**Recommended Easy Jewish Choral Music for Beginners**

**title: Al HaNissim**

**composer: Dov Frimer (arranged by Joshua Jacobson and Hankus Netsky)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 991306

voicing: SATB, div

accompaniment: piano (and optional clarinet or full klezmer band)

language: Hebrew

text: liturgy for Chanukah

year of composition: 1989 (arrangement)

timing: 2:10

recordings: Lights

level of difficulty: moderate

description: This joyous setting of a few words from a Chanukah prayer is in a lively “klezmer” idiom. The lyrics thank God for His miracles. The music is not difficult, but does require sustained energy, especially from the basses who are required to sing forte marcato in the top of their register.

**title: Ale Brider**

**composer: folk (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: World Music Press

catalogue number: 30 (31 is a version for SA chorus)

voicing: SATB, solo any voice

accompaniment: piano (drums and bass may be added ad lib)

language: Yiddish (or English)

text: folk

year of composition: c. 1920

timing: 3:00

recordings: An Hour in the Garden of Eden (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy

description: This is an Eastern European song of solidarity: originally workers’ solidarity, but it can also be understood in the larger sense of the brotherhood (and sisterhood) of all people. It has a catchy wordless refrain that easily lends itself to audience sing-along.

**title: Amen Shem Nora/ Halleluyah**

**composer: folk and Gabai (arranged by Matthew Lazar)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 982007

voicing: unison choir and tenor solo

accompaniment: piano and tof

language: Hebrew

text: liturgy for Simhat Torah and Psalm 150

year of composition: c. 1980 (arranged)

timing: 3:50

recordings: Seasons of Our Joy (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy

description: This medley of two lively Sephardic hymns is quite easy for the chorus to learn, but requires an extremely competent tenor soloist and tof (Middle Eastern hand drum) player.

**Title: Ani Ma’amin**

**Composer: Azriel David Fastag**

Arranger: Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory

Voicing: Unison choir

Accompaniment: piano, violin

Language: Hebrew

Lyrics: paraliturgical Jewish credo

Level of difficulty: easy

Publisher: earthsongs S-244

A beautiful arrangement of a song that stood for spiritual resistance during the Holocaust.

**title: Around the Campfire (medley: Ha-Finjan, Rad Ha-Layla, Zemer Lakh)**

**composer: folk (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: World Music Press

catalogue number: 22

voicing: SATB (or SAB)

accompaniment: piano, 2 clarinets, tof

language: Hebrew (alternative English)

text: (Chaim Hefer, Jacob Orland, A. Ben-Ze’ev)

year of composition: 1993 (arrangement)

timing: 3:02 (1:22+0:49+0:51)

recordings: The Songs of Israel (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: A medley of three songs using dance rhythms (one waltz and two horahs), sung around the campfire by the early pioneers of the Land of Israel. Quite easy to perform.

**title: Az Ikh Vel Zogen Lekho Dodi**

**composer: folk (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 982079 (982080 is a version for SA chorus)

voicing: SATB div, solo (any voice)

accompaniment: piano

language: Yiddish

text: folk

year of composition: 1998 (arrangement)

timing: 2:00

recordings: Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland (Video) (Zamir)

level of difficulty: moderate

description: This song portrays a rehearsal with a cantor and his choir in Eastern Europe a century ago. The slow “call and response” is followed by a lively Hassidic-style up-tempo “tchiri-bim-bam” niggun.

**title: Cantata ebraica**

**composer: Carlo Grossi**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 982077

voicing: SATB, T solo

accompaniment: harpsichord (or piano)

language: Hebrew

text: anonymous

year of composition: 1681

timing: 5:30

recordings: Italia! (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: This charming “dialogue cantata” was commissioned by the Venetian Jewish confraternity, Shomerim la-Boker, for their annual Hoshana Rabba celebrations. A rare example of Jewish choral music (by a Christian composer) from the Baroque era.

