

PITCHU LI

Music: Cantor Gerald Cohen
Text: Psalm 118: 19-24

פְּתִחוּ לִי

לִחְנוֹ: גִּרְלֵד כֹּהֵן
מִלִּילִים: תְּהִלִּים: קִיחַ: יט – כד

INTRO

This resource will help guide you as you rehearse your chapter through the learning of *Pitchu Li*. It is our hope that this document will make it easier to bring some of the “midrash” of the music alive from week-to-week so that when we come together as a HaZamir community, we will all have common understandings of the texts and music we learn together. Please keep these points in mind as you use the following guide:

THE TEXT: Centered and bordered on this page, you will find the complete Hebrew text for *Pitchu Li*, accompanied by its translation.

1. CONTEXT: This section provides a brief overview of the context in which *Pitchu Li* was composed. From general historical information to pertinent historical figures and places, you will find useful information to share with your singers about the history of this song as you teach it to your chapter.

2. CONTENT: This section provides guides for how some sections of the music may be interpreted. Many of these suggestions come directly from our maestro, [Matthew Lazar](#). As you are learning the referenced sections with your chapter, you may consider the following exercise:

- Experiment with your singers by rehearsing passages *first without* prompting them to keep in mind one of the interpretations.
- Prompt your singers to **audiate** (to hear in the mind’s ear) that interpretation.
- Rehearse the passage again, with the interpretation in mind.
- Follow up by asking your HaZamirnikim for descriptive feedback about the differences between each “take” of this passage.

3. CHEVRUTA QUESTIONS (PAIRED STUDY): In this section, you will find a number of questions you can ask your HaZamirnikim to discuss with each other during rehearsals. This rehearsal activity is not something that should distract from the overall flow of rehearsal; rather it provides an occasional moment for HaZamirnikim to learn from one another and to solidify their own understanding of the materials they have been presented with.

<p>פְּתִחוּ לִי שְׁעָרֵי צְדָקָה. אֲבָא בָּם אוֹדֶה יְהוָה: זֶה הַשְּׁעָר לַיהוָה. צְדִיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ: אוֹדֶדְךָ כִּי עֲנִיתָנִי. וְתֵהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה. אֲבֹן מְאֻסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים. הֵיטֵה לְרֹאשׁ פִּנְחָה. מֵעַתָּה הִ' הֵיטֵה זֹאת. הִיא נִפְלְאת בְּעֵינֵינוּ. זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה הִ' נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בוֹ.</p> <p><i>Open for me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them to thank Adomai. This is the gateway to Adomai; through it the righteous shall enter. I will offer thanks to You, for You answered me, and You were my rescuer. The stone the builders rejected has become the keystone. This is Adomai’s doing; how wondrous it is in our sight. This is the day that Adomai has made; we shall celebrate and rejoice in it!</i></p>	<p>Pitchu li sha’arei tzedek, avo vam odeh Yah, Zeh hasha’ar Ladomai, tzadikim yavo-u vo. Od’cha ki anitani, vat’hi li lishu’ah, Even ma-asu habonim, hai’tah l’rosh pinah. Me-et Adomai haitah zot, hi niflat b’eineinu, Zeh hayom asah Adomai, nagilah v’nism’chah vo!</p>
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GOALS/OBJECTIVES

HaZamirnikim will be able to...:

- perform *Pitchu Li* with musical sensitivity, adhering to both markings in the music and instruction from their conductor.
- maintain their own part both in local chapter rehearsals/performances and in international rehearsals/performances.
- express general knowledge of the context in which the piece was composed.
- express an understanding of the musical markings in the score while demonstrating the ability to execute those markings.
- demonstrate ability to explain the composer’s and arranger’s intentions based on understanding of the style of the music, any text painting, and compositional techniques used in the piece.

