

The Threshing Floor

CD released January 29, 2010

About The Threshing Floor

In the Bible, the threshing floor was a place that drew people together. Villagers brought their crops to this circle of packed earth or paving stones at harvest to separate the grain from the chaff. The threshing floor was the setting for many of life's most important cycles and several biblical stories. More than just an everyday place, the threshing floor transformed over time into something sacred: King David purchased one in Jerusalem to serve as a sacred altar, which became the foundation for the first Temple.

Our music, like the threshing floor, draws our loving community near to be nourished by the work of so many of its talented members. And like the transformation of King David's floor into a sacred space, the music of Congregation Bet Haverim uplifts seemingly commonplace or secular pieces, uncovering their inner spiritual depth and holiness.

The threshing floor is a fitting metaphor for Congregation Bet Haverim. Like other Reconstructionist Jewish communities, we wrestle with our traditions in an ongoing effort to separate what remains meaningful from that which no longer serves us. This is an evolving process, like the synagogue itself, which was founded by a small group of gay and lesbian Jews. Bet Haverim, or "house of friends," is now a diverse community embracing all Jews and their loved ones, committed to innovations built upon solid Jewish traditions and values.

This CD, our second collection, offers Jewish music from distant lands and times alongside works from other traditions and songs composed and arranged by members of our own chorus. Feed your soul on Jewish music from the Mediterranean, India, Eastern Europe and Uganda, as well as inventive renditions of psalms and festival liturgies. The life rhythms of The Threshing Floor beat with a blues adaptation of Lamentations, Hasidic and poetic love songs and a stirring arrangement of an REM song.

Listen to this story on WABE about The Threshing Floor (on WABE Atlanta)

Audio and text [HERE](#)

Listen to these interviews about The **Threshing Floor CD Release** - Interview Choir Director Will Robertson's and other CBH members on WABE- Audio and [text HERE](#)



The Musicians of Congregation Bet Haverim

Music director: Gayanne Geurin Weiss

Chorus director: Will Robertson

Chorus

- Sopranos
 - Tobi Ames
 - Julie Fishman
 - Joy Goodman
 - Ellie McGraw
 - Rina Rosenberg
 - Faith Russler
 - Lili Safon
 - Sandi Schein
 - Karen Wyatte
- Altos
 - Jesse Harris Bathrick
 - Kim Goldsmith
 - Rebecca Green
 - Carrie Hausman
 - Barbara Katz
 - Samira Mehta
 - Rebecca Leary Safon
 - Gayanne Geurin Weiss
- Tenors
 - Ned Bridges
 - Brad Davidorf
 - Faye Dresner
 - Audrey Galex
 - Alan Hymowitz
 - Stephanie Liffick
 - Lynne Norton
- Basses
 - Dan Arnold
 - David Borthwick
 - Avrum Geurin Weiss
 - Bill Witherspoon
 - Howard Winer

Vocal Soloists

- Gayanne Geurin – Dodi Li, Hon Tahon, Adon Haselichot, Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu, Ken Es Akeyo de
- la Meniana/Wayfaring Stranger, Sweetness Follows
- Brad Davidorf – Adon Haselichot, Psalm 136, Misheberach
- Will Robertson – On My Way, Sitting in the Dirt, Follow the Drinking Gourd
- Danielle Sansone – Karev Yom
- Ned Bridges – Follow the Drinking Gourd
- Bill Witherspoon – Ken Es Akeyo de la Meniana/Wayfaring Stranger
- Ellie McGraw – Adon Haselichot

Instrumentalists

- Sarah Zaslav – violin, viola
- Will Robertson – guitar, piano, mandolin, bouzouki, harmonium, bass
- Jordan Dayan – bass, fretless electric bass
- Mike Zimmerman – drum kit, kpangolo, percussion
- Joey Ziegler – djembe, cajón, percussion
- Ruth Einstein – cello
- Seyed Safavynia – violin (tracks 12–13)
- David Borthwick – viola (tracks 12–13)
- George Nicholson – bass (tracks 12–13)
- Norman Joss – harmonica
- Rich O'Dell – trumpet
- Gayanne Geurin – tambourine
- Alan Hymowitz – piano