**title: Dance the Horah (medley: Hey Harmonika and Mayim, Mayim)**

**composer: Alkoni and Emanuel Amiram (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: earthsongs

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: piano, tof (middle-eastern drum), clarinet and flute (optional bass)

language: Hebrew

text: Alkoni and Isaiah 12:3

year of composition: c. 1950 (arranged in 1998)

timing: 2:40

recordings: The Songs of Israel (Zamir)

level of difficulty: moderate

description: a medley of two vibrant dance songs from the land of Israel.

**title: Enosh Kechotzir Yomov**

**composer: Louis Lewandowski**

publisher: Broude Brothers

catalogue number: CR 65

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: organ

language: Hebrew (English alternate)

text: Psalm 103:15 - 17

year of composition: c. 1882

timing: 4:30

recordings: [The Majesty of Holiness](http://zamir.org/cds/details.cgi?cd=912), The Songs Live On (www.Zamir.org)

level of difficulty: moderate

description: One of Lewandowski’s most moving compositions, this work, written for a memorial service, describes the ephemeral nature of human life in poignant tones. Similar in style to Mendelssohn. An orchestration is available.

**title: Erev Shel Shoshanim**

**composer: Joseph Hadar (arranger Jack Klebanow)**

publisher: World Music Press

catalogue number: WMP 03

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: piano

timing 3:15

language: Hebrew

text: Moshe Dor

year of arrangement: 1986

recordings: The Songs We Sang (HZ-906) (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy

description: “Erev Shel Shoshanim” is an Israeli song, conceived in a “folk” style, and tremendously popular both in Israel and the Diaspora in the 1960s. The text of this secular love song is a paraphrase of verses from the Biblical Song of Songs, in which the poet entreats his lover to join him in the fragrant garden for an “Evening of Roses.” This one is quite easy to learn, and has achieved great popularity among U.S. high-school choirs; the tempo is slow, the meter remains quadruple, the mode is Dorian, and voice parts are simple. The trick here is to perform the work with a warm tone and expressive legato phrasing.

**title: Hanukah Tarantella**

**composer: David Polansky**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 982035 (SA version is 982083)

voicing: SATB (or SA)

accompaniment: piano

language: English

text: David Polansky

year of composition: 1992

timing: 3:50

recordings: Zamir 25

level of difficulty: moderate, somewhat challenging

description: Polansky is best known for his songs for children. But this tarantella is sure to appeal to children of all ages. With Tom-Lehrer-like cleverness, Polanksy exhausts every possible (and impossible) rhyme for the word “Chanukah.” It’s a hoot!

**title: Hava Nagila**

**composer: folk (arranged by Daniel Faktori)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 993137

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: a cappella

language: Hebrew

text: Moshe Nathanson or Abraham Idelsohn

year of composition: 1911 (?)

timing: 2:00

recordings: The Songs of Israel

level of difficulty: moderate

description: With a melody derived from a Hassidic niggun, and quintessential Zionist lyrics, “Hava Nagila” song has come to be the most well-known Israeli song. Faktori’s arrangement brings the rhythms to life in a delicate madrigalesque way with some interesting contrapuntal textures.

**title: Hayoshevet Baganim**

**composer: Nissim Cohen Havron (arranged by Aryeh Levanon)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 993123

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: tof

language: Hebrew

text: Song of Songs 8:13-14

year of composition: 1960 (arrangement)

timing: 2:30

recordings: The Songs We Sang (Zamir)

level of difficulty: moderate

description: A simple but very effective setting of a popular Israeli dance song. The arrangement is in ABA form, fast-slow-fast.

**title: Hitragut**

**composer: folk (arranged by Paul Ben-Haim)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 991760

voicing: SATB (optional soprano solo)

accompaniment: a cappella

language: Hebrew

text: Yehuda Karni

year of composition:

timing: 3:40

recordings: Zamir 25 (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: This gorgeous little serenade is based on an older Sephardic folk song. Its three strophic verses are set homophonically. For variety, one of the verses may be sung by a soprano soloist while the choir hums their parts underneath.

