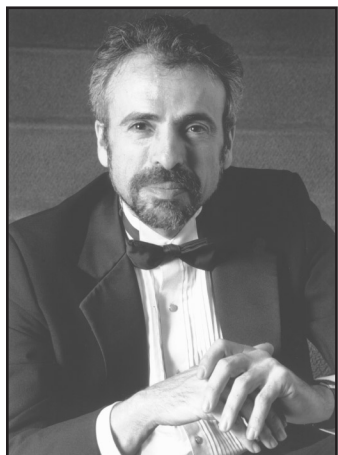




You Don't Have to Be Jewish to...

Joshua R. Jacobson, Artistic Director



For the past few decades, I have been teaching workshops on Jewish Music at conventions of the American Choral Directors Association. The ACDA is an organization that represents some 20,000 choral directors across the United States: conductors of choirs in public and private schools, colleges and conservatories, professional choirs, community choirs and church choirs. The conventions feature inspiring performances, stimulating speeches, and informative workshops.

Increasingly, America's choral directors are interested in multiculturalism, but that interest is sparked by a variety of incentives. For years, the staple of the choral repertoire has been settings by great composers of texts from the Christian liturgies: masses, requiems, passions, cantatas, anthems and motets. In recent years the hegemony of this repertoire has come under fire. African-Americans and Asian-Americans have questioned the exclusivity of music from the European traditions. Jews and Moslems have expressed concern about the effect on their children of constant exposure to Christian liturgy. So conductors today are seeking the "politically correct" path, attempting to be as inclusive

as possible. Occasionally the results are disastrous.

In some school systems conductors have been told to avoid liturgical music altogether! This misguided attempt at political correctness ends up censoring some of Western civilization's greatest works of art. Is singing Mozart's

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"Israel in Egypt" and the Jews of England

George Frideric Handel was a man who knew his audience. When the German-born composer arrived in England in 1710 he perceived and filled a demand. The concert-going audience of London was mad about Italian opera, and Handel gave them just what they wanted. In return, London made Handel rich and famous.

But tastes change. By the 1730s, Italian opera had lost its appeal in London, and Handel was quick to adapt to the new situation. Blending the structure of the Italian oratorio and the drama of opera with the immediacy of the English language, Handel created a new genre with a winning formula.

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Great Figures in Jewish Music

First in a series

Cantor Salomon Sulzer



Salomon Sulzer almost drowned in a childhood swimming accident. As the boy's life was hanging in the balance, his mother vowed that if he would be saved, she would devote his life to a sacred career. That little accident was to have quite an impact on the future of Jewish liturgical music!

Salomon was resuscitated, and subsequently received extensive training in the cantorial art. The lad soon proved himself more than equal to the task. By the time he reached age of *bar mitzvah*, this young prodigy was already known as the finest cantor in his native Hohenems. Moreover, after acquiring a conservatory education in composition and singing, Sulzer became the first musician in

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Zamir Film to Air Nationally

The Public Broadcasting System has agreed to help sponsor the film of last summer's Zamir Chorale European Tour. The film, titled *Zamir Chorale: Jewish Voices Return to Poland*, will air nationwide beginning in August. (Check local listings.)

We are planning a premiere for the film this summer at a local movie theater. For updates, please visit the film's website at www.TheSongsLiveOn.com or the Zamir website at www.zamir.org

You Don't Have to Be Jewish to...

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Requiem a theological experience or an aesthetic experience? What about going to a museum to see Raphael's *Madonna and Child*? How deeply does a performer become enveloped in his or her script? Most actors leave their characters behind when they remove their costumes and make-up. Isn't it the same for singers? Now, I would make a distinction between singing Handel's *Messiah* and singing Christmas carols. One is primarily an artistic experience, the other primarily a religious/social experience.

Other school conductors take a different path—they attempt to balance their programming. The “December dilemma” is solved by adding some Chanukkah music to a Christmas concert. Another disaster! Some of the greatest music has been inspired by themes of the Christmas season. Chanukkah, by contrast, is a minor holiday. But music publishers, sensing a market, have flooded us with a deluge of inane *dreydel* songs. The contrast of the highest art of one religion and the worst kitsch of the other is, frankly, embarrassing.