In Gratitude

Thank you first and foremost to Congregation Bet Haverim for being our spiritual community that nurtures, challenges and inspires. Thanks to so many of you for your participation, support and belief in the music of CBH: Rabbi Joshua Lesser, the excellent all-volunteer chorus and instrumentalists of CBH, the Wednesday morning chant group, the music committee, the CBH Board of Directors, Sue and Don Emerich in honor of Dorothy Severson, Gib Geurin in honor of Dorothy Geurin, Lynne Norton, Robert Fillipo, Kristen Strezo, Laurie Price, Jonathan Hillyer, Sarah Zaslav, Susan Kupferberg, Sherry Thacker, Diana and Laurie Robins, Ellie McGraw, Tobi Ames, Avrum Weiss, Amy, Noa and Levi Robertson who shared their home and “Dad” with this project, Michael Levine, Clay Cook, 800 East, Marty Kearns, Ken Gregory, Brian Ashmead, Juliana Finch, Central Congregational UCC (CCUCC) in Atlanta. We admire and are boggled by Will Robertson’s many gifts and feel blessed that he shares these so generously with CBH. Special thanks to Beverly Blouin, who gave the CBH Chorus wings and elevated us to be who we are today. This entire disc reflects the ear of CBH’s devoted ingatherer and gleaner of songs, Gayanne Geurin Weiss, who separates the musical wheat from the chaff.

We have been inspired by the beautiful arrangements of the following artists and adapted music from their recordings to incorporate into the worship of Congregation Bet Haverim: Rahel Musleah (Hon Tahon), Voice of the Turtle (Ken Es Akeyo de la Meniana), Mavis Staples (On My Way), Rabbi Andrew Hahn (Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu), Yofiyah (Dodi Li), Gerard Edery (Adon Haselichot), Irene Orleansky (Karev Yom), the Klezmer Conservatory Band (Meron Niggun), the Weavers (Follow the Drinking Gourd) and SAVAE (Birkat Cohanim).

Produced, mixed and mastered by Will Robertson

Additional engineering by Michael Levine, Tim Anderson, Charlie Garcia, Guy Strauss and Robert Fillipo

Recorded at Gallop Studios (Tucker, Ga.), 800 East (Atlanta) and CCUCC (Atlanta)

Artwork and layout by Laurie Price

Photography by Jonathan Hillyer

Liner notes by Sarah Zaslav

TRACKS

- 1 Dodi Li Yofiyah* (3:51)
- 2 Hon Tahon trad. Iraqi/Indian Rosh Hashanah piyyut* (2:44)
- 3 Adon Haselichot trad. Sephardic High Holiday piyyut* (3:01)
- 4 Meron Niggun trad. Hasidic klezmer, arr. Jeff Warschauer, adapted by Will Robertson (4:10)
- 5 Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu Mosh Ben Ari* (4:26)
- 6 Solu, Solu Will Robertson (2:10)
- 7 Karev Yom trad. Hasidic Passover song* (3:38)
- 8 On My Way African American spiritual adapted as a Civil Rights era song* (3:19)
- 9 Psalm 136 J.J. Keki, Abayudaya of Uganda* (2:46)
- 10 L'Olam Va'ed contemporary chant (2:10)
- 11 Tov L'Hodot Shabbat liturgy* (1:30)
- 12 Nishmat Kol Chai Will Robertson (1:33)
- 13 Rakut Eric Whitacre and Hila Plitmann, additional arr. David Borthwick (2:00)
- 14 Misheberach for Healing (Call and Response) Brad Davidorf (2:16)
- 15 Ken Es Akeyo de la Meniana / Wayfaring Stranger Sephardic and American folksongs arr. Will Robertson and Gayanne Geurin (3:51)
- 16 Sitting in the Dirt Will Robertson contemporary kinah based on Lamentations (4:22)
- 17 Sweetness Follows Bill Berry, Michael Stipe, Peter Buck and Mike Mills* (4:17)
- 18 Yikraeni Will Robertson (2:02)
- 19 Yihyu L'Ratzon Ernest Bloch, Sacred Service (1:26)
- 20 Birkat Cohanim Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, adapted by Christopher Moroney* (1:49)
- 21 Follow the Drinking Gourd African American folksong* (3:21)

