



**HALLELU-YAH!**  
FOUR DAYS WITH THE  
KALLAH CHORALE 2004



**“WE RETURN. IT’S JUST SUCH AN EXPERIENCE.”**  
**“IT’S A COMMUNITY WITHIN A COMMUNITY.”**  
**“THIS IS MY ANNUAL SPIRITUAL SHOT IN THE ARM.”**  
**“IT’S A GIFT I GIVE MYSELF EVERY YEAR.”**  
**“IT NOURISHES MY SOUL IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY.”**  
**“THIS IS MY REAL LIFE. THE OTHER STUFF JUST PAYS THE BILLS.”**



In July, 2004, more than 100 people came to Rindge, New Hampshire, to attend the URJ (Union for Reform Judaism) Kallah adult learning retreat. They came for spiritual renewal, to study with renowned scholars, to enjoy the fellowship of like-minded individuals, and to celebrate Shabbat surrounded by mountains, trees, and beautiful music. Cantor Ellen Dreskin, director of programming for the Synagogue 2000 program, has led the Kallah Chorale for six years. The 18 women and one man in this year’s Chorale, many of them choir members and leaders in their own temples, came for a special reason: to sing with each other and with Ellen.



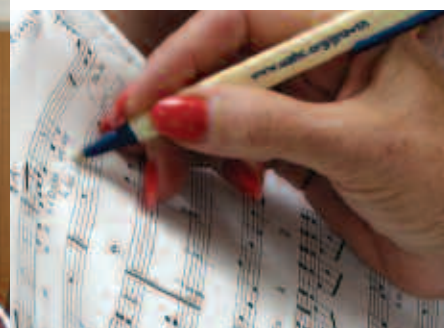
**WEDNESDAY, JULY 21, 2:30 PM**

**1**  
**REHEARSAL**

“We’re going to learn four pieces,” Ellen begins. “Some three-part, some four-part. Mostly it’s just pretty informal. You know what parts you like to sing. So divide yourself into three sections: highish, middlish, and lowish.”

So 19 blondish to dark brownish, mostly reddish and curlyish-ish, 40-ish women in T-shirts, sandals and running shoes—and one man, beardish and baldish—arrange themselves and find their seats.

Some are first-timers at Kallah. Others have been coming back for years. This is the first time this group is singing together, and they have three 75-minute rehearsals to prepare for Shabbat services on Friday evening.



“Okay,” Ellen says. “Let’s sing.”

She passes out sheet music for the first piece, *Or Zarua* (Shining Light) by Dan Nichols, picks up her guitar and demonstrates the *nigun* (melody).

Within three minutes everyone is singing:

“Bum-bi-di-bum, bum-bi-di-bum.” And within ten minutes there is glorious harmony. Highish:

“Na-ma-naaa... na-ma-na...” Middlish: Ahhh... ahhh...” Lowish:

“Bum-bi-di-bum, bum-bi-di-bum.”

“That’s gorgeous,” beams Ellen.





The second piece, *Yis'm'chu*, puts a new melody to words everybody knows. "Y'all be happy," is Ellen's instruction, which echoes the meaning of the song. "I'm from Texas," she adds by way of explanation.

The third piece, *Halleluyah* is a new arrangement by Danny Maseng. "Let everybody that breathes praise God."

"This is the most difficult one," says Ellen of the last piece, *Y'did Nefesh*. "Just listen, listen carefully," she instructs. She sings each of the three parts solo, one after the other, then leads each group *a cappella*.

"Now let's see if you can put all of that together. If it doesn't work today it will work tomorrow."





**THURSDAY, JULY 22, 11:30 AM**

**2**  
REHEARSAL

Before practice begins, “Bum-bi-di-bum, bum-bi-di-bum” is already echoing through the halls of the music building.

Ellen starts the session by explaining, “We’ll sing *Or Zarua* at the very beginning of the Friday night service...” Everyone breaks into song: “*Or zarua la-tza-dik ul...*” She holds up her hand. “We’ll sing *Yedid Nefesh* during the program after Shabbat dinner, and we’ll do *Halleluyah* and *Yis’m’chu* on Shabbat morning.”

“*Yedid Nefesh* is my absolute favorite piece of music,” Ellen continues. “It’s gorgeous poetry with mystical overtones. It was written in Tzfat. We’ve sung this thousands of times, but adding these harmonies gives it a whole new level of meaning. It’s a love song to God: ‘Delightful beloved of my soul, I stand before you. My soul is sick with love for you.’”