That's where Zamir comes in. Through workshops

and performances at ACDA conventions we have made thousands of conductors aware of what they had thought was an oxymoron—good Jewish choral music. Conductors all across America are realizing that Jewish music isn't just for December anymore. Multicultural programming is now motivated by enthusiasm, rather than guilt.

At the Eastern Division ACDA conference in Baltimore this past February, I had the privilege of introducing my colleagues to the beautiful synagogue music of Salamone Rossi, a Jewish composer of late Renaissance Italy. And in March, Zamir traveled with me to the North Central Division ACDA conference in Madison, Wisconsin, to introduce Midwestern conductors to the riches and variety of Jewish music.

Perhaps the greatest measure of our success is when we see Zamir's repertoire appearing on the programs of choirs all across America: school choirs, conservatory choirs, community choruses, even church choirs! We can rejoice in the fact that Jewish choral music is no longer the exclusive domain of Jewish choirs. 🕊



From the Executive Director

There we were: performing at Madison, Wisconsin's Masonic Temple Auditorium as headliner concert, opening the 2000 divisional conference of the American Choral Directors Association. There we were: a Jewish choir from Boston in the middle of the Midwest, singing for a non-Jewish audience. And our music did exactly what music sometimes does in rare and special moments: it connected people to one another who never dreamed they could be connected.

A hundred years after the founding of the first Jewish communal chorus, we have witnessed the rise of a Jewish artistic and intellectual movement, its near obliteration in an unthinkable holocaust, and a second, more extraordinary rebirth. Back in 1899, it would have been difficult to imagine the intellectual and cultural wave represented by the HaZomir Chorus taking root, thriving, then becoming illegal in just a few

decades, with its participants marked for death. But it would have been more unimaginable still to think that 100 years hence, American Jews would in good nature be elbowing gentiles to “get with it”—to discover Jewish music as the serious and substantial music that it is!

Jewish music has come a very long way in the twentieth century and so, likewise, has the Zamir Chorale of Boston. Today's Zamir is more than an excellent Jewish choir from Boston. It is America's exemplary Jewish choir. Preservers of Jewish musical culture, Zamir brings Jews to a better appreciation not only of their ethnic roots, but also of their fellow Jews. And as ambassadors of Jewish musical culture to the larger world, Zamir is helping instigate a great renaissance of respect for Jewish music, and through it, a rebirth of respect for Jews and Judaism. Who would have thought that the Jewish urge for musical expression could progress from something grudgingly tolerated by the authorities to a form of that quintessential Jewish obligation, *Tikun Olam* (world healing), in so short a time?

—Dan Rostan

Oheb Shalom Congregation
South Orange, NJ Erica J. Lippitz, Cantor

April 10, 2000

Dear Friends,

When I was twenty-one years old and moving to Boston, a friend happened to say, “You know, you ought to check out the Zamir Chorale.” Curious, I did so—and the next two years of music and friendship proved to be one of the most powerful and meaningful experiences of my life. Why? Because Zamir is not merely an entertainment group. Because not only is Joshua Jacobson a talented conductor, he is a man with a mission.

Think of what happens when the singers of Zamir lift their voices. Audiences thrill, they cheer, they celebrate. But they also learn, they remember, they weep, they open their hearts. Through music, a powerful message of humanity resounds.

In recent years, Zamir has become an ambassador to communities across the U.S. and the world. How proud I am of Zamir’s recent trip to Eastern Europe, marking the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the first Zamir Chorale in Lodz, Poland! In that emotional pilgrimage, Zamir carried a precious gift: a gift of Jewish vitality and music for the Jewish communities who still remain, a demonstration of pride and strength to the many non-Jews who also came to listen. We proved that our people and its songs, indeed, live on.

Just as exciting was Zamir being chosen last month as a featured choir at an American Choral Directors Association convention. Imagine: hundreds of conductors listening to and learning about Jewish music at the opening session! What Joshua Jacobson and Zamir taught that day will affect what thousands of school children will learn next winter and for years to come.

Soon, Zamir will reach a still larger national audience. PBS has selected “Zamir Chorale: Jewish Voices Return to Poland”—the documentary recounting Zamir’s history-making concert tour—as a featured program to be aired during PBS-affiliate pledge drives nationwide this year. Once again, Zamir will demonstrate that Jewish music is world-class music—richly diverse and intellectually challenging.