*Arranged by Will Robertson

NOTES AND LYRICS

1. Dodi Li (My Beloved Is Mine)

Our CD opens with a celebration of open and joyous love: [Song of Songs 2:16](#) as cited in the Shabbat evening service. Music by [Yofiyah](#), arranged by Will Robertson. Yofiyah (also known as Susan Deikman) melds Hindu-style call-and-responses with Hebrew words to create what she calls [kabbalistic kirtan](#), “the intense devotional chanting of simple Hebrew texts.” Her CDs include *Kiss the Beloved* and *Open*.

“One may read the Songs of Songs as a poem reconciling disparate, often polarized aspects of each human soul.... Male and female, maiden and royalty, palace and field, blossom and fruit, animals, birds and plants all draw into harmony on this day of inclusive, overflowing love and self-acceptance.” — Sheila Peltz Weinberg in *Kol Haneshamah* (the Reconstructionist siddur), p. 18.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Mike Zimmerman, kpangolo; Joey Ziegler, cajón; Jordan Dayan, bass; Will Robertson, guitar, shaker.

Dodi li va'ani lo	My beloved is mine and I am his
Haro'eh bashoshanim	The shepherd among the lilies
Ani l'dodi v'dodi li	I am my beloved's and my beloved is
	mine

Traditional piyyut sung the evening of Rosh Hashanah in the “Baghdadi” Jewish community of India, which originated in Iraq and elsewhere in the late 18th century. Arranged by Will Robertson, inspired by Rahel Musleah’s version on her CD *Hodu*. Used by permission.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim with Gayanne Geurin Weiss, vocal soloist, tambourine; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Mike Zimmerman, kpangolo, wind chimes; Will Robertson, bouzouki, chime, bass.

2. Hon Tahon (Have Mercy)

Traditional piyyut sung the evening of Rosh Hashanah in the “Baghdadi” Jewish community of India, which originated in Iraq and elsewhere in the late 18th century. Arranged by Will Robertson, inspired by Rahel Musleah’s version on her CD *Hodu*. Used by permission.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim with Gayanne Geurin Weiss, vocal soloist, tambourine; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Mike Zimmerman, kpangolo, wind chimes; Will Robertson, bouzouki, chime, bass.

Hon tahon al vanecha l’cha shavim
Uv’fachad l’fanecha nitzavim
Yere’im et yikaru ladin ki al ken ba’u nichavim

Have mercy on your children, who are returning to you
In fear they stand before you
Awed, they call on You for judgment

Zachor tizkor rachamim, yom hadin
Hafer ka’as uze’amim et tadin
Lire’echa ul’choshvei shemecha hemah yoshvei
al midin

For they have come before you in anguish
Remember to have mercy on the day of judgment
Break the anger and fury at the time of judgment
Set those who fear You and revere your name on the
path to comfort

Karev li shnat go’el ufedeini
Al mei menuchoth ha’el tancheini
Uzchor li zechut ish tam, al libecha
kachotam simeini

Bring near the year of redemption, and save me
Lead me upon the waters of tranquility
And remember the merits of Jacob
Upon your heart place me as a seal

3. Adon Haselichot (Lord of Forgiveness)

A traditional Sephardic piyyut for the High Holiday penitential season. The text is a partial acrostic, each

phrase of the verse starting with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order (alef, bet, gimel, etc.).

Arranged by

Will Robertson and Gayanne Geurin Weiss, inspired by Gerard Ederly’s version.

Performed by Brad Davidorf, Ellie McGraw and Gayanne Geurin Weiss, vocal soloists; Will Robertson, guitar; Sarah Zaslav, viola; Mike Zimmerman, kpangolo.

