

# *The Zamir Chorale of Boston*

Joshua R. Jacobson, Artistic Director  
Barbara Gaffin, Managing Director  
Lawrence E. Sandberg, Concert Manager and Merchandise Manager  
Edwin Swanborn, Accompanist  
Andrew Mattfeld, Assistant Conductor  
Devin Lawrence, Assistant to the Conductor  
Jacob Harris and Melanie Blatt, Conducting Interns  
Rachel Miller, President  
Charna Westervelt, Vice President  
Michael Kronenberg, Librarian

## Sopranos

Betty Bauman\* • Melanie Blatt • Jenn Boyle • Vera Broekhuysen • Lisa Doob • Sharon Goldstein • Naomi Gurt Lind • Maayan Harel • Marilyn J. Jaye • Anne Levy • Sharon Shore  
Rachel Slusky • Julie Kopp Smily • Louise Treitman • Deborah Wollner

## Altos

Anna Adler • Sarah Boling • Jamie Chelel • Johanna Ehrmann • Deborah Melkin\* • Rachel Miller • Judy Pike • Jill Sandberg • Nancy Sargon-Zarsky • Rachel Seliber • Elyse Seltzer • Gail Terman • Phyllis Werlin • Charna Westervelt • Phyllis Sogg Wilner

## Tenors

David Burns • Steven Ebstein\* • Suzanne Goldman • Jacob Harris • Kevin Martin • Andrew Mattfeld\* • Dan Nesson • Leila Joy Rosenthal • Lawrence E. Sandberg • Gilbert Schiffer • Dan Seltzer • Yishai Sered • Andrew Stitcher

## Basses

Peter Bronk • Abba Caspi • Phil Goldman • Michael Krause-Grosman • Michael Kronenberg  
Devin Lawrence\* • Richard Lustig • Michael Miller • James Rosenzweig • Peter Squires • Mark Stepner • Kyler Taustin • Michael Victor • Jordan Lee Wagner • Robert Wright • Richard Yospin

## \*Section Leader

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# *Program Notes*

## PSALMS

What book has ever been set to music more often than the book of Psalms? Jews and Christians have been interpreting these 150 songs (and they were originally songs, not poems) for thousands of years—as Gregorian chant, synagogue Psalmody, catchy Hallel tunes, stately hymns, and musical masterworks.

The English word “Psalm” is derived from the Latin *Psalmus*, derived in turn from the Greek *ψαλμός* (*psalmós*), a translation of the Hebrew *mizmor*, which originally meant “song to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.” In fact, the name of our choir, “Zamir”, is derived from the same root as *mizmor*.

Some of the Psalms must have been sung by the general populace in ancient Israel. But in time the Psalms became the hymnal of the professional musicians in the official Temple (*Bet Ha-Mikdash*) in Jerusalem. One of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel, the tribe of Levi, was put in charge of everything relating to the sanctuary, including its music.

The biblical Book of Chronicles, written probably in the fourth century b.c.e., describes the Levite choir and orchestra performing Psalm 136.

All the Levite singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, their sons and their brothers, dressed in fine linen, holding cymbals, harps, and lyres, were standing to the east of the altar, and with them were 120 priests who blew trumpets. The trumpeters and the singers joined in unison to praise and extol the LORD; and as the sound of the trumpets, cymbals, and other musical instruments, and the praise of the LORD, “For He is good, for His steadfast love is eternal,” grew louder, the House, the House of the LORD, was filled with a cloud. (2 Chronicles 5:12-13)

The Mishnah (compiled c. 200 c.e.) describes a performance of the Psalms by Levites standing on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Countless Levites with harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments were there upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the court of the women, corresponding to the fifteen “Songs of the Steps” (*Shirey Ha-Ma’alot*) in the Psalms. It was upon these that the Levites stood with their musical instruments and sang their songs. (Mishnah *Sukkah*, 5:1-5)

The Psalms, in all their beauty and variety, are the focus of *Zamir*’s 48th season. This evening we present a program of rarely heard majestic settings by 19th-century synagogue composers.

## **BERLIN**

Louis Lewandowski (1821–1894)

In 1833 a destitute orphan boy made his way from his hometown of Wreschen to the big city of Berlin, where he would be apprenticed to Asher Lion, cantor at the Heidereutergasse Synagogue. Within a few decades Eliezer Lewandowski, better known as Louis, would become one of the most influential figures in the history of synagogue music.

In Berlin his talent was quickly recognized. Thanks to the influence of Alexander Mendelssohn (first cousin of Felix), Lewandowski was admitted to the Berlin Academy of the Arts—becoming the first Jew to be admitted to that school.