**title: I Have a Little Dreydel**

**composer: Michael Gelbart (arranger Matthew Lazar)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 982002

voicing: SATB, T solo

accompaniment: piano (optional bass and drum set)

timing: 3:00

language: English

text: Michael Gelbart

year of arrangement: 1989

recordings: LIGHTS (HZ-901)

level of difficulty: moderate

description: Originally written in Yiddish, Michael Gelbart’s “I Have a Little Dreydel” has proven to be a popular children’s song for Chanukah. In English translation it has captivated several generations of American children, as well. Utilizing the styles of 1950s rock-’n’-roll, this lighthearted arrangement conveys the joyous aura of the Festival of Lights. After a deceptively simple a cappella introduction by the choir, the piano boldly enters in 12/8 rhythms. The soloist carries the melody for the most part, while the chorus enjoys the sounds of “doo-wop.”

**title: Ledor Vador**

**composer: Meir Finkelstein (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

[publisher: Transcontinental](http://www.etranscon.com/)

catalogue number: 992074

voicing: SATB (solo S or T)

accompaniment: piano or organ

language: Hebrew (or English)

text: synagogue liturgy

timing: 3:00

[recordings: The Songs Live On](http://zamir.org/cds/details.cgi?cd=914) (www.Zamir.org)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: A very sweet setting of the last paragraph of the Kedushah (Sanctification). The choir supports the cantor and sings the melodious refrain.

**title: Maoz Tsur and Chanukah Candle Blessings**

**composer: traditional (arranged by Abraham Binder and Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 992017

voicing: SATB. Solo (any voice)

accompaniment: piano or organ (optional)

language: Hebrew and English

text: liturgy for Chanukah

year of composition: 1990 (re-arrangement)

timing: 2:05

recordings: Lights (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: A fairly straightforward setting of the traditional Ashkenazic melody for the three blessings of the Chanukah candles—the choir provides a wordless accompaniment to the soloist. The Maoz Tsur (again in the traditional Ashkenazic melody) is sung in homophony by the full chorus, with some lovely chromatic harmonies.

**title: Niggun**

**composer: trad. Bratslav (arr: Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number:

voicing: 2-part

accompaniment: piano or harp or guitar

language: no text (vocables)

year of composition: 1990 (arrangement)

timing: 2:20

recordings: Zamir Chorale of Boston “The Soul of the Sabbath”

level of difficulty: easy

description: a meditative *niggun* (spiritual Hassidic song), meant to induce a sense of *dveykus* – cleaving to God.

**title: Ocho Kandelikas**

**composer: Flory Jagoda (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 982015 (SA version is 982070)

voicing: SATB (or SA) with alto solo

accompaniment: piano or guitar, percussion ad lib

language: Ladino

text: Flory Jagoda

year of composition: 1990 (arrangement)

timing: 3:10

recordings: Zamir 25 (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy

description: Flory Jagoda’s “Ocho Kandelikas” (Eight Little Candles) paints a picture of the Chanukah ceremonies she remembers from her childhood in Yugoslavia. The piano/guitar accompaniment is very simple (there are only two chords), but the singers are encouraged to add to the fun with various percussion instruments (shakers, tambourines, hand-drums, etc.).

**title: Ozi**

**composer: trad. Yemenite, arr: Eleanor Epstein**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number:

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: tof (hand drum)

language: Hebrew

text: Psalm 118, 24

year of composition: 1982 (?)

timing: 2:00

recordings:

level of difficulty: easy

description: a canon based on a traditional Yemenite song.

**title: Psalm Verses (Eighteen Canons)**

**composer: Yehezkel Braun**

publisher: Israel Music Institute

catalogue number: IMI 6403

voicing: any combination of voices (2 to 5 parts)

accompaniment: a cappella

language: Hebrew (alternate English)

text: Psalms

year of composition: 1982

timing: depends on which canons are chosen and how they are realized

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: Each of these little gems is a setting of a verse or two from the Psalter. The simpler ones are two-part canons at the unison. The more complex canons involve up to five parts, are in mixed meter, have entrances in different keys and involve inversion of the subject. A word of warning to the conductor: the composer has written many of these in the form of “puzzle canons;” you’ll need to figure out their solutions. But it’s worth the effort. These are fun to sing and lovely to listen to. Use your imagination in selecting a sub-set of the eighteen, allocating them to various combinations of voices, and arranging ways to bring each canon to a conclusion.