Adon haselichot
Bochen levavot
Goleh amukot
Dover tzedakot
Chatanu l’fanecha, rachem aleinu

Ruler of forgiveness
Examiner of hearts
Revealer of depths
Speaker of justice
We have sinned before you; have
mercy upon us

Hadur b'nifla'ot
Vatik b'nechamot
Zocher brit amo
Choker kelayot
Chatanu l'fanecha, rachem aleinu

Majestic with wonders
From times of old, comforting us
Remembering the covenant with our
ancestors
Weighing our insides
We have sinned before you; have
mercy upon us

4. **Meron Niggun** (Tune from Meron)

Instrumental. A chance for the CBH Band to step out.

Traditional Hasidic klezmer tune, adapted by Will Robertson from an arrangement by [Jeff Warschauer](#), recorded by the [Klezmer Conservatory Band](#). Published by Hasmode/BMI. Used by permission.

The Hasidic community of Meron, near the mystical center of Safed in northern Israel, is known for its springtime celebrations of [Lag BaOmer](#). On the eve of that holiday, Hasidic klezmer musicians start playing this piece's main tune, "Abu's Courtyard," in the courtyard of "the Moroccan rabbinical Abu family in Safed.

From the courtyard a mingled procession of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, led by the [band], sets out, bearing a Torah scroll, to the tomb of [Rabbi Simeon bar Yohay](#) in Meron" (quoted from Yaacov Mazor's liner notes to *Hassidic Tunes of Dancing and Rejoicing*, Ethnic Folkways Records FE 4209, © 1978).

Performed by Will Robertson, mandolin and piano; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Jordan Dayan, bass; Mike Zimmerman, drums

5. **Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu** (Peace Will Come To Us)

By [Mosh Ben Ari](#) (Sheva). "[Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu](#)" is also known as "Salaam" ("peace" in Arabic). This song became an Israeli hit and was adopted there and internationally as something of an anthem by youth movements hopeful for Arab-Israeli peace.

Arranged by Gayanne Geurin and Will Robertson, inspired by the version of [Rabbi Andrew Hahn](#), "the kirtan rabbi." Used by permission.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim with vocal soloist Gayanne Geurin Weiss; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Jordan Dayan, bass; Mike Zimmerman, drums; Joey Ziegler, hand drum; Will Robertson, guitar, shaker, harmonium.

Od yavo shalom aleinu
V'al kulam
Salaam (shanti), aleinu v'al kol ha'olam
Salaam (shanti), shalom

Peace will come to us
And to everyone
Peace upon us and all the world
Peace, peace

6. Solu, Solu (Build Up, Build Up, Clear the Road)

Words from [Isaiah chapter 57](#) (verses 14 and 19), in the haftarah portion read on Yom Kippur. Music by [Will Robertson](#).

Amy and Will Robertson worked on this text together. Amy writes: “In a chapter that offers a litany of ways in which Israel has gone astray—a litany of acts, past and present, that stand between Israel and God — these verses are an about-face. They say: Never mind what the obstacles are, never mind what blocks the path to God. Whatever it is, our imperative is to clear it off, to rebuild the path to God, to wholeness, to shalom, and to walk that path, whether we are far or near.”

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim.

Solu, solu panu darech

Shalom, shalom larachok v'lakarov

Build up, build up, clear the road

Peace. peace to the far off and to the near

7. Karev Yom (A Day Is Coming)

Traditional song from the Passover Haggadah. Tune by the early Hasidic rabbi [Reb Nachman of Bratslav](#). Arranged by Will Robertson, inspired by [Irene Orleansky's](#) version.

This beautiful song speaks to Congregation Bet Haverim in imagining the transformation of the ordinary into the mystical, beyond spoken understanding.

Sung by [Danielle Sansone](#) with the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim; Sarah Zaslav, violin, viola; Will Robertson, guitar.