In 1844 Berlin's Jewish community invited Lewandowski to organize and direct a synagogue choir. This was not to be the primitive improvised harmonies that were heard in most synagogues. This was to be a trained ensemble of men and boys who could read music. With this appointment, Lewandowski became the first full-time independent choirmaster in the history of the synagogue.

In that same year Michael Sachs was appointed rabbi, and one year later Abraham Jacob Lichtenstein was appointed cantor. Sachs, Lichtenstein, and Lewandowski all sought a middle ground that would modernize the liturgy while retaining the traditional elements.

On September 5, 1866, the New Synagogue of Berlin, the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue, was dedicated. With seating for 3,200 it was the largest synagogue in Germany, and it boasted one of the finest pipe organs in the city. Lewandowski would compose hundreds of pieces for services in this grand synagogue. His music for cantor, choir, and organ was published and frequently reprinted and spread throughout the Ashkenazi Jewish world.

## **VIENNA**

Cantor Salomon Sulzer (1804–1890)

Two hundred years ago, Vienna was the cultural capital of Europe; a political and commercial gateway between East and West; the seat of the Hapsburg dynasty and the Holy Roman Empire. Vienna was also the capital of Austria-Hungary; the city of Mozart and Salieri, Haydn and Beethoven; an exquisite and impressive city of magnificent palaces, idyllic parks, splendid theaters and concert halls, and, of course, the beautiful blue Danube.

In Vienna (and throughout Western Europe) Jews were beginning to leave the confines of ghetto life to participate for the first time in the cultural activities of the surrounding community. They joined their middle-class neighbors and attended concerts and operas in the new public theaters as well as soirées of chamber music in private homes.

Enter Salomon Sulzer. He was born in 1804 in the Austrian town of Hohenems, near the Swiss border. As a child he displayed a prodigious talent in music, and the Jewish community decided to appoint the 13-year-old boy as the official hazzan of their synagogue. But that appointment then (as now) had to be approved by the government. The Emperor Joseph II decreed that the boy could serve, but only after he had completed his education. So for the next three years, young Sulzer learned his trade. He apprenticed himself to a master hazzan in nearby Switzerland

to learn the traditional Jewish chants. He also went to Karlsruhe to study the art of European secular music.

At the age of 16 he returned to Hohenems and became the musical leader of the synagogue. But he would not remain in the sticks for long. The fame of this young prodigy quickly spread. After five years in Hohenems, an invitation came from Vienna to audition for the post of hazzan at the new and beautiful synagogue on Seitenstettengasse.

In 1824 the Jewish community of Vienna had finally received permission from the authorities to build a new synagogue for its steadily growing community.

The community hired one of the most famous architects in Austria, Josef Kornhausel. A synagogue was built on Seitenstettengasse and dedicated in Cantor Salomon Sulzer

April 1826. From the outside, the synagogue looked like one of many store fronts or residences in the area, but the interior was stunning and majestic. The sanctuary was oval-shaped, seating up to 550 worshippers. The women's balcony had an unobstructed view of the sanctuary. There was a special balcony for the choir just above the ark. The furnishings and decorations were exquisite. The acoustics were excellent.

A new rabbi was brought in to serve the community. Noah Mannheimer, a modern man, would adapt the ancient liturgy to suit the cultivated tastes of the Viennese Jewish bourgeoisie. When Sulzer arrived in Vienna he found a beautiful building, a sophisticated community, a liberal and well-educated rabbi, but a liturgical music that was in wretched condition. Sulzer wrote in his memoirs, "I encountered chaos [when I arrived] in Vienna, and I was unable to discover any logic in this maze of opposing opinions." Like Rabbi Mannheimer, Cantor Sulzer tried to find the "middle road"—a path that would preserve the traditions, yet cast them in a modern light; that would retain the essential traditional elements of Judaism, but clothe them in Austrian garb; that would please the older generation, and at the same time provide an idiom to which the younger assimilated Jews could relate. His singing attracted admirers from far and wide, Jews and non-Jews. His choir was considered by many to be the finest a cappella ensemble in Vienna. And his compositions were praised in Vienna's press and soon were heard in synagogues throughout Europe and even across the Atlantic.

## **PARIS**

Cantor Samuel Naumbourg (1817–1880)

Paris, after all, was where it all began. The seeds for liberal humanism had been planted by the industrial revolution, nourished by the enlightenment philosophers, burst open with the French Revolution of 1789 (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*), and then spread throughout Europe by Napoleon. In 1808 Napoleon would declare, "... under the influence of various measures undertaken with regard to the Jews, there will no longer be any difference between them and other citizens of our empire." Paris was not only a center of music, but also a center for freedom of thought, a place where Jews could feel at home.

