

Debut CD offers Jewish music with popular appeal

By: [LILA HANFT](#) Staff Reporter

Temple Emanu El's Cantor Laurel Barr has released a debut CD "Modim, Grateful."

Two years in the making and independently produced, "Modim" is not a collection of *chazzanut* (traditional cantorial chant-ing); rather, it is a personal selection of Jewish-themed music Barr finds meaningful and inspiring.

Crafted with popular appeal in mind, the CD's audience will be fans of show tunes, Barbra Streisand, and, of course, Barr herself.

The lighter music Barr has chosen for this CD ranges from cartoon tunes ("When You Believe" from "The Prince of Egypt") to comedy (Tom Lehrer's "Chanukah in Santa Monica") to songs by contemporary Jewish musicians Julie A. Silver ("Take God with You") and Craig Taubman ("*Shehecheyanu*").

Barr has a lovely, lively, sophisticated voice, as anyone who has attended services at Temple Emanu El can attest. Unfortunately, not all the selections on "Modim" show Barr's vocal talent to best advantage.

On the finest tracks, Barr's voice has the sultry quality of a nightclub *chanteuse*, with a smoky complexity that makes the liturgical selections ("*L'dor Vador*," "*Modim*") particularly compelling.

When the music is on the sentimental side, Barr's style is strongly reminiscent of Streisand's. "Take God with You," "Far from the Home I Love," and "If I Could" (which is, in fact, one of Streisand's signature songs) are delivered with an expansive theatricality. That, for me, is less moving than the understated pathos of the liturgical pieces.

The honky-tonk exuberance of "Chanukah in Santa Monica" is a welcome departure from the gravity of the CD's second half. Barr really has fun with this song and its humorous pairing of Jewish holidays with American place-names. (Clevelanders are bound to smile at: "These midwestern winters, I can't endure 'em/ So every year I pack my gear and head out West for Purim.")

Throughout the CD, Barr creates lovely, resonant harmony with backup vocalists Sharon Barr (her daughter), Chad Barr (her husband and the guitarist on many numbers), and Cantor Allan Robuck (her brother, who also plays keyboard on the CD).

"Modim, Grateful" is available at www.laurelbarr.com or the Women of Temple Emanu El Gift Shop. Hear Barr and six other area cantors at K'hila B'shira, the cantor's concert, on Sun., Dec. 12, at Temple Emanu El at 3 p.m. 216-292-2931.

<http://www.cjn.org/articles/2004/12/06/features/arts/music1203.txt>