

Craig Taubman:

BY BETH PANITZ



MICHAEL SEGAL

He was conned—pure and simple. It was 30 years ago, but Craig Taubman will

never forget the day his camp counselor tricked him—and he'll never stop thanking him for it either. Faking laryngitis, Craig's cunning counselor thrust his guitar into the 14-year-old's hands and asked him to lead a song session with the group. As Craig's fingers flew over the strings, he discovered his true love—music. The next day, the teenager composed his first song—a new melody for שיר המעלות (Shir Hama'alot)—a psalm chanted as part of ברכת המזון (Birkat Hamazon, Grace After Meals).

Craig has gone on to write scores of songs—everything from playful tunes for Walt Disney Records to advertising jingles for Ford cars. But mostly, he pours his heart and soul into Jewish music, crafting original songs as well as new melodies for age-old prayers. We recently talked to Craig about what keeps him attuned to Jewish music.

BABA: Hi, Craig. What do you enjoy most about being a musician?

CRAIG: I like knowing that my music can touch people and stir their emotions—that it can make people smile, cry, laugh, or dance—that it can send a shiver up someone's spine—that somehow it can help them look at life a little differently.



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& Soul

BABA: Why have you focused so much of your career on Jewish music?

CRAIG: Jewish music just really, really sends me. I can write secular music, but I feel a deeper, more powerful connection to Jewish music. I don't just write a piece of Jewish music, I discover it.

BABA: How can music enrich our holiday celebrations?

CRAIG: The holiday songs we sing every year are the Jewish soundtrack to our lives, stirring memories of previous holiday celebrations and setting an appropriate mood for the חג (hag, holiday). For example, whenever I hear "Avadim Hayinu," which we sing at Pesach, I can smell the chicken soup on the Seder table, and feel the joy that we experience when we celebrate the Exodus from Egypt.

BABA: What's your favorite Jewish holiday?

CRAIG: Sukkot is one of my favorites. It's a great time to kick back and enjoy being with my family and friends. Every night dozens of people visit our *sukkah* to eat and sing together.

BABA: What is one song that we'd be certain to sing if we joined you in your *sukkah*?

CRAIG: השְׁכִיבֵנוּ (Hashkiveinu)—which is part of the evening service all year—is especially powerful on

Sukkot. I composed a sweet and simple melody for השְׁכִיבֵנוּ (Hashkiveinu) that conveys the prayer's meaning, which asks God to spread a shelter of peace over us—סֻכַּת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ, *sukkat shlomekha*. It reminds me that all of us on this planet—man and woman, young and old, people of all faiths—need God's blessing and the strength and courage to bless each other with peace.

BABA: How can music bring people together in celebration?

CRAIG: Music speaks louder than words; it is a language that the whole world understands. When we pray together in a community, we can create a powerful sense of wonder that is difficult to create when one is not in a group.

BABA: Thanks, Craig. That's music to our ears! 🎵

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