

NOTES FROM
ZAMIR

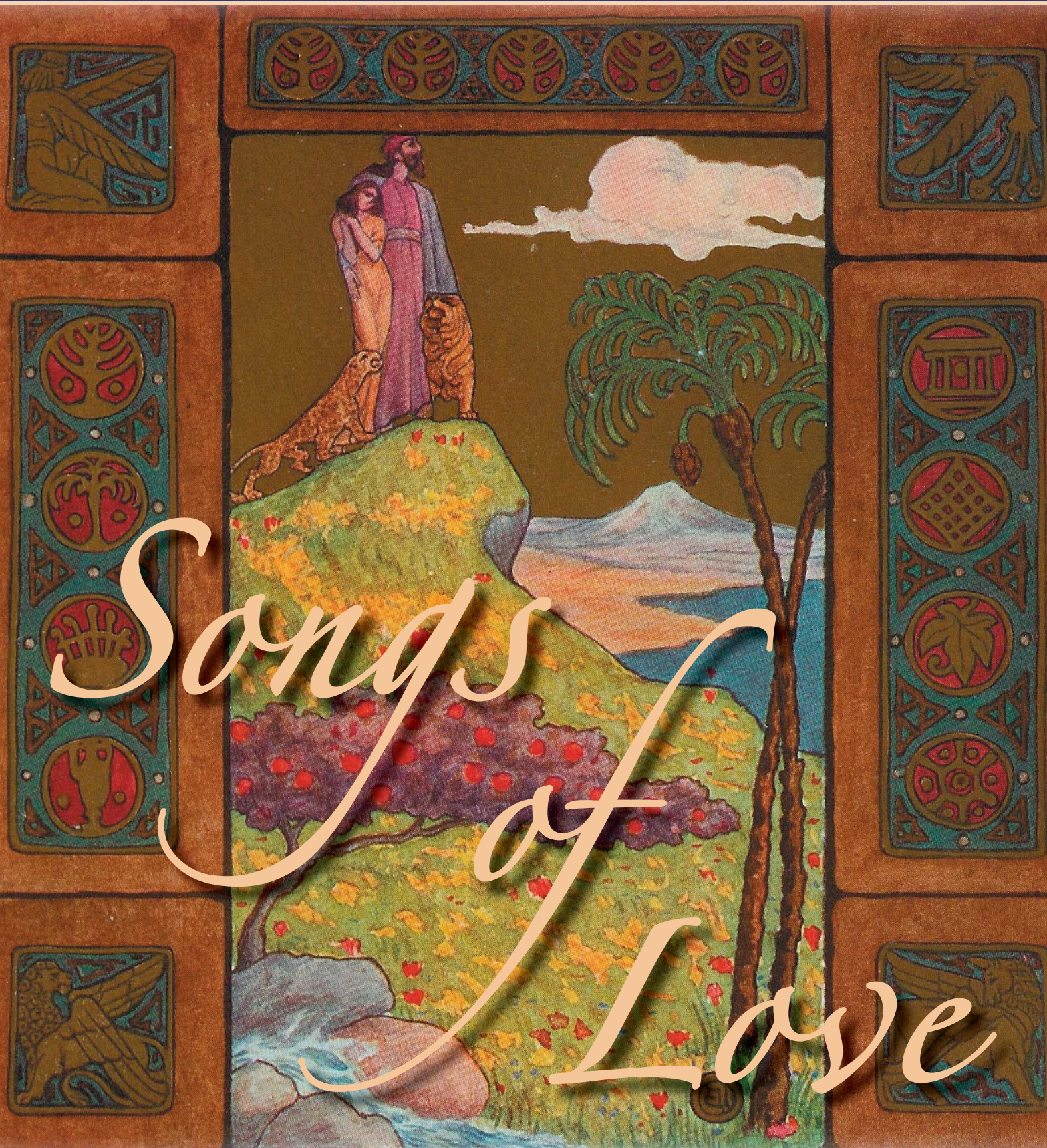


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הזמיר

Spring 2004

The Magazine of the Zamir Chorale of Boston

אביב תשנ"ד



Managing Editor: Deborah A. Sosin

Design and Layout: Susan R. Rubin

Editorial Staff: Andrew M. Greene, Joshua R. Jacobson,
Rachel C. King, Jill W. Sandberg, Lawrence E. Sandberg
Email: notes@zamir.org

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THE ZAMIR CHORALE OF BOSTON

Joshua R. Jacobson, Artistic Director

Joyce Bohnen, Chair, Board of Directors

Rachel C. King, General Manager

Susan R. Rubin, Chorale President

P. O. Box 590126

Newton, MA 02459

Toll-free 866-ZAMIR-20 (866-926-4720)

www.zamir.org

Mission Statement

The Zamir Chorale of Boston is an educational and musical institution that awakens audiences to the breadth and beauty of Jewish culture.

Zamir educates, inspires, and entertains through performances, symposia, recordings, publications, and the commissioning of new musical works.

Correction: In the Autumn 2003 issue, the photo of Molly Picon on page 8 was misidentified. The photo shows the actress in *East and West* (1923) and belongs to the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University. NFZ regrets the error.