Into this fertile ground came the young cantor Samuel Naumbourg. A descendent of a three-centuries-old cantorial family in Germany, Naumbourg arrived in Paris in 1843. Two years later,

upon recommendation by the famous opera composer Jacques Halévy, Naumbourg was appointed to the post of Chief Cantor of Paris and was commissioned by the French government to arrange a new musical service to be introduced into all French synagogues. Halévy (1799–1862) himself had come from a strong Jewish background; his father had been a cantor and secretary of the Jewish Community of Paris. Naumbourg served ably as cantor at the great synagogue on Rue de Notre Dame—he collected and published traditional chants, introduced order into the synagogues of the French Republic, and composed beautiful new settings of the liturgy for cantor and choir. Jacques Fromental Halévy (1799–1862) was a cantor's son who became one of the most successful opera composers in 19th-century Paris. His grand opera, *La Juive* (The Jewess) premiered in 1835 and achieved tremendous popularity. Cantor Samuel Naumbourg Jacques Fromental Halévy

## **LONDON**

Julius (Yisro'el) Mombach (1813–1880)

London's most famous synagogue composer was born in Pfungstadt, Germany, the son of the town chazzan (cantor). At the age of 14, Mombach left home and traveled to London to serve as a meshorer (a boy soprano) in the Great Synagogue at Duke's Place with the newly appointed cantor Enoch Eliasson, who had also just arrived from Germany. He served in that capacity until 1841 when he was appointed director of the synagogue's newly formed choir, a post he held until his death at the age of sixty-seven. Mombach composed and arranged a great deal of music for his choir at the Great Synagogue, but it was published only posthumously. During his lifetime he was in great demand as choirmaster at official celebrations in Jewish communities throughout England. His Psalm 24 was sung at the consecration of the new London Central Synagogue in 1855. His Psalm 150 was composed for the wedding of Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild and Evelina de Rothschild in 1865. Today his melodies are heard in nearly all Ashkenazic synagogues in the United Kingdom and within the British Commonwealth.

Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813–1888)

was known, alongside his friends and colleagues Chopin and Liszt, as one of the greatest virtuoso pianists living in Paris. In addition, Alkan was a devoted Jew, who spent many hours studying the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Most of his compositions are for the piano (and many of them are notoriously difficult), but he also composed two settings of the synagogue liturgy for his friend, Cantor Samuel Naumbourg.

## **THE ORGAN**

Traditional Jewish worship had eschewed the use of musical instruments. This was in part as a result of a rabbinic decree that since the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 c.e. the Jewish people were to be in a state of mourning. But another factor was the perceived need to distinguish Jewish worship from Christian worship. And for centuries the organ had been associated with the Church.

But in the 19th century more and more synagogues were introducing the “king of instruments” into their services. Louis Lewandowski wrote, “The organ, in its magnificent sublimity and multiplicity, is capable of any nuance, and bringing it together with the old style of [Jewish] chanting will inevitably have a marvelous effect. The necessity, in the almost immeasurably vast space of the new synagogue, of providing leadership through instruments to the choir and most particularly to the congregation imposes itself on me so imperatively that I hardly think it

possible to have a service in keeping with the times in this space without this leadership.” And yet, just two years before his death, Lewandowski was reported to have confessed, “I, who organized the music of the whole worship service and organized it indeed with the organ, I am myself in my heart of hearts an opponent of the organ in the synagogue.”

Salomon Sulzer was at first opposed to the use of the organ. His early published compositions are all presented a cappella. However his position seems to have evolved. In 1869 he wrote, “Instrumental accompaniment for the singing in the worship service should be introduced everywhere, in order to facilitate the active participation of members of the congregation in the same. . . . To provide the requisite accompaniment to this end, the organ deserves to be recommended, and no religious reservations conflict with its use on the Sabbath and holy days.”

Samuel Naumbourg had serious misgivings about the use of the organ, despite the presence of the instrument in his synagogue. In 1874 he wrote, “Another unfortunate innovation is the introduction of the organ in many synagogues. . . . I prefer choral singing over it. The organ can never be joined to our prayers and to our traditional songs without destroying their charm.” Yet when he published the third volume of his compositions in that same year, Naumbourg wrote that these liturgical settings could be performed “with an accompaniment of organ or piano ad libitum.”

—Joshua Jacobson

### **Majesty of Hallel**

Recorded February 26 and April 23, 2017 at Methuen Memorial Music Hall

Leon Janikian, Recording Engineer

Joshua Jacobson, Artistic Director

Cantor Peter Halpern, Soloist

Edwin Swanborn, Organ

Judy Saiki, Harp