

Haida

Haida is a nigan (pl. niganim, alternately niggun/niggunim), which is a form of Jewish religious song sung by groups, often with repetitive sounds instead of with formal lyrics. They are especially central to worship in Chassidic Judaism, in which they evolved to be structured, yet ecstatic forms intended to reflect the mystical joy of intense prayer.

From Coreen Duffy:

“The true beauty of the Chassidic nigan (beginning in the 18th Century in Eastern Europe) was the drive to equalize prayer. The highest, most spiritual levels of prayer had always been reserved for the upper echelons of Jewish (ghetto) life — the rabbis and the wealthier in the community. Poor Jews had no time to study Torah and did not know the words to prayers, and were thus excluded from the spiritual mountain top. The Chassidic movement innovated singable tunes and dispensed with the words to be able to include everyone. The modern tendency to start in a slow tempo and then whiz into accelerando derives from the Chassidic tendency to carry these niganim on for (sometimes) hours. Worshippers would enter a new plane of spirituality, sometimes singing and dancing into a frenzy. I should also add that the joy and exuberance often associated with niganim come from the urgency of connecting with the higher spiritual power of God without the encumbrance of text. After all, the syllables themselves have no meaning. The meaning comes from the spiritual escape that the nigan offers from the misery of ghetto or shtetl* life. Perhaps that’s another explanation for the slow-tempo start: the exhausted trudging towards worship, that intensifies and grows into a frenzy of dancing, singing, improv, and connection.

[In performance] you could adopt some of the more exciting, nuanced possibilities in rendering a nigan with a choir. In addition to choreography, a certain amount of ornamentation and improvisation (including descant and syncopation with the syllables) would be welcome (or could be pre-planned, with soloists executing at certain points).”

*shtetl: a Yiddish word meaning “little town.” Shtetls were small market towns in Russia and Poland that shared a unique socio-cultural community pattern during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

There is a traditional Israeli dance that often accompanies this song. You can see the children doing it on the video at this link featuring the Fairfield County Children’s Choir. The dance is not usually done in a straight line, but the children here are likely doing it that way due to space.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6px24HEofvs&feature=emb_rel_err

Here is a slightly more elaborate version of the dance that is actually being taught in the video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyQGavkDXNQ>

“The cool thing about Israeli-style dance in this context is that different groups can accomplish different levels of the choreography simultaneously (the more difficult version in one circle, and the simpler one in another, and the rest on risers just doing the clapping). You can also do this in concentric circles, with each circle moving in the opposition direction.”

~Coreen Duffy

Pronunciation

hai-də, hai-dI-di da- də

Editions

1) You can find a pdf of the free edition at

<https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/freesheetmusic/round-haida-am.pdf>

You also can find that same edition in keys from E-flat minor up to A-minor here (as well as lots of other good unrelated resources) here if needed:

<https://www.music-for-music-teachers.com/singing-rounds-for-the-classroom.html>

2) Haida, arranged by Henry Leck, Colla Voce

Unison/two-part (or three-part?) canon with piano accompaniment arranged by Thomas Gerber

3) Haida, arranged by Shirley W. McRae, Pavane Publishing

SSA, piano, clarinet and tambourine