

CD 'Ma'alot' – The Songs of Ascents

Psalms 120-134, sung in Hebrew

Waltraud Rennebaum & Ensemble SHOSHAN

(*'Shoshan' means 'lily'*)

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Waltraud Rennebaum: mezzo-soprano; composition
 Raimund Rennebaum: piano, keyboards; composition
 Heike Zehe: flute, alto flute

Genre: Jewish music, Psalms of the Bible

guest musicians:

Anselm Schardt: violoncello (track 5, 7, 9, 14, 16)
 Helmut Kandert: percussion (track 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 15)
 Tom Daun: Celtic harp (track 8, 13)
 Olaf Rosier: high tenor (track 3, 4, 7, 15)
 Torsten Ache: tenor (track 3, 4, 7, 15)
 Klaus Kölsch: baritone (track 3, 4, 7, 11, 15)

producer: Waltraud Rennebaum
arranger: Raimund Rennebaum

CD booklet: The composed verses from the bible are taken from the Old Testament Book of Psalms (in Hebrew 'Tehilim'). The lyrics have been retained in the original language (Hebrew) and are additionally rendered in phonetic transcription, in German and in English Bible translation.

You find information about composer and copyright below each song title.

Comments on the original significance of this biblical song cycle as well as a **short biography of the 'Ensemble Shoshan'** together with pictures of the artists are **included in the booklet.**

More information: www.shoshanim.de/pages/home.html

track, time	title, subtitle, composer, ISRC	instruments, voices	musical character, features	song informations and lyrical context
1 4:01	El Adonai <i>psalm 120</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14369	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vocals flute frame drum, tambourine, chimes keyboards bass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> elegy Middle East style mystical intro and coda in classical style 	<i>Elegy</i> An elegy opens up the cycle of the 15 ascension or pilgrimage songs, whose main subject is the longing for 'Zion'. The word 'Zion' refers primarily to Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The psalm writer is in exile, far away from his homeland Israel. He is surrounded by liars and aggressive tribes (<i>Meshech, Kedar</i>). Lost in despair, he turns to God, who answers his prayers. The poet takes up different roles during the psalm verses: Sometimes he uses the first-person form while narrating, sometimes he addresses his enemies directly, and sometimes he talks in prayer to God. These alternating roles are characteristic for many psalms.
2 3:37	Essa einai <i>psalm 121</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14370	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vocals flute piano keyboard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cheerful dance-like spirited increasing tempo 	<i>Joyful praise song</i> The song starts with the question: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where shall my help come from? Does my help come from the Lord...?" and it closes with the encouragement: "He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" ('Hine lo yanum...'). Full of hope looking up to God whom he recognises as creator of heaven and earth, the praying man is comforted by the promise of being kept from harm and danger. In Judaism, mountains often represent places of worship and personal encounter with God, like Mount of <i>Moriah</i> for Abraham or Mount of <i>Horeb</i> for Mose. Psalm 121 has already several times been set to music and is to this day a favoured prayer in synagogues in times of persecution and war.

<p>3 5:18</p>	<p>Sha'alu shelom Yerushalayim <i>psalm 122</i> Waltraud Rennebaum Raimund Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14371</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead vocals • backing vocals (3 male voices) • flute • piano • keyboards • tambourine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>part A:</i> lyrical, romantic, tender, very cantabile • <i>part B:</i> joyous, full of verve, sweeping 	<p><i>Prayer for Jerusalem</i> This psalm by King David sings about the outstanding significance of Jerusalem. The city is intrinsically tied to the history and faith of the Jewish people. Three times a year, the Israelites pilgrimated up to Zion in order to celebrate the great feasts – <i>Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot</i>. The Songs of Ascents were intoned while climbing up towards Jerusalem and probably also during the solemn services on the steps of the temple. The 'House of the Lord' which was situated on the eastern hill of the city represented at all times the center of the Jewish-Mosaic services. According to the biblical tradition, true peace will come from Jerusalem and spread all over the world. That's why it was always and is still important to wish Jerusalem peace, security and happiness and to pray for her (<i>sha'alu shelom Yerushalayim</i>).</p>
<p>4 4:45</p>	<p>Hineh keinei avadim <i>psalm 123</i> Israel Harel DE-A55-07-14372</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead vocals • choir vocals (3 male voices) • flute • piano, keyboard • bass • congas, shaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latin Pop-Jazz • catchy vocal tune • lively instrumental interludes • classical four-part choral arrangements 	<p><i>Waiting for God's mercy</i> The theme of this song is the longingly searching for God's help. The psalmist compares the man who depends on God to the faithful servants and maiden who look devotedly to the hand of their masters and mistress. So the eyes of the psalm writer are patiently waiting on the Lord, his God, until he shall have mercy on him.</p>
<p>5 3:38</p>	<p>Nafshenu ketzipor nimleta <i>psalm 124</i> Martin Neeb DE-A55-07-14373</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • flute • violoncello • piano 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flute-solo-introduction • slow moving, at times powerful singing • classical chamber music style • moderate in tempo 	<p><i>Thanksgiving song</i> This psalm too is accredited to King David. The poet sings about how his people escaped from a horrible threat. David uses the touching illustration of a small and weak bird freeing itself from the snare of the fowlers. Its soul has escaped from the doom at the last moment. He points out that the help was not received by chance but it's due to the creator of heaven and earth.</p>
<p>6 3:25</p>	<p>Ha tzadikim <i>psalm 125</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14374</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • flute • piano • keyboard • frame drum, chimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lyrical • romantic • beautiful in sound • resolute middle part 	<p><i>Prayer from Jewish-National point of view</i> The psalmist divides mankind into two groups: On the one hand the righteous (<i>ha tzadikim</i>) and good, who trust in the Lord and may count on the total protection of God. On the other hand the godless, not straightforward in their heart and committing injustice. They are counted among the evil-doers. It is said that the wicked shall no longer dominate the righteous, because God himself will bring this situation to an end. The song is radiating confidence and assurance of faith, and it flows into the prayer for peace on entire Israel.</p>