ASSESSMENT

Informal Assessment: can be performed by the conductor during the course of rehearsal by prompting HaZamirnikim with questions relating to the content included in this guideline and by critically evaluating sections of the music during rehearsal (ex. A conductor may prompt their HaZamirnikim to pay special attention to the rehearsal of a difficult passage, then the conductor can ask for musical feedback (using the learned vocabulary) from the singers).



PITCHU LI

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1. CONTEXT

The text for Pitchu Li comes from **Hallel**. Hallel is one of the great texts of gratitude, praise, and supplication (asking) in Jewish liturgy. It consists of the biblical Psalms 113-118, preceded and followed by a special blessing (“Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us with his commandments and directs us to recite the Hallel”; and “Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, who is honored with praises”). Hallel is recited on most Jewish holidays, usually in synagogue or temple, often sung and sometimes accompanied by musical instruments.

Throughout these Psalms, we are exposed to the full gamut of human experience. From joy to sadness, from love to fear, Hallel offers a deep reflection on our lives, as well as our relationship with God. The setting of this excerpt from Psalm 118, composed by **Cantor Gerald Cohen** and commissioned by the Zamir Choral Foundation, captures the celebration, wonder, and wisdom that Hallel represents. The music’s upbeat nature, both in rhythm and tempo, creates an exciting experience for performers and listeners alike. Cantor Cohen, like many other composers, found his inspiration for it while exploring nature.

NOTE TO CONDUCTORS:

When we use traditional “God” language, it may be useful to remind your singers that within Judaism there are many ways of relating to the concept of God, and many languages available to us. Traditional liturgy is, as quoted above, “God, King of the Universe.” Other modern liturgies use other words and concepts, like “Creator,” “Presence,” or, simply, “You.” And Jews have many beliefs of and experiences with the concept of the divine, from agnosticism to fervent personal belief. All of these approaches are welcome.

2. CONTENT

- Throughout this setting of Pitchu Li, there are almost always moving eighth notes in the piano accompaniment. The excitement that this motion creates can help reflect the composer’s excitement and amazement that the text expresses.
- Cantor Cohen composed this piece so that each chorus, or refrain, is slightly different — and more exciting — than the last. He did this to show that, “it’s not just about rejoicing on the holidays, but rejoicing in every day.” Even if your day consists of regular or repeated activities, each is a gift with its own wonder. As you rehearse, notice the differences between each refrain.
- (Optional:) This piece uses **meter** as an expressive tool in its own unique way. The meter changes throughout the piece so that you don’t know where you are — like we often feel in life when things change rapidly in unpredictable ways.

3. CHEVRUTA QUESTIONS (PAIRED STUDY)

1. Cantor Cohen was inspired by a quote from the great 20th-century Jewish activist **Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel** (1907-1972). Heschel was a theologian, author, and teacher who famously marched with **Dr. Martin Luther King** in Selma. After the march, he remarked, “I felt my feet were praying.” Heschel wrote that “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement... to get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.” While Heschel recognized praying through his feet, there are also those that pray through their lips, with their minds, with dance, and through their actions. How might you recognize these different forms of praying in your own life?

2. The quote from Rabbi Heschel appears in a work of Jewish

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philosophy, in which Heschel emphasizes wonder and radical amazement as a central religious value. How does it change your notion of Judaism to say that its purpose is “to get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted... to be amazed”? When have you felt something like this sense of wonder or amazement, and what caused that feeling?

3. What do you think is the relationship between wonder and gratitude?
4. (Optional): How might the idea of wonder and radical amazement be connected to specific Jewish rituals like Shabbat or blessings?
5. In the “Od’cha” (“I will offer thanks to You”) section, why might the composer have chosen to repeat the word “Od’cha”?
6. The solo section in the middle of the piece contrasts with the rest of the musical setting. While the soloists are singing, the rest of the choir is actively listening, highlighting this melodic section. The text for this solo section is “Mei’eit Adomai Haita Zot hi Nifla’at b’eineinu” (“This is Adomai’s doing; how wondrous it is in our sight”). Why do you think the composer chose this text for the solo?

