

David Avshalomov

Chanukah Tonight!



Mixed Chorus SATB (opt. divisi)
with STRING ORCHESTRA

DURATION: 2:45

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This exuberant song gives a quick glimpse of the legend, tradition, and modern observance of Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, in a lively syncopated setting that builds from the quiet placing of one more candle in the *chanukiah* each night, to the bright celebration on the eighth night, with songs, food, and play. It is intended for both Jewish and non-Jewish choruses and audiences and is suitable for an inclusive (non-sectarian) Winter Holiday concert. (The tune and words are not traditional but newly-made, in familiar style.)

Diction clues in this song

“secon(d) night”, “an(d) the,” – **elide**, slight the d
“Maccabee(s) saved”; “candle(s), sing”; “latke(s), sing”, “u(s) see” - **elide** the s’s
“than(k)” – **close** the k but don’t pop it
“ligh(t)”, “firs(t)” – **close** the t but don’t pop it
“six(th)”, “eigh(th)” – **close** the th, don’t pop it
Chanukah – Hha-nook-uh, thickened H, not kh.
Antiochus – Ann-tee-**aw**-cuss (closer to Latin)
latkes – lot-cuz

LEGEND – Chanukah is about standing up for your religious freedom. On Chanukah, in 165 BCE, the Maccabees regained control of Jerusalem and rededicated the (second) Temple, which had been desecrated by Antiochus IV. They found only one night’s worth of priest-consecrated olive oil for the menorah lamp, but when they lit it, it burned for eight days (the time it took to press and prepare new oil)—a symbol of the miracle.

CANDLES – Jewish law follows the position of Hillel that it is best to add a candle for each successive night and build up the light and joy. The lighting traditionally starts after dark (except on the Jewish Sabbath). This is typically a home observance. One can also use oil lamps.

SHAMMASH – (*shah-mush*, Hebrew: "attendant" or "sexton") – The extra (ninth) candle, the only one lit with a match; it is then used to light the others. The rule is that the Chanukah lights themselves are not used for practical illumination, only for symbolic contemplation and publicizing of the miracle. The *shammash* is there to have a light for use. It gets a distinct position relative to the other candles.

LIGHT UP OUR HOME – In some traditions, the *chanukiah* (the special 9-branched *menorah* or candelabrum) is placed so the light can be seen from outside, to share the miracle—"Illumination of the house without."

BLESSING, THANKING – On eight all nights two traditional prayers are sung, one blessing the Lord for the commandment to light the lights on Chanukah, one thanking Him for miracles. On the first night the *Shehecheyanu* prayer is also sung, thanking Him for preserving us to see this season.

SONGS – After lighting and blessings, singing of the hymns *Ma'oz Tzur* and *Hanerot Halal* and other traditional songs is customary in many homes. Some Hasidic and Sephardi Jews also recite Psalms.

LATKES – Almost all Jewish holidays include an unofficial “commandment” to eat. There is a custom of eating foods fried or baked in oil (preferably olive oil) on Chanukah. *Latkes* are traditional fried potato pancakes, best prepared fresh from scratch, often served with apple sauce and sour cream (yum!); they come from the Ashkenazic tradition. There are many Jewish cultural variations that involve other foods, including special jelly donuts (Sephardic and Israeli).

DREIDEL – (Pronounced DRAY-dle; Yiddish, “little spinner”) – A four-sided wooden top spun to play a game with betting (usually with tokens or chocolate coins). It bears four Hebrew characters: נ (*Nun*), ג (*Gimel*), ה (*Hey*), ש (*Shin*), for the words “A Great Miracle Happened There”. Rules are complex and variable (like Calvin Ball).

GIVING – In North America and in Israel it is common to exchange small presents, or to give *tzedakah* (alms—literally, “justice”) instead.

CHRISTMAS – Chanukah is *not* the Jewish equivalent (there is none); it is a minor festival based on a legend that is not mentioned in the Jewish Bible (Torah and Tanakh), only in the Talmud (rabbinic commentary). The Christian Bible refers to Jesus’ being at the Jerusalem Temple during “the feast of the dedication and it was Winter” in John 10:22-23.

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Music and Lyrics: David Avshalomov

Lively ♩ = 144

SOPRANOS

Precise, wide-eyed, hushed

Choir (with small chorus, altos may join sopranos in first 4 sung bars) **p** 1. Place one can-dle on the first night

Violin I *f* *p* etc.

Violin II *f* *p* etc.

Viola *f*

Violoncello *f* *pizz.* *mf* *p*

Contrabass *f* *pizz.* *mf* *p*

use open strings freely where natural

7 and the Sham-mash to light it. **p** **pp** an(d) the match-es

Altos Place two can-dles on the second night

pp

pp

pp

pp

22

sing the bless - ing, ea(t) some lat - ke(s), spin that Dray - dle, *mp* Than(k) the Lord who let u(s) see — this

27

Chan-u-kah to night. *f* An - ti - o - chus was a bad king, he for - bad us

emphatic

f mp

f mp

f mp

f mp

arco

f mp

32

our re - li - gion. But the Mac-ca bees saved our Tem - ple and re - stored our faith.

(alto ossia)

(bass ossia)

37

f When they had cleaned up the Tem ple, found ONE day's oil for the Men or - ah, when they li(t) the oil it burned for

(alto ossia)

(bass ossia)

mp

mp

mf > mp

mp

mp

43

eigh(t) days on end. 2. Place five can-dles on the fifth night and the Sham-mash to (in the Chan- u -

p *pp* *pizz.* *p* *mp* *p*

49

light them Place six can-dles on the six(th) night and the match - es near. <>

ki - ah)

p *pp* *pizz.* *p* *pp* *pp* *pp*

54 *mp*
 Pla(ce) sev-en can-dles on the sev-enth night _____ and eight can-dles on the eighth night _____ When the can-dles are

59 *mp* *Dancy*
 read-y to light it's Cha-nu-kah to - night _____ Light the can - dle(s), sing the bless - ing,
mp Light! Sing!

We re-mem-ber our tra-di-tion Than(k)the Lord who let us see this night! *f* Light the can-dle(s),
 (that we al-mos(t) lost our righ(t) to wor-ship as we choose!)

Alto melody

Bass opt. div.

— sing the bless-ing, eat some lat-ke(s), spin that Dray-dle, Than(k) the Lord who let us see— this

f

84 Full Ending

Chan-u- kah to night. Than(k) the Lord who let us see__ this Chan-u- kah__

(bass ossia)

f

mp *f*

mp *f*

mp *f*

mp *f*

mp *f*

89 In Tempo

to night! *ff* Bless the Lord tonight! *ff*

opt.div. (t) (t)

f *ff*

f *ff*

f *ff*

f *ff*

f *ff*

Alt. Soft Ending

94

night. *p* Than(k) the Lord who let us see this Chan-u - kah to

mp *pp*

mp *pp*

mp *pp*

mp *pp*

mp

98

nigh, *pp*

nigh(t) light the can - dle(s), sing the bless - ing Bless the Lord to- night (t)

nigh,

pizz

pp

pizz

pp

pizz

pp

pizz

pp

pp