

CHOOSING *Music* FOR YOUR *Chupah*

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The *chupah* is the high point of the Jewish wedding. Traditionally, music plays an enormous role at the *chupah*. It is played (or sung) as the *chasan* is escorted to the *badeken* and as the *chasan* and *kallah* are escorted to the *chupah*. If there is a cantor, he may sing Ma Tov at the beginning of the *chupah* as he walks down. Mi Adir and Mi Van Siach are sung under the *chupah*, and depending upon the communal custom or individual preference, other songs like Im Eshkacheich and Shir Hama'alos may be sung under the *chupah* as well. After the *chupah*, either Od Yishoma or Siman Tov is usually played as a recessional.

Understandably, many people have a hard time picking the perfect song to walk down to, never mind the music for the rest of the *chupah*. As a bandleader, I am frequently asked for advice about which music the couple should select for their ceremony. Here are some helpful tips for choosing the right music for your *chupah*.

For the Chasan and Kallah

The most important thing is to choose music that is meaningful to you. Some people know exactly which tune they want to walk down to, and have been dreaming about it as long as they can remember. If you're not one of those people, though, all is not lost. Here are some good places to start looking:

Favorite albums and artists – A good way to find meaningful music is to look at favorite albums and artists. If the couple has a favorite artist/recording, that can be a great source.

Lyrics that speak to you – Think about the words of songs you love – do any of them evoke the thoughts and emotions of this special moment in your life? As you audition songs, look at the lyrics as well to find a song that is personally meaningful.

Tradition – Where there is a community or family tradition, opting to use the traditional melody is often a moving and emotionally satisfying choice. Unless the bride or groom has a personal preference against the melody in question, walking down to the traditional tunes is a way to connect to the community or family's rich heritage, and the guests also respond to the music in an instinctive and very powerful way.

Classics – If none of the above work for you, listen to the songs that your friends and relatives have walked down to. There are some tunes that are *chupah* classics – usually with good reason. Some classic examples

of popular *chupah* melodies in a variety of genres are:

Traditional Nigunim

The Alter Rebbe's Nigun (Chabad)
Bobover Wedding March
Keili Ata (Chabad)
Lecha Dodi (Breslov)
Adam Harishon's Nigun (Moditz)

Israeli

Al Kol Eleh (Naomi Shemer)
Yerusholayim Shel Zahav
(Naomi Shemer)
Erev Shel Shoshanim
Yedid Nefesh

Contemporary Jewish

Bilvavi (R' Shmuel Brazil)
Lev Tahor (D'veykus)
Yesimcha (Avraham Fried)
B'sheim Hashem (Carlebach)
L'ma'an Achai (Carlebach)

Classical

Canon in D (Pachelbel)
Air from Water Music (Handel)
Trumpet Voluntary (Jeremiah Clarke)

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Yiddish/Klezmer

Oif'n Pripitchok
 Rhozinkes Mit Mandlen
 Flatbush Waltz (Andy Statman)

The Wedding Procession

The wedding procession can provide an opportunity to include tunes that might not be quite right for the *chasan* or *kallah*, but are still meaningful to them. It can also be a way to include music that is meaningful to other members of the bridal party – whether a Yiddish tune for the grandparents, a shared favorite for the bridesmaids or groomsmen, or a family *nigun* for one of the siblings.

Will any children be walking down?

If so, a number of approaches are possible. One is to choose a nice slow melody, just like for the adults, perhaps one with lyrics like Hamalach. A second option is to select a classical piece associated with kids, such as Brahm's Lullaby. Another approach is to play a more upbeat song, either a popular children's tune – along the lines of It's A Small World or You Are My Sunshine – a classical piece like the March from the Nutcracker Suite, or a Hebrew song like Ki Va Moed or

even Piamenta's Asher Bara.

Under the Chupah

For Mi Adir, there are many pretty melodies, including the Vishnitz melody and the Abie Rotenberg version from the album Aish. For Mi Van Siach, there are nice melodies by Blue Fringe and Abie Rotenberg among others. Of course, there are also the cantorial standards, like Schnipelisky's Mi Adir.

For Im Eshkacheich, there are several popular options including the traditional melody, a Carlebach version, and one by R' Mottel Twersky, popularized by the group Lev Tahor.

A Few Final Thoughts

Less is More – In terms of the wedding procession, less is more. Although bands can play a different song for each person walking down, with larger processions, this unduly complicates things and prevents the music from flowing well. Additionally, since in many venues it doesn't take all that long to walk down, the band winds up only playing part of each piece. To prevent this, I often suggest choosing

one song per group of people; i.e. having all the bridesmaids walk down to the same song.

Coordinate in Advance – It is good etiquette, and makes for a much more polished accompaniment, if the person singing under the *chupah* lets the band know prior to the event what melodies and in what key he'll be singing if musical accompaniment is desired. This allows the band to bring sheet music if needed and ensures that the accompanists know what key the singer will be singing in before he starts.

Coordinate at the Event – It's good for the band and event coordinator at the venue to work together to allow the band time to end each song before the next person or group starts walking down. This will avoid the situations where the band is forced to end a song mid-sentence, as it were, to switch to the next one.

Any good band will be able to improvise and accommodate any sudden surprise changes on the fly, but a little advance preparation will help make the music at your *chupah* perfect.

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