<p>7 6:06</p>	<p>Ke cholmim <i>psalm 126</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14375</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead vocals • backing vocals (3 male voices) • flute • djembe, shaker, frame drum, handclaps • keyboards • bass • violoncello 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sound of oriental lute • varying moods: mystical – elegiac – ecstatic • alternating solo and choral singing • strong rhythmic elements 	<p><i>Like those who dream</i> The song describes the great dream of the Jewish people, the ‘restoration of Zion’. The realization of this dream is a process tied to suffering and pain. Remember the reconstruction of the present-day State of Israel, arisen from the ashes of the Holocaust at immense sacrifices, presenting a homeland to the Jewish nation after 2000 years of exile. The psalm writer uses the symbol of sowers who are going out in tears and finally will reap and return in joy. They are like those who dream (<i>ke cholmim</i>), clinging to their vision regardless of the miserable circumstances. So the song points far beyond the terrestrial Jerusalem and everything visible to something prospective.</p>
<p>8 3:13</p>	<p>Im Adonai lo ivne vai <i>psalm 127</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14376</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • alto flute • Celtic harp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lyrical • archaic • lugubrious • melancholy • gentle 	<p><i>Man’s labour and God’s blessing</i> This psalm expresses that man’s fortune is not ‘manageable’, but a gift of God. Several examples of everyday life describe that everything eventually depends on God’s blessing: the construction of a house, the security of a city, the fruit from field work or the care for descendants. It is remarkable that the author of this psalm is King Salomo who built the first temple in Jerusalem, who was responsible for the security of the cities and who had to procreate descendants for the succession to the throne. The song creates an attitude of gratefulness and a humble mind of man towards his creator, and it emphasizes his dependency on God.</p>
<p>9 3:00</p>	<p>Yevarechecha <i>psalm 128</i> David Vincranst DE-A55-07-14377</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • flute, alto flute • piano • bass • violoncello • darabouka, tambourine, handclaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • folkloristic • sweeping • dance-like • solemn blessing part • racy coda 	<p><i>Joyful blessing</i> A wonderful life is promised to those who fear the Lord. All the days of their life, they shall see the bliss of Jerusalem and enjoy their numerous descendants, the children and the grandchildren. “You shall be blessed” (<i>yevarechecha</i>) – is the wording of the promising encouragement of this popular traditional. There is also an Israeli dance to the tune of “Yevarechecha”. Like psalm 125, this psalm as well closes with a prayer for peace on Israel.</p>
<p>10 3:39</p>	<p>Adonai tzadik <i>Psalm 129</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14378</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • piano • frame drum • keyboards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mixture of classical and oriental tone • grave • melismatic singing • lyric piano • recitation of the first and the last verses 	<p><i>Hard-pressed Israel’s cry for help</i> The psalm depicts the sacrificial, painful peasant life of slave workers: “Many times they have afflicted me from my youth...The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long...” The righteous God (<i>Adonai tzadik</i>) will stop this ignominy and humiliation by cutting off ‘the cords of the wicked’. The word ‘cord’ refers to the halter connecting the draught animals to the plough. This psalm is a severe warning to all those who oppress the Jewish people and stand against God’s purposes concerning Zion. Excluded from God’s blessing, they shall be “like the grass on the housetops, which dries up before it grows up.”</p>

