesed,” a core component of why we study Ruth on Shavuot. The *chesed* that Ruth shows Naomi, and that Boaz later shows Ruth, is a model for how we should live our lives and build our communities. The book depicts an ideal world, one which we can strive towards by taking action and making a positive change around us. With this set, we move into contemporary settings of our traditional liturgy set by Jewish composers for our communities today. These do not necessarily use text directly from Ruth, but rather portray the value of *chesed* that we study from our text on Shavuot. In this section of the service, there will be a chance for some audience participation. The melodies are simpler and repetitive, giving people the chance to really focus on the words of the songs and take them to heart.

We begin with Sue Horowitz’s “Here I Am,” a creative English setting of the “Hineini” text that speaks to many of the themes of Ruth. We will continue with the Noah Aronson “Let There be Love,” a beautiful version of the Friday-night Hashkiveinu prayer, followed by “Open Up (Let It In)”. Both of these pieces take traditional liturgy and interweave them with themes of love, God’s compassionate *chesed*, and call for us to make the world a better place through our

actions and intentions. Finally, we will end the concert with the beloved congregational setting of “Olam Chesed Yibaneh” by Rabbi Menachem Creditor. This well-known tune highlights together the essential teachings of the Book of Ruth, that we are God’s instruments of *chesed* in the world, and it is up to us to build the world we want to see.