Karev yom asher hu lo yom v'lo laylah

Ram hoda ki l'cha hayom af l'cha halaylah

Shomrim hafkid l'irchah, kol hayom v'chol halaylah

Ta'ir ke'or yom cheshkat laylah

A day is coming that is neither day nor night

Most high, let it be known that yours is the day and
yours is the night

Place guards over your city all day and all night

Lighten the darkness of the night with the light of day

8. On My Way

A Protest song from the Civil Rights Movement, based on the African American spirituals “I’m On My Way to Canaan Land” and “I’m Bound for the Promised Land.” Our arrangement (by Will Robertson) is inspired by [Mavis Staples's](#) rendition, produced by Ry Cooder, on *We'll Never Turn Back*.

At Congregation Bet Haverim, a southern synagogue only miles from the spiritual home of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ebenezer Baptist Church, this is one of several African American songs we sing particularly on Shabbat Shirah to connect the African American struggle for freedom and rights with both the ancient Israelites' exodus from Egypt and LGBT strivings for full rights today. As Mavis Staples says, “These songs are still needed today. I want the youth today to question these songs and say, ‘Why is she singing this?’”

Performed by Will Robertson, vocal soloist, guitar, shaker; the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim; Joey Ziegler, cajón; Mike Zimmerman, kpangolo; Jordan Dayan, bass.

I'm on my way to freedom land
I'm on my way to freedom land
I'm on my way to freedom land
I'm on my way, great God almighty
I'm on my way
I asked my brother, come go with me . . .
I asked my sister, come go with me . . .
If they say no, I'll go alone . . .
I'm on my way, great God almighty
I'm on my way

9. Psalm 136

Psalm 136, sung in [Luganda](#) and Hebrew. Music by [J.J. Keki](#). Keki is a leader, speaker and performer from the [Abayudaya Jews of Uganda](#), a small African Jewish community with a unique history. The Abayudaya (“People of Judah”) connect this psalm’s account of deliverance from persecution with the downfall of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, who was chased from the country before Passover of 1979. Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim with vocal soloist Brad Davidorf; Joey Ziegler, kpanzolo, shaker; Mike Zimmerman, drums, shaker; Jordan Dayan, fretless electric bass; Sarah Zaslav, plucked violin; Guy Strauss and Gayanne Geurin Weiss, shakers; Will Robertson, guitar, shaker.

Refrain: Kubanga okusaasira kwe kwa luberera *Refrain:* God’s love is everlasting [*Ki l’olam chasdo*]

Mumwebaze Adonai i, kubanga mulungi
Hodu l’elohey ha’elohim
Mumwebze Adonai i w’abaami
L’osey nifla’ot gedolot levado

Acknowledge the Eternal, who is good
Praise the God of all the gods
Give thanks to the most powerful of powers
Who alone performed great, wondrous deeds

Oyo eyakola eggulu n’amagezi
L’eroka ha’aretz al hamayim
Oyo eyakola ebayka ebikulu
Et hashemesh l’memshelet bayom

Maker of the heavens with sublime discernment
Founder of the earth upon the waters
Maker of the great light orbs
Sunlight for dominion of the day
Moon and stars to rule the night

Omwezi n’emmunyeenye okufuga baabwe
Shebeshiflenu zachar lanu
N’aata bakabaka abaatiikirivu
Vayifrekenu mitzareynu

Who, amid our lowliness, remembered
Who unyoked us from our troubles
Who gives sustenance to all of flesh

Adonai mulungi, adonai mulungi

God is good, God is good

10. L’Olam Va’ed (Forever)

This is a contemporary chant Gayanne Geurin heard another visitor sing at a retreat at [Eilat Chayyim](#) in Connecticut. Gayanne brought it back to Atlanta, where CBH’s weekly chant group has embraced it. That’s all we know about it.

Chanted here by Congregation Bet Haverim’s Wednesday Morning Chant Group, led by Gayanne Geurin, who is also doing the drumming.

L'olam va'ed
Yah yimloch l'olam va'ed

Forever
God is eternal

11. **Tov L'Hodot** (It Is a Good Thing to Give Thanks)

Words from [Psalm 92](#) in the Shabbat evening liturgy. Traditional tune; four-part arrangement by Will Robertson and Gayanne Guerin Weiss.