I think back twenty years, and I am grateful. So much was given to me in the time I sang with Zamir, and so much of what Josh and Zamir still do continues to inspire me. It was the exposure to outstanding Jewish music and the integrity and charisma of Josh’s leadership that led me to the cantorate and eventually to creating a community choir of my own. Indeed, many other cantors, rabbis and educators have preceded and followed me in this choir. Whether you are a singer or aficionado, you know that this is a group that changes lives.

You and I are part of the extended Zamir family that now spans generations and continents. We have the privilege of expressing our gratitude with a gift that can make a real difference. And when the next generation comes looking for inspiration, there will be a Zamir.

Yours truly,



Cantor Riki J. Lippitz

“Israel in Egypt” and the Jews of England

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The new English oratorio portrayed stories from the Hebrew Bible, using solo voices in virtuoso arias, colorful orchestrations, and—most importantly—dramatic choral responses. Handel brought to life the heroes of ancient Israel in such works as *Belshazzar*, *Deborah*, *Esther*, *Israel in Egypt*, *Jephtha*, *Joseph and His Brethren*, *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Samson*, *Saul*, and *Solomon*. (*Messiah*, although the most popular of the oratorios, is an exceptional work, in that it is not dramatic, and its subject is not a hero from the “Old Testament.”)

To the majority of Handel’s audience, these works may have served as paeans to the British military exploits of the eighteenth century. But to the Jews of London, these were literal depictions of the glorious deeds of their ancestors. The historian Sir Newman Flower wrote, “A Jew on the stage as a hero rather than a reviled figure was a thing practically unknown in London, and Handel found himself possessed of a new public.” Some have even suggested that the financial success of these works was due largely to the patronage of London Jewry.

Israel in Egypt was originally conceived as an anthem. Handel had composed a setting of the “Song of the Sea” (Exodus 15)—Moses’ song of triumphant thanksgiving after Pharaoh’s armies were drowned in the Red

Sea. But the work was already bursting the bounds of an anthem and assuming the proportions of an oratorio. So the composer created a huge preface, depicting the enslavement of the Israelites and the miraculous plagues which afflicted the Egyptians. Here Handel was truly in his element. The depictions of the swarms of frogs and flies, the fiery hailstones, and the thick darkness are among his most vividly theatrical musical creations. From the opening “And the Children of Israel Sighed” to the closing “I Will Sing unto the Lord,” one superb choral piece follows another. Indeed, *Israel in Egypt* is graced with more choral numbers than any other oratorio.

Temple Emanuel of Newton, continuing its renowned eleven-year concert series, will present Handel’s *Israel in Egypt* on June 4. (Due to a Y2K glitch, the concert was postponed from December 24.) The performance will feature the Zamir Chorale of Boston and orchestra, with soloists Cantor Louise Treitman, Michela Macfarlane, Cantor Charles Osborne, James Deselms, Prof. Mark Aliopoulos and Cantor Scott Sokol. Prof. Joshua Jacobson will conduct. To order your tickets to this rare treat, call Temple Emanuel at (617) 558-8100, or visit Zamir’s website, zamir.org.

—Joshua Jacobson

Alumni and Member News

Susan Carp-Nesson, Alumni Chairperson

Mazal tov to Joyce and Michael Bohnen on the marriage of their daughter Sharon to David Goldstein in January.

Mazal tov to Sharon (Eisner) and Walter Gillett on the birth of their son, Seth, in August.

Mazal tov to Gilbert Schiffer on the birth of his granddaughter, Elisheva Leah, in February.

Our condolences to Rena (Finkelstein) Markowitz on the death of her beloved husband, Chaim, this past February.

Michele (Newler) Pozner, who sang with Zamir from 1969 to 1973, is living in New Jersey with her husband and two children. Recently, she joined Kol Dodi, the chorus conducted by another Zamir alumna, Riki Lippitz. Michele is an elementary school librarian at a Solomon Schechter day school, serves as a cantorial assistant, and is librarian at her synagogue. She notes that she received her early training in Zamir

when she served as music librarian!

