

Shani Cohen

Placement Recording Notes

Oseh Shalom

Composer: Yoel Sykes

Accompaniment: Shani Cohen

This piece has been a favorite at Shabbat services and religious school gatherings alike. I love the rhythm of Syke's setting, building from a simple prayer for peace into a wordless melody that brings people together through music and movement. It is impossible to hear this tune without wanting to move your body, so I encourage you to sing, clap along, and enjoy!

Avinu Malkeinu

Composer: Max Janowski

Accompaniment: David Strickland

Janowski's iconic setting of "Avinu Malkeinu" has been one of the pieces of High Holiday music closest to my heart. The Days of Awe are a time of repentance and spiritual reckoning when we look to God as a source of authority and judgement, our parent and sovereign. We ask God for comfort during these days of renewal and atonement, entering the new year with a hope that God will hear our plea and show us justice and compassion.

Mi Chamocha/Tzur Yisrael

Composer: A. W. Binder/Shabbat nusach

Accompaniment: Shani Cohen

Whether in a Saturday morning service, or a religious school t'fillah, Binder's Mi Chamocha always fills me with joyful energy, lifting me into the Amidah that follows. We then transition into Tzur Yisrael, which acts as a bridge between the redemptive exaltation of Mi Chamocha and the pleading *bakashot* (requests) of the Amidah, spiritually elevating us so we may stand before God as we physically raise our bodies.

Adonai Roi

Composer: Cantor Gerald Cohen

Accompaniment: David Strickland

Psalm 23 is ubiquitous in both Jewish and Christian circles as a memorial prayer, words of comfort and hope for the bereaved. Cantor Cohen's beautiful melody has now become a mainstay of Jewish funerals and yizkor services, touching in its simplicity and soaring melody

lines. When I had the opportunity to study this piece with Cantor Cohen, I learned that it was originally written in 1989 for a friend who passed away from cancer. The gentle piano part, added in a later arrangement, offers a flowing accompaniment to the melody, as a steady, loving presence to the solitary mourner. This psalm reminds us that we are never truly alone, for God is always with us: “Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no harm, for You are with me.”

Modim Anachnu Lach

Composer: Cantor Jonathan Comisar

Accompaniment: David Strickland

Cantor Comisar’s heart-wrenching setting of “Modim” has been with me throughout my cantorial journey. I learned this piece for my first High Holy Days as a soloist, at Congregation Shma Koleinu in Houston, and have sung it several times since then for services and recitals. I love the “Modim” liturgy and its message of gratitude for the divine beauty of the world around us and for the love in our lives. “Modim” continues to be one of my favorite prayers, reminding me that even in the darkest times, there is still so much for which we can be grateful and give thanks to God.

Sweet as Honey (video)

Composer: Dan Nichols

Accompaniment: Shani Cohen

I had so much fun filming this video on the steps of Congregation Beth Elohim’s sanctuary in the middle of our Brooklyn neighborhood for family High Holy Day services. 2020 was a year of adaptation and creativity when it came to Jewish ritual and community-building. Our virtual services encouraged families to come as they were. Everyone zoomed in from their homes for the High Holy Days, yet we all came together to feel a sense of community and connection to Jewish tradition. This beloved setting of the blessing for Torah study by Dan Nichols reminds us that no matter how we engage with Judaism, there is always sweetness to be found.