“Psalm 92 has been associated with Shabbat since biblical times. According to the midrash [ancient interpretive commentary], Shabbat itself stood up and recited this psalm at Creation, thus exulting in the role given it as the day of inner joy for all of God’s creatures.” — Arthur Green, *Kol Haneshamah* (Reconstructionist siddur), p. 48.

Sung by the congregation and chorus of CBH, led by Gayanne Geurin Weiss.

Tov l'hodot l'adonai
u'l'zamer l'shimcha elyon
L'hagid baboker chasdecha
v'emunatecha baleylot
Yai lai lai lai lai, etc.

It is a good thing to give thanks to the Eternal
To sing out to your name supreme
To tell about your kindness in the morning
And your faithfulness at night
Yai lai lai lai lai, etc.

12. **Nishmat Kol Chai** (The Soul of Every Living Thing)

Ancient blessing found in the Shabbat and festival morning liturgy as well as the Passover Haggadah. Music composed by [Will Robertson](#). Used by permission. In Will’s setting, the chorus evokes the sunrise and the descending piano notes represent slumber falling away.

“Nishmat [Kol Chai] is the song of the wave awakening to the ocean, seeing that the wave is the ocean and the ocean the wave, recognizing the interdependence of all things and discovering the awesome wonder that is our reality.” — Rami M. Shapiro, *Kol Haneshamah* (Reconstructionist siddur), p. 234.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim; Seyed Safavynia and Sarah Zaslav, violin; David Borthwick, viola; Ruth Einstein, cello; George Nicholson, bass; Alan Hymowitz, piano; Will Robertson, conductor.

Nishmat kol chai
T'varech et shimcha
Adonai eloheinu

The soul of every living thing
Shall bless your name
Eternal One, our God

13. Rakut (Tenderness)

The fifth of the *Five Hebrew Love Songs* by the wife-and-husband team of [Hila Plitmann](#) (lyrics) and [Eric Whitacre](#) (music). © Walton Music Corp. Used by permission. String quintet accompaniment arranged by David Borthwick.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim; Seyed Safavynia and Sarah Zaslav, violin; David Borthwick, viola; Ruth Einstein, cello; George Nicholson, bass; Will Robertson, conductor.

Hu hayah maleh rakut
Hi haytah kashah
V'chol kama shenista l'hisha'er kach,
Pashut, uvli sibah tovah,
Lakach otah el toch atzmo,
V'heni'ach
Bamakom hachi, hachi rach

He was full of tenderness;
She was very hard
And as much as she tried to stay thus,
Simply, and with no good reason,
He took her into himself,
And set her down
In the softest, softest place

14. Misheberach for Healing (Call and Response)

Traditional Jewish blessing. Music composed by [Brad Davidorf](#). Used by permission.

Misheberachs are traditional prayers for various circumstances and life cycle events. ("Mi sheberach" means "the one who blessed," as in, "May the one who blessed our ancestors also bless so-and-so.") At Congregation Bet Haverim, before a communal misheberach those present may speak aloud the names of loved ones in need of healing.

Brad Davidorf says: "I believe that the power of community is strongest when we focus the energy of every individual, if even for a moment, on a single purpose. In uniting our voices to pray for a healing of the body and spirit of someone who is ill in our midst, we vibrate the fabric of life like nothing else can." Sung by Brad Davidorf and the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim.

Refrain: Misheberach

Mi sheberach avoteinu avraham, yitzhak v'yaakov
V'imoteinu sarah, rivkah, rachel v'leah
Hu yevarech virafeh et hacholeh

Refrain: Misheberach

May the one who blessed our fathers
Abraham,
Isaac and Jacob, Our mothers Sarah,
Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Bless and
heal the ailing

Yiten adonai chochma v'tushiyah b'lev harofeh
V'yishlach refu'ah shlemah
Refu'at hanefesh v'refuat haguf

May the physician have wisdom and sound
judgment for alleviating pain and suffering
And may the sufferer be thoroughly healed
in spirit and in body

Yosif adonai lo shnot chayim v'shalom
L'hodot u'l'halel larofeh hane'eman v'harachaman
V'nomar amen.