**Title: Rozhinkes mit Mandlen**

**Composer: Avrohom Goldfaden**

Arranger: Joshua Jacobson

Voicing: SA, (also available for SATB)

Accompaniment: piano, violin

Language: Yiddish or English

Lyrics: Avrohom Goldfaden

Level of difficulty: easy

Publisher: earthsongs

This well-known Yiddish lullaby was actually written for Goldfaden’s opera, *Shulamis*.

**title: Sa’enu**

**composer: folk (arranged by Charles Davidson)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 990744

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: a cappella

language: Hebrew (English alternative text)

text: Alexander Penn

year of composition: 1965 (arrangement) (song c. 1927)

timing: 3:35

level of difficulty: moderate

description: This is a magical arrangement of a popular Israeli song. Generally the sopranos carry the melody, which is based on a Beduin folk song, while the lower parts weave a bell-like accompaniment.

**title: Samachti**

**composer: Charles Osborne**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 991488

voicing: SATB

accompaniment: piano (or orchestra)

language: Hebrew

text: Psalm 122

year of composition: c. 1995

timing: 2:11

recordings: Jewish Composers in America (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: This lyrical setting of the Jerusalem pilgrims’ Psalm is in strophic form, with the second strophe adding an ingratiating descant countermelody.

**title: Sevivon**

**composer: folk (arranged by Steven Barnett)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 991293

voicing: satb (div)

accompaniment: a cappella

language: Hebrew

text: folk

year of composition: 1981 (arranged)

timing: 1:30

recordings: Lights

level of difficulty: moderate

description: This traditional Ashkenazic folksong is about the “sevivon” or “dreydel,” a children’s spinning toy for Chanukah. Barnett’s engaging setting utilizes snappy rhythms and jazz harmonies, but is not too difficult to learn.

**title: Shalom Aleykhem**

**composer: Israel Goldfarb, arranger: Gil Aldema**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number:

voicing: SAB

accompaniment: a cappella

language: Hebrew

text: trad.

year of composition: 1918

timing: 2:45

recordings: Zamir Chorale of Boston “The Soul of the Sabbath”

level of difficulty: easy

description: Goldfarb wrote this hymn, which is now sung in Jewish homes around the world on Friday nights to inaugurate the Sabbath dinner.

**title: Song of Praise**

**composer: Robert Starer**

publisher: MMB

catalogue number: MMB 89001

voicing: mostly unison (some two-part), any combination of voices

accompaniment: piano (or harp, violin and cello)

timing: 4:40

language: Hebrew and English

text: from Psalm 92

year of composition: 1988

recordings: Jewish Composers in America (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy

description: Robert Starer belongs to the generation of young Jewish musicians who fled Austria in the 1930s. After spending a decade in Jerusalem, Starer eventually settled in the United States. “Song of Praise” is one of Starer’s many works in which he alternates Hebrew and English lyrics. The writing is basically tonal (or modal), but frequent and unexpected modulations are common. The voicing is flexible enough so that this piece works equally well with all-male, all-female or mixed choirs, large or small. This is the first of four choruses in the Psalm suite, Mizmor L’David.

**title: Zol Shoyn Kumen Di Ge’uleh**

**composer: Abraham Cook (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: Transcontinental

catalogue number: 991435 (SA version is 993109)

voicing: SATB divisi (or SA) with solo (any voice)

accompaniment: piano

language: Yiddish

text: Shmerke Kaczerginski

year of composition:

timing: 3:40

recordings: Hear Our Voices (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy to moderate

description: Kaczerginski created this song as a vehicle to raise the morale of the Holocaust survivors he met in the DP camps after the Second World War. It has a wonderful refrain for audience participation.

**title: Zol Zain Sholom**

**composer: folk (arranged by Joshua Jacobson)**

publisher: World Music Press

catalogue number: 24 (24A for SA chorus)

voicing: SATB, solo any voice

accompaniment: piano

language: Yiddish (or English)

text: folk

year of composition:

timing: 1:35

recordings: An Hour in the Garden of Eden, The Monster and the Nightingale (Zamir)

level of difficulty: easy

description: A joyous Yiddish call-and-response song