Rachel Reef-Simpson is living in Sudbury with her husband and two sons, Alex and Ian. After leaving Zamir, she sang professionally in bands and cabaret shows and was vocal director for a local theater company. Currently, Rachel is an early childhood music teacher with a license in Kindermusik and is busy teaching in music schools and area synagogues.

A correction: In our last issue, the editor got Rabbi Donald Cashman’s name wrong. Our apologies.

We have started an alumni section on our website and an alumni email list. If you would like to be included, please visit zamir.org and click on “alumni.”

North American Jewish Choral Festival

This year’s NAJCF will be held July 23–27 at the Nevele hotel in Ellenville, NY. The festival is a unique opportunity to study with some of the leading proponents of Jewish choral music. For more information write to zamirfdn@aol.com or visit their website at www.zamirfdn.org

A Letter from the American Choral Directors Association

I first heard the outstanding singing of Zamir at the Washington, D.C. American Choral Director's Association 1995 National Convention [as part of the National Jewish Chorale]. It isn't often that I am moved to tears during a convention performance in the middle of a day, but Zamir did just that with their passionate, committed singing. Their conductor, Joshua Jacobson, an outstanding scholar, gifted conductor and advocate for Jewish music, presented a fascinatingly diverse program illustrating some of the many facets of Jewish musics.

As a member of the Planning Committee for the ACDA North Central Division Convention held in Madison, WI, March 1–4, 2000, there was never any question in my mind that Zamir should be invited to appear as the lead headlining performing ensemble. The quality and musicianship of the group is unmatched, the repertoire and presentation mind-opening. Unfortunately, ACDA's North Central Division is a somewhat "un-diverse" division: one need only look at the demographics of the divisional membership, who live in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

In Madison, Prof. Jacobson spoke to 650 convention participants, all of whom were music teachers, conductors, and church and temple musicians. He said "We teach music, we listen to music, we perform music, for its own sake, certainly. Music has its own intrinsic meaning and its own intrinsic rewards. But we also use music as a means of broadening our horizons, of experiencing new emotions.... The wider we cast our net, the broader we become as human beings, the more capable we are of far-reaching empathy." For me personally, in this day and age of school children killing each other, the importance of "far-reaching empathy" cannot be underscored enough, especially if, in that process, one reaches out across cultures, across countries, across religions. In the end, people learn that they are more like than unlike.

In the last fifteen years or so, there has been a strong movement in the American Choral Directors Association to be more inclusive of music of other cultures and languages in the curriculum, that programming should include not only Bach and Beethoven, but also music from diverse cultures worldwide. About this, Prof. Jacobson also made an excellent point:

- Do you have to be Jewish to perform Jewish choral music?
- Do you have to be Lutheran to conduct a Bach cantata?
- Do you have to be a Catholic to conduct a Bruckner mass?
- Do you have to be deaf to conduct Beethoven's 'Missa Solemnis'?
- Do you have to be white to conduct Stravinsky?
- Do you have to be black to conduct spirituals?
- Do you have to be Italian to conduct Monteverdi?
- Is December the only time to consider programming Jewish choral music?

Why do we program music of another culture—because of pressure from the school board or the parents? Because it's "politically correct?" Out of a sense of "white guilt?" Or, perhaps, because we think it is good music, because it has something to say to us? Am I suggesting that we stop performing Handel and Haydn and replace the Western classical repertoire with African-American spirituals and synagogue music? Not at all. What I am suggesting is that from time to time you vary your diet of white bread with an occasional bagel.

For all these reasons, it was important that the North Central Division of the American Choral Directors Association begin its journey into the 21st century with the words and music of Joshua Jacobson and Zamir. To experience another culture is the first step in understanding. Prof. Jacobson said that Zamir had been to the "Middle East," but never to the Middle West! I sincerely hope that this visit will not be their last.

Dr. Sharon A. Hansen
Director of Choral Activities,
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Cantor Salomon Sulzer

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modern times to create a synagogue liturgy of the highest aesthetic standard by combining the cantorial heritage with forms and performance techniques of modern European music.

In 1827, the Jewish community of Vienna was searching for a new cantor: someone knowledgeable in Jewish music, yet sophisticated enough to match their own cosmopolitan tastes. The 23-year-old Sulzer was just the man Vienna was looking for.