May he have many more years of life and health
For giving thanks and praise to the all-merciful and
faithful Healer, for a length of days
And let us say: Amen.

15. Ken Es Akeyo de la Meniana / Wayfaring Stranger

(Who Is This of a Morning / Wayfaring Stranger)

“Ken Es Akeyo de la Meniana” is a traditional Sephardic song ([Ladino](#) poetry set to a Balkan tune); we learned it from a recording by [Voice of the Turtle](#). “Wayfaring Stranger” is a traditional American song that exists in several variants. Gayanne Geurin noticed the similarity between these two sad tunes and asked Will Robertson to realize this arrangement for CBH’s Tisha B’Av service in 2009.

This interweaving also reflects the way we engage music at Congregation Bet Haverim. These two songs come from different cultures: one from the southern United States, our home; the other from a global Jewish community with roots in the past, Sephardic Spain. Combined they take on a new meaning, a reconstructed story of grief and longing.

(The last two verses of “Ken Es Akeyo de la Meniana” speak to this sadness. They are not sung in this rendition but are added here in translation for the poetry of the piece: “If my heart had a window allowing a view, fields and vineyards would awaken to see my great pain. Goodbye, my love; goodbye, my beloved; goodbye, sun and moon; goodbye, my heart.”)

Sung by Bill Witherspoon and Gayanne Geurin Weiss; with Will Robertson, guitar; Ruth Einstein, cello; Sarah Zaslav, violin.

Ken es akeyo do la meniana
ken al'ombra kantamos
O son las 'streyas de la meniana
o son los ojos del mi amor
No son las 'streyas de la meniana
i no son los ojos del mi amor
O es esto un verjel verdi
ke arelumbra me korason

Who is this of a morning
to whose shadow we sing?
Perhaps the morning stars,
or the eyes of my beloved?
It is not the morning stars
nor the eyes of my love
Is it a green orchard
that illuminates my heart?

I am a poor wayfaring stranger
Traveling through this world of woe

Yet there's no sickness, toil nor danger
To that bright world to which I go
I know dark clouds will gather round me
I know my way is rough and steep
But golden fields lay out before me
Where God's redeemed shall ever weep

I'm going back to see my mother
I'm going back no more to roam

I'm just a-goin' over Jordan
I'm just a-goin' over home

16. Sitting in the Dirt

In 2008, Congregation Bet Haverim's rabbi, Joshua Lesser, asked [Will Robertson](#) to write this as a contemporary [kinah](#) for Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av is the fast day originally mourning the ancient destruction of Jerusalem. The words here were inspired by the first chapter of [Lamentations](#). And the music? The blues—an authentic American form of lament. Used by permission. Performed by Will Robertson, vocals and guitar; Gayanne Geurin Weiss, background vocals; Norman Joss, harmonica.

You're all alone, Crying in the night
Can't find no comfort, Anywhere in sight
There's tears in your eyes, There's blood on your skirt
Nothing in your hands, Sitting in the dirt
It's hard to believe, That you could fall so far
From the princess you were, To the beggar you are
Everyone you loved, All your possessions on this earth
God took them away, And left you sitting in the dirt
And I heard you say,, "How long will it take me
To learn to do without?, I thought you loved me
Who's gonna help me now?",". Your cleanest white dress
It's just a rag full of holes, You're weeping and moaning
for God to save your soul, Where did you go
Who did you hurt, What did you do
That left you sitting in the dirt?

17. Sweetness Follows

Song composed by Bill Berry, Michael Stipe, Mike Mills, Peter Buck. This song is published by Warner-Tamerlane Pub. Obo Night Garden Music and displayed here with permission. All rights reserved. Our arrangement is by Will Robertson.

