

The Music of Shabbat

by Beth Ann Salzman

Imagine a Shabbat service or a Hebrew School without music. Our religion is filled with melody. Our liturgy has been put to music by some of the greatest composers of our time. We sing in Hebrew, English, Yiddish and in some cases, Ladino. Our youth groups love to sing. We have a different traditional *nusach* (Jewish music form) for every major holiday.

Betenu, a small congregation in Amherst, NH, applied for a grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Manchester to create a Shabbat CD when it realized that its services and religious school were sorely lacking in musical content. The congregational membership had little Jewish musical background and there were so many new melodies that could enrich their services and classes. Once the federation granted the funding, the work of creation began.

Temple members, Paula Silver, executive producer, along with Ann Rachel and Doug Hirsch, vocalists, first had to decide what music to record and which melodies to use. They followed the exact order of their congregational *siddur* which varies slightly from the order of Gates of Prayer. In some cases they recorded both a traditional and modern version of the same prayer. They obtained copyright permission from all the composers whose work was not in the public domain. Each CD includes a booklet with all of the recorded songs' words in Hebrew and English

transliteration, along with an English translation. The CD contains 46 songs of Shabbat sung by Ann Rachel and Doug Hirsch.

Once the CD was complete, Congregation Betenu distributed copies to all its members. The hope was that everyone would listen to the music at home, in the car, or wherever they had a CD player, and that by osmosis they would learn how to "sing along." The results have been astounding.

Attendance at services has increased. The

sanctuary is filled with song. Ann Rachel has become the congregational soloist. Jeff Gribetz, a member of Betenu who plays the organ, made himself known when the CD came out and his music now enriches services. The children, required to attend anywhere from 3 - 10 service a year depending on their age, are singing. Shabbat has taken on

wonderful vitality. This year the congregational membership has increased about 20 percent, as has enrollment in the religious school.

As the words of a wonderful folk song go, "music speaks louder than words; it's the only thing that the whole world listens to... music speaks louder than words, when we sing, people understand. Thanks to the grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Manchester, this seems to be holding true for Congregation Betenu. If you want to sing along you can order their CD for an \$18 contribution to Congregation Betenu Music Fund, Northern Blvd., Amherst, NH 03031.



Singing along with Rabbi Joshua Segal are Betenu's innovative music-makers Jeff Gribetz, organist, Doug Hirsch, vocalist, Ann Rachel, congregational soloist, and Paula Silver, executive producer of the innovative Shabbat music CD funded by the Federation.