<p>11 4:24</p>	<p>Kiviti Adonai (A Hebrew Spiritual) <i>psalm 130</i> Raimund Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14379</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead vocals • backing vocals (2 male voices) • flute • piano • congas, shaker • bass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>part A:</i> classical chamber music style, mysterious, grave • <i>part B:</i> like a Spiritual, light-hearted and lively, three-part choral singing 	<p><i>Psalm of repentance</i> The psalm starts with a dramatic cry of a praying man, who feels separated from God because of his sins: "Out of the depths I have cried to you, o Lord. Lord, hear my voice..." For the first time in the course of the 'Songs of Ascents', the affliction does not come from the exterior, but from the interior, out of man's soul. The psalm writer realizes his own situation of being completely doomed, because he knows that no sinner will be able to exist before the Holy God. By turning away from sin towards God, his inner feelings begin to change. Desperation turns into hopeful confidence, and finally he is assured that God will have the redeeming word of forgiveness for him. That's why the song's pitch, melody and rhythm change. What had begun gravely, ends in swinging serenity, while he sings: "I wait for the Lord, my soul is waiting, and his word is my hope."</p>
<p>12 4:10</p>	<p>Lo gavah libi <i>psalm 131</i> Elisheva Shomron DE-A55-07-14380</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • flute • piano • triangle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lullaby • classical chamber music style • tender • melodious • gently flowing accompanying lines 	<p><i>Childlike surrender</i> This gently flowing little psalm tells about the changed mind of a man who has recognized and overcome his pride and has become a humble personality resting in the Lord. Maybe he had overrated his mental power and dealt with things too great and incomprehensible for him? The psalm reminds us that there are things in our life which man cannot or may not fathom, because they surpass his abilities and would overstrain him. Realizing this fact, he is getting tranquil inside, like a satisfied child breastfed by its mother. In the same way, Israel may be perfectly calm and secure while patiently trusting in the Lord.</p>
<p>13 3:02</p>	<p>Po eshev <i>psalm 132</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14381</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • flute • Celtic harp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lyrical • archaic • classical • slow and peaceful 	<p><i>The election of Zion</i> Psalm 132, recognized by Jews and Christians as one of the 'messianic' psalms, is the longest among the 15 'Songs of Ascents'. It combines the two themes 'Zion as the throne of the Davidic kingship' and 'Zion as the eternal residence of God'. Verses 13 to 16 present the core not only of the 132th psalm, but as well of the entire song cycle of the psalms of pilgrimage. In these verses, God claims to establish the throne of his eternal reign in Zion: "This is my rest forever; here I will dwell (<i>po eshev</i>); for I have desired it." The fulfillment of this prophecy is still pending and it is connected with wonderful blessings for the inhabitants of Jerusalem: The poor shall be satisfied, the priests sanctified, and the godly shall rejoice.</p>

<p>14 3:27</p>	<p>Ke tal Chermon <i>psalm 133</i> Raimund Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14382</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • piano • violoncello 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • classical chamber music style • gentle up to powerful singing • melancholic cello cantilenas • slow 3/4 time 	<p><i>Praise of brotherly fellowship</i> David's psalm sings about the high value of brotherly unity. This attitude involves a never-ending stream of blessing for all men, who belong to the people of God. For illustration the writer uses two poetic pictures. In the first picture, the consecration of the high priest Aaron, he describes that precious ointment is poured out on his head in a lavish manner. In the second picture, the dew that settles on Mount Hermon (<i>Ke tal Chermon</i>), flows down to the hills surrounding Jerusalem. 'For there the Lord commanded the blessing and life forevermore.' The words of the psalm's first verse are "<i>Hineh ma tov uma naim shevet achim gam yachad</i>". This line has already been set to music in a world-famous folksong entitled 'Hine ma tov'. The song 'Ke tal Chermon' however is a composition of the complete psalm 133.</p>
<p>15 4:23</p>	<p>Hineh barchu et Adonai <i>psalm 134</i> Waltraud Rennebaum Raimund Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14383</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead vocals • backing vocals (3 male voices) • flute • piano • darabouka, tambourine • keyboards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • folkloristic • sweeping • dance-like • solemn and moving blessing part • racy postlude (instrumental) 	<p><i>Solemn praise song in the temple</i> Completing the songs of pilgrimage, psalm 134 presents an impressive final liturgy. Priests and Levites are called upon to sing the praise of God in the temple area – even by night. In a festive atmosphere, they lift up their hands to praise <i>Yahve</i> in joyful worship, and they conclude the service by dismissing the pilgrim people with the ritual blessing: "May the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth, bless you out of Zion!"</p>
<p>16 5:58</p>	<p>Anah elech <i>psalm 139</i> Waltraud Rennebaum DE-A55-07-14384</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocals • flute • piano • violoncello 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • classical chamber music style • elegiac, sometimes swinging dance-like • vocal recital with great intensity • virtuosic instrumental interludes 	<p><i>The omnipresent God</i> At the beginning and at the end of this song we find the question: "Where shall I go from your spirit?" (<i>anah elech meruchecha</i>). Psalm 139 is a comprehensive and profound reflection of a man, who lives his life trusting in God and is getting more and more amazed about the greatness of God, his omnipresence and his omniscience. David knows that he is anytime and everywhere surrounded by God, actually in his thoughts, which God already knows before they are articulated. Even in the face of death David meets the living God. He describes his faithful relationship to God in an artistic and imaginative language: "If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the furthest parts of the sea, even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."</p>