This REM song is an example of secular, non-Jewish music that Congregation Bet Haverim has adopted for religious purposes. In 2009 we used it both in a Shabbat evening service (to celebrate slowing down and living life with joy and wonder on the Sabbath) and at the end of an intense Tisha B'Av service (to reassure us that after hardship comes sweetness).

Sung by Gayanne Geurin with the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim; Will Robertson, guitar, background vocals; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Ruth Einstein, cello.

Readying to bury your father and your mother
What did you think when you lost another?
I used to wonder why did you bother
Distanced from one, blind to the other

Listen here, my sister and my brother
What would you care if you lost the other?
I always wonder why did we bother,
Distanced from one, blind to the other

Oh, oh, but sweetness follows

It's these little things, they can pull you under
Live your life filled with joy and wonder
I always knew this altogether thunder
Was lost in our little lives
Oh, oh, but sweetness follows

It's these little things, they can pull you under
Live your life filled with joy and thunder
Yeah, yeah, we were altogether
Lost in our little lives
Oh, oh, but sweetness follows

18. Yikraeni (He Calls to Me)

Words from [Psalm 91:15](#). Music by [Will Robertson](#). First sung at Congregation Bet Haverim's Yom Kippur services in 2009. Used by permission.
Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim.

Yikraeni v'eneihu
Imo anochi v'tzarah
He calls to me; I answer him
I am with him in times of trouble

19. Yihyu L'Ratzon (May the Words of My Mouth)

Words from [Psalm 19:15](#). Music from *Sacred Service (Avodath Hakodesh)* by [Ernest Bloch](#) (1880-1959). Bloch was a Swiss-born composer who wrote several Jewish-themed works and lived out his final decades in the United States.
Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim.

Yihyu l'ratzon imrei fi
V'hegyon libi l'fanecha
Adonai tsuri v'go'ali
Amen

May the words of my mouth
And the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable before you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer
Amen

20. Birkat Cohanim (Priestly Benediction)

This famous blessing, known as the Priestly Benediction or Aaronic Blessing, comes from the Torah— [Numbers 6:22-27](#). Music by Suzanne Haik-Vantoura (under the title “Bircath Cohenim”)

based on her interpretation of ancient Torah markings, adapted by Christopher Moroney of the San Antonio Vocal Arts Ensemble ([SAVAE](http://www.savae.com)). "Bircath Cohenim" tr. and arr. Christopher Moroney, tr. and arr. © 2002 World Library Publications, Franklin Park, Ill. www.wlpmusic.com. All rights reserved. Used by permission. This version is arranged by Will Robertson. Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim.

Yevarechecha adonai v'yishmerecha
Ya'er adonai panav elecha vichuneka
Yisa adonai panav elecha v'yasem l'cha shalom

May God bless you and keep you
May God shine God's face upon you and be
gracious to you
May God lift up God's face toward you
and grant you peace

21. Follow the Drinking Gourd

Traditional African American folk song, arranged by Will Robertson, inspired by [the Weavers'](#) version. The "drinking gourd" is the Big Dipper, the constellation that guided escaped slaves northward to freedom in the era of the Underground Railroad. (The precise origin of "Follow the Drinking Gourd" is unclear. Compare [this](#) standard explanation of the lyrics with [this](#) qualification of the timeline.) At CBH we sing "Follow the Drinking Gourd" on Shabbat Shirah to connect three great struggles for full freedom and dignity: that of African Americans in this country, that of the ancient Israelite slaves fleeing Egypt in the Book of Exodus, and that of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender folks everywhere today.

Performed by the Chorus of Congregation Bet Haverim with vocal soloists Will Robertson and Ned Bridges; Sarah Zaslav, violin; Mike Zimmerman, drums; Jordan Dayan, bass; Will Robertson, guitar.

Follow the drinking gourd
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to
freedom
Follow the drinking gourd
When the sun comes back and the first quail calls
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to
freedom
Follow the drinking gourd
Well the riverbank makes a mighty good road
The dead trees will show you the way
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on
Follow the drinking gourd
Where the great big river meets the little river
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to
freedom
Follow the drinking gourd