“Just indulge me one time.”

“I’m giving you a downbeat.”

“Now try it without that extra breath.”

“And smile.”



“On letter A, page 2, let’s listen to how those words fit together.”

“Get ready to sail through. We won’t stop, no matter what happens.”

“What’s the actual note we’re ending on? B-flat the first time. B-natural the second time.”

“Let’s go from the same tricky spot.”

“If you sing a wrong note during Shabbat, don’t worry about it. We’re here to have fun and praise God. Just keep going.”

“Cool. Ya’ll are so good!”





**FRIDAY, JULY 23, 11:30 AM**

“Ladies and gentleman,” Ellen begins the third and last rehearsal, “we are going to arrange ourselves in rows: highish here, lowish and middlish here. Okay, is everybody happy where they are?”

“Good. Let’s build on what we did yesterday and put it all together.”

“You need to watch my hand a little more closely. Your rhythm is a little off. Please don’t look at the music unless you have to. And when you turn the page, try to hold the note as long as you can. We don’t want any dead space. Now let’s start again at ‘C.’”



“Now let’s try it standing, like we’ll be during services. When we get to ha-rac-cha-man, that’s the first drop-dead chord of the piece.”

“Okay, we’re going to do ‘D’ twice, and the second time is when you go into that weird note.” Wearing Texas with thick black rubber soles, she bounces on her toes.

“Remember, it’s not halle-lu-yuh, it’s halle-lu-yah. Let’s go to the beginning. Hang onto your kippot!”

“Wow. I know I’m going to cry during services, it’s so beautiful.”



“Everything I wanted to do with this choir is done,” are Ellen’s last words of advice. “We had a good time. Shabbat is coming. Our whole purpose is to enhance the congregation’s worship. You are all *sh’lichei tzibbur*, service leaders. Don’t think about the notes. Think about doing something for them. If you make a mistake, smile and forget about it. I’m going to make mistakes. I just hope I don’t throw anyone off. Let’s go and celebrate Shabbat.”



**SATURDAY, JULY 24, 10:20 AM**





**SATURDAY, JULY 24, 10:30 AM**

**“IT’S A JOYOUS EXPERIENCE TO OPEN YOUR MOUTH AND LET THE MUSIC FLOW”**  
**“I LOVE BEING SURROUNDED BY BEAUTIFUL MELODIES AND BEAUTIFUL VOICES.”**  
**“WE GAIN A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEANING OF THE WORDS.”**  
**“WITH A GREAT TEACHER YOU CAN CREATE WONDERFUL MUSIC IN A SHORT TIME.”**  
**“ELLEN’S SPIRITUALITY INFUSES ALL OF US.”**  
**“I WISH I COULD HAVE THIS EVERY DAY OF MY LIFE.”**

## **KALLAH CHORALE 2004**

<b>Nanci Bell</b>	<b>Shirley, MA</b>	<b>Myrna Kruger</b>	<b>Aberdeen, NJ</b>
<b>Judith Bitterman</b>	<b>Maywood, NJ</b>	<b>Mickey Milbauer</b>	<b>Hartsdale, NY</b>
<b>Laurie Botstein</b>	<b>Atlanta, GA</b>	<b>Susan Mintz</b>	<b>Richmond Hill, ONT</b>
<b>Bob Brakman</b>	<b>Hazlet, NJ</b>	<b>Debra Samuels</b>	<b>Pittsburgh, PA</b>
<b>Joan Charlson</b>	<b>Pittsburgh, PA</b>	<b>Roberta Sol</b>	<b>New Fairfield, CT</b>
<b>Amy Dattner</b>	<b>Briarwood, NY</b>	<b>Deb Taylor</b>	<b>Wexford, PA</b>
<b>Ellen Dreskin</b>	<b>Ardsley, NY</b>	<b>Pat Tonkin</b>	<b>San Antonio, TX</b>
<b>Susan Goldberg Pardo</b>	<b>Williamsville, NY</b>	<b>Ronnie van Gerder</b>	<b>Atlanta, GA</b>
<b>Susan Goldman</b>	<b>Longmeadow, MA</b>	<b>Karen Winograd</b>	<b>Matawan, NJ</b>
<b>Rene Katersky</b>	<b>Scituate, MA</b>	<b>Fredi Wolgin</b>	<b>Lafayette Hill, PA</b>

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