

◆ Jewish Holidays

Range:



ABOUT THE ARRANGER

Charles Heller has spent his life immersed in Jewish music, beginning as a boy soprano at the age of eight and then as a conductor and arranger. His compositions and arrangements have been performed in broadcasts and concerts throughout the world.

Heller teaches music at the middle school level and is the Choir Director at Beth Emeth Synagogue in Toronto.

Charles Heller collected the folk song **Jewish Holidays** from Ben Miller and then arranged it for choir. Ben Miller was born in Poland and now lives in Toronto (Canada) and Israel. Ben Miller's life has been filled with singing; on holidays when he was growing up in Poland, the neighbors would stand under the windows to listen to his family singing.



A SIGN OF THE TIMES

This folksong was sung in Poland before World War II. It has absorbed the rhythm of the *Polonaise*:



The Polonaise was used in the Polish court in the 17th century as an accompaniment for festive occasions. Famous composers like Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert composed Polonaises but it was Chopin who transformed this dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ time to become a symbol of national heroism.

THE LYRICS

The original lyrics of **Jewish Holidays** were in Yiddish. Each verse tells of a different Jewish holiday:

Rosh Hashannah (rohsh hah-shah-nah) - the New Year in the fall

After the synagogue services, people go to a river bank and throw crumbs into the water to symbolize casting away their sins and starting afresh.

Sukkot (Soo-koht) - Thanksgiving

Each family builds a booth (sukkah) in the backyard and eats inside, as a reminder of the flimsy tents of the Israelites in the wilderness. In Eastern Europe, there was not much space and so families would share a booth. When visitors would drop in, everyone had to avoid quarreling and good food would be enjoyed by all.

Chanukah (hah-noo-kah) - the festival of lights

Jews eat latkes (delicious fried potato pancakes dipped in cream or apple sauce) and children play games with the dreidl (a spinning top). Colored festival candles are lit each evening for eight days.

Purim (poo-rim) - day of fun and masquerade

The Jews read aloud the Book of Esther which tells of how the Jews survived attempted genocide in Persia. When the name of the wicked Haman is read, the listeners make loud noises. The story of Esther is full of hidden identities, so for this holiday the children and adults dress in disguise as clowns or as characters from the story. The Purim cakes are called *Hamman-tashen* (Haman's purses).

Passover - celebration of spring and new beginnings

This holiday is a commemoration of the deliverance of the slaves from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea and the birth of the Jewish nation. In honor of the week-long holiday, Jews sweep out the whole house, buy fresh food to be eaten on dishes only used for Passover and eat matzo (unleavened bread) instead of regular bread and cake. The Seder (ceremonial meal) is probably the most significant of all Jewish customs.

THE MUSIC BETWEEN THE NOTES

The beat of music may be sung in different ways in different kinds of music.

A strong, accented beat for marches:



The gentle beat of small children walking:



Use a bounce (no accent) on each beat in **Jewish Holidays** to add to the feeling of excitement:

**INTRODUCTION FOR THE AUDIENCE**

"**Jewish Holidays** is a folksong arranged by Charles Heller which revels in the party atmosphere of each special day."

It is wonderful to be able to share in the enjoyment of the celebrations by singing this song. Happy holidays!

Nancy Telfer
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