At the Seitenstettengasse Temple, Cantor Sulzer tried to find the “middle road”—a path that would preserve the essential elements of Jewish musical traditions, but clothe them in modern Austrian garb; that would please the older generation, and at the same time provide a idiom to which the younger acculturated Jews could relate.

People flocked from all over Europe to hear the new cantor and his choir. And not only Jewish worshippers came to the synagogue; some of the most sophisticated gentile musicians found their way to the Seitenstettengasse Temple. Franz Liszt, the famous pianist and composer, had this to say in his diary:

In Vienna we visited the famous tenor Sulzer, who served in the capacity of precentor in the synagogue, and whose reputation is so outstanding. For moments we could penetrate into his real soul and recognize the secret doctrines of the fathers.... Seldom were we so stirred by emotion as on that evening, so shaken that our soul was entirely given to meditation and to participation in the service.¹

In 1866 the great music critic Eduard Hanslick wrote in the *Neue Freie Presse*:

[Sulzer] is one of the most popular figures of Vienna.... Even today no foreign musician leaves Vienna without having listened to the celebrated cantor. His performance, from the slightest breath to the most powerful of tones, combines the charm of the exotic with the persuasiveness of a glowing faith.²

Joseph Mainzer, a Catholic composer, wrote:

The synagogue was the only place where a stranger could find, artistically speaking, a source of enjoyment that was as solid as it was dignified. Never, except for the Sistine Chapel, has art given me higher joy than in the synagogue. In seven months I did not miss a single service. One has to attend no more than once, however, in order to find oneself instantly freed, as if by some sudden reaction, of all the odious prejudices

against the Jews instilled in us with baptism in early childhood.³

And the Englishwoman Frances Trollope wrote:

There is in truth so wild and strange a harmony in the songs of Israel as performed in the synagogue in this city, that it would be difficult to render full justice to the splendid excellence of the performance, without falling into the language of enthusiasm.... The volume of vocal sound exceeds anything of the kind I have ever heard; and being unaccompanied by any instrument, it produces an effect equally singular and delightful.⁴⁴

But Sulzer’s fame today rests not so much on his singing as on his compositions. Some of Sulzer’s choral melodies became so popular that the congregation began to sing along—a practice that the great cantor discouraged at every turn. But the melodies that Sulzer composed for *VaY’hi BiNesoa Ho-Oron*, *Yehalelu Es Shem*, and *Shema Yisroel* are heard in nearly every Ashkenazic synagogue today.

Sulzer’s compositions, as well as those which he commissioned from Franz Schubert and several other great Viennese musicians—together with his transcriptions and arrangements of ancient traditional Jewish melodies—all these works were brought together and published between 1839 and 1865 in the two volumes of his magnum opus, *Schir Zion*.

Hanslick wrote, “Sulzer’s *Schir Zion* lies open before me. The chants have the stamp of genuine Jewish-oriental music. It was Sulzer who restored order, dignity and lofty aesthetic form in the musical liturgy of Judaism.”

In our own time, Sulzer is again receiving recognition from the general musical community. Volume 134 in the scholarly series, *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in der Österreich* (*Monuments of Austrian Music*), published in 1983, is devoted to Sulzer’s synagogue music. And, ten years ago, the Austrian government issued a stamp bearing a portrait of Cantor Sulzer and the words, “100 Todestag von Salomon Sulzer, 1804–1890, Republik Österreich, 1990.”



The music of Salomon Sulzer can be heard on Zamir’s CD The Majesty of Holiness, available at www.zamir.org.

1. Franz Liszt, *Les Bohémiens et leur musique*, in Sam Morgenstern, *Composers on Music* (New York: 1956), p. 163.
2. Eduard Hanslick, “Salomon Sulzer,” *Die Neue Freie Presse* 551 (Vienna, 1866).
3. Joseph Mainzer, “Vienna et la Synagogue Juive pendant les années 1826, 1827 et 1828,” *Gazette Musicale de Paris I* (1834) p. 126.
4. Frances Trollope, *Vienna and the Austrians*, (London: 1838) Vol. 1, p. 373.