

# Our Music

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

For junior year abroad I studied at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Enchanted with English poetry, I wrote a letter to my father telling of my love of Wordsworth, the romantic poets, the wonder and variety of English verse. My father, who was a devotee of literature and my first teacher, wrote back that he was glad I found inspiration and nourishment in them. But then he added something important.

Remember David, he said, English poetry became the poetry of the world on the backs of British soldiers. The Jewish people too had our Wordsworth and our Tennyson; they were named Ibn Gabirol, Yehuda Halevy, Bialik and Tzernichovsky. Only they had no armies; they had only their words. Don't neglect them, he wrote, for they belong to you.

Sometimes we forget that the variety of Jewish culture is broader than Torah study or law or ritual alone. We are a people of artists, musicians, poets and dreamers as well. Is Yehuda Amichai's subtle, stunning verse less a part of us than the poetry of our prayers? The words of the prophets became the conscience of the world. But our songs did not cease with the Bible, or the Rabbis, or in the middle ages. We continue to sing, joining Jewish voices to the sweet and sad music of humanity.