

GENERATIONS: C-Shawn Zevit 2005
CD 2 Z'mirot "Songs" for the Sabbath – From Now to Then

My father's family originally came to Winnipeg, Canada, around 1919 from the Ukraine area of old Russia. With my great-grandparent's Ben Zion and Golde Zwet, and their five children (Celia, Etta, Channah, Aaron and David) came a wonderful musical tradition. Soon after my grandfather Aaron and Uncle Dave changed their name to Zevit. My grandfather Aaron and grandmother Rose Gruber, born in Vienna and who also loved to sing, began their partnership in song when they were both 16 years old and met in the Rosh Pina synagogue choir. When they retired in 1975, they moved to Israel for eight years, then to Toronto in 1983. Together they blended musical traditions and when they returned to Canada, I began joining them and/or my Aunt and family almost every Friday night. Over the course of the next 10 years, I learned the unique family melodies they inherited, and my grandfather and I even sang them together in occasional concerts. After he died in 2003, I approached my dad's first cousin Izzy Asper (himself a Jazz buff and lover of family history) in August 2003 about collaborating on a project to preserve our family legacy as well as record new melodies for an inspiring, prayerful, and educative Sabbath musical experience. Izzy was very excited about the project, and then sadly passed away suddenly in October 2003 before we could begin. This was part of the loss of an entire generation within only a couple of years- my grandfather and his four siblings (all who were in their 90's), my dad's sister Estelle, and Izzy. The passion to bring this music to the world intensified, and thanks to Izzy's daughter Gail, and the rest of her family, the project moved forward. The 15 pieces on this CD were from original recordings that my grandfather and I made in the early 1990's and digitally enhanced. Some light percussion, guitar and violin were added on some selections. Otherwise, the vocals are live and as they were originally captured on tape.

1. **Shehekheyanu (2:29)** Traditional liturgy and melody- sung at many festive occasions and when we gather in gratitude for our being sustained to gather again as family or in community.

<https://youtu.be/-Di0CTpEBNs?si=nXhCKRRLRMWupTq>

2. **Elu Devarim (3:44)** <https://youtu.be/M1TKPnS-n4s?si=BUFkG6gZQ8RImEsk>

Based on the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127a; traditional melody recounting the early sages understanding of what constitutes the core of unconditional loving and moral acts that cannot be measured. The study of Torah is ultimately equated to all the actions, derived from a rabbinical discussion on whether study or acts in the world are the most important. In the estimation of the sages, study will lead to action and so is the most powerful starting place for human spiritual and ethical development.

3. **Kol Mekadeshe (2:01)** <https://youtu.be/GfcwLFMj7Qk?si=byXmvYurTHgYnDF>

Traditional Sabbath zmirah, melody passed down through my family. Little is known of the composer of this zmirah, except from the three initials in Mekadesh, Shomer and Harbeh in the first stanza that spells Moshe.

4. Menukha V'Simkha (2:06) <https://youtu.be/cknq9UZceM?si=eMNdClaTUALyoQod>

Traditional Sabbath zmirah, by another unknown composer by the name of Moshe (initials of the first three stanzas), and another complex and unfolding melody passed down through my family.

5. Yom Shabbat (2:19) https://youtu.be/6O77w5M4y3I?si=ggzXdUx69vNa_Kv1

Traditional Sabbath zmirah, melody passed down through my family. This zmirah has faded from many contemporary prayer books. While the theology and gender roles reflect a very traditional mind-set, the melody and harmonies made this a favorite of my grandparents.

6. Yah Ribbon (4:35) <https://youtu.be/7kgCb17MNkk?si=iq2qk1qENd28-MxS>

Traditional Sabbath zmirah is in Aramaic by Israel ben Moshe of Najara, Damascus. A student of Rabbi Yitzhak Luria of Tzfat, Israel, and later became rabbi of Gaza and a prolific writer of zmirot. Written as an acrostic spelling “Yisrael”, it recounts the many blessings of God’s creation in praise, not directly mentioning the Sabbath, but celebrating the existence of the world and our role in witnessing and praising God’s presence in the universe, in our lives and the community of Israel. The melody was passed down through my family. This beautiful and complex melody is an example of how my grandparent’s collaborated on their musical traditions- strands of both their family’s traditions are seamlessly woven together here.

7. Tsur Mishelo (2:56) <https://youtu.be/-aDoRCbxVms?si=shN0tfgfgwAW0t9G>

Traditional Sabbath zmirah, melody passed down through my family. An introduction to Birkat Hamazon (Grace after Meals), the refrain invites gathered guests to thank God for the food they have eaten and parallels the first three blessings of the traditional Grace after Meals. The last stanza before the final refrain was always a special moment for my grandmother Rose, where she would place her hand on my grandfather’s to slow down our pace. Tears would fill her eyes as the yearning of rebuilding a Jewish home in Jerusalem that had been transmitted for centuries would fill her soul- and ours.

8. Mimkomkha (2:31) https://youtu.be/6yReObim8SQ?si=xRtLYrld_tAZRe7i

Sabbath morning liturgy, traditional cantorial melody. My grandfather had been encouraged at times to pursue being a cantor, but never pursued it formally.

9. Barukh El Elyon (2:45) https://youtu.be/AmMGUWa2MNU?si=bPMQCS_03_Wdd5ka

Traditional Sabbath zmirah, melody passed down through my family. The presumed author, Rabbi Barukh ben Shmuel, lived in Mainz, Germany, where he died in 1221 c.e. The acrostic forms the name Barukh Hazak. The zmirah praises the one who celebrates the Sabbath and the benefits of this spiritual observance. I love the overlapping chorus and accompanying table banging.

10. Dror Yikrah (1:35) <https://youtu.be/zfVqHvj0vHg?si=PNKZov1qA7SH3SzL>

Traditional Sabbath zmirah attributed to Dunash ben Labrat, focusing on human freedom. The melody passed down through my family and is another unique and progressive melody in a major key.

11. Yom Zeh Mekhubad (3:08) <https://youtu.be/WtArxwjBZPU?si=fhaXLbKJ-AaTV8B5>

Traditional Sabbath zmirah honoring the Sabbath itself, poetically repeating the Biblical account of creation and the Sabbath as a day for celebrating God's presence in the world. Nothing is known about the author except his name Yisrael written in acrostic form in the first 5 stanzas. This is the family melody I have most transmitted to the world and find that people make it their own within moments.

12. Atzabehem (Psalm 115) (1:23) <https://youtu.be/UXX3-bEipas?si=rm6RivRXkb57KNVS>

Traditional liturgy and Passover Haggadah, traditional melody. A recount of the what happens when the work of our human hands is turned into idolatry and the false and illusory nature of placing our belief in them in contrast with putting faith in the One without form and that contains all forms.

13. Moshele (3:02) https://youtu.be/u0FWgXti2qk?si=35uIFj0LkInXJC_L

Traditional Yiddish song about the trials and tribulations and loves of Moshele, that was my Grandfather Aaron's big solo number whenever he did concerts with a choir in Toronto later in life.