Cover and pp. 9–11: Images from *The Songs of Solomon*, a collection of colored plates self-published by Ze'ev Raban, The Song of Songs Publishing Co., Jerusalem, 1930. Donated to the Bezalel Arts School. Back cover and p. 20: Poster design by Florette Kupfer.

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MISSION POSSIBLE

Dear Friends,

This issue of *Notes from Zamir* explores the world of Jewish love songs, from biblical gardens to modern Israel, in anticipation of our June 6 concert, *Shirei Ahavah*, “Songs of Love.” In addition to Joshua Jacobson’s essay introducing the love songs theme, the magazine includes original contributions by two of today’s leading Jewish scholars, Professors Marc Brettler and Lewis Glinert.

Indeed, offering in-depth context for our music is central to Zamir’s mission to both entertain and educate. In January, the Board of Directors voted to formalize this dual purpose by adopting a new mission statement (see masthead, left), one that, we believe, embodies the wonderful array of Zamir’s musical and extra-musical activities.

That range of activities—from performing to recording to publishing to developing and educating audiences—is gratifying evidence of how far Zamir has come over 35 seasons. To celebrate our accomplishments, we are planning an exciting double-chai anniversary season next year, capped off by an alumni reunion weekend and gala concert, June 3–5, 2005. We look forward to seeing you there and sharing where we have been and where we are going. For details about how you can participate, see Ronda Jacobson’s announcement on page 3.

Thank you for your continued support, and we hope to see you at Casey Theatre on June 6 for a romantic and enriching evening of Jewish love songs.

B’shalom,

Joyce Bohnen

Chair, Board of Directors

Order tickets for our
June 6 concert! See page 20.

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ALUMNI NEWS

MAZAL TOV TO

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Steve and Jill Ebstein on the bat mitzvah of their daughter, Naomi.

Debby Gelber and Avi Pfeffer on the birth of their daughter, Dina Tova.

Lisa Goldberg and Roy Barr on the birth of their son, Simon Jacob.

Sheri and Eli Gurock on the birth of their daughter, Mira Abigail.

Lisa and Craig Newfield on the bar mitzvah of their son, Jacob.

Jon and Irene Solomon on the birth of their son, Zachary Alexander.

CONDOLENCES TO

Dan Funk on the death of his beloved mother, Pearl.

Robert Weiss on the death of his beloved mother, Rose.

2004-05 CONCERT SCHEDULE

May 5, 7:30 pm **Hebrew College**, Newton, Mass.

May 16, 4:00 pm **Temple Tifereth Israel**,
Malden, Mass.

June 6, 7:30 pm **Casey Theatre**, Regis College
Weston, Mass.

July 11, evening **North American Jewish Choral
Festival**, Kerhonkson, N.Y.

* * *

Oct. 26, 8:00 pm **Boston University**, Boston, Mass.

Nov. 14, 3:00 pm **Congregation Kehillath Israel**,
Brookline, Mass.

Dec. 19, 7:00 pm **Temple Emanuel**, Newton, Mass.

June 5, 2005, **Sanders Theatre**, Cambridge, Mass.
7:30 pm Zamir 36th Anniversary Celebration

The full 2004-05 schedule will appear in the next issue.
Please visit www.zamir.org for updates.

Celebrate! Double-Chai Anniversary



June 3-5, 2005

Thirty-five years ago, a group of friends formed the Zamir Chorale of Boston. Now, a 36th anniversary celebration committee is already at work planning next year's song-filled weekend of reunion, friendship, and fun.

On Sunday, June 5, 2005, at 7:30 pm, Zamir will present its 36th anniversary gala concert at Sanders Theatre in Cambridge, Mass. Slated for the first half is a selection of music commissioned by Zamir over the years, including "Shir Ahavah" by Jef Labes; "The Rainbow" by Daniel Pinkham; "Harninu" by Benjie-Ellen Schiller, in memory of Rick Boyar ז"ל, Zamir's longtime tenor, percussionist, and fan; and the world premiere of "Et Hazzamir Higgaya" by Yehezkel Braun, in memory of Lou Garber ז"ל, Zamir founder, board member, and advocate.

Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service* will be featured in the second half, with noted alumnus Cantor Eliot Vogel as soloist. Former Zamir singers who can attend rehearsals are invited to perform this piece with the Chorale. We hope Zamirniks from all 36 years will gather on-stage to end the celebration with our anthem, "Hazzamir." Alumni, current members, donors, and friends will enjoy a festive post-concert reception.

Other anniversary celebration plans include a commemorative book with greetings and tributes, Shabbat dinner with *z'mirot*, a Saturday evening "sing"—and more! On Sunday, Boston-fun options may be offered, followed by a pre-concert lecture at Sanders. In addition, Zamir has formed a 36th anniversary capital campaign committee, led by Peter Finn, Zamir's first board chair.

We have much to do and we welcome your participation, involvement, support, and ideas. Questionnaires have already been emailed and snail-mailed to alumni whose addresses we have. (Didn't receive one? Please let me know!) If you wish to volunteer to help in any phase of planning this wonderful celebration, contact me at friends@zamir.org.

L'hitraot,

Ronda Garber Jacobson

Zamir 1969-1976

36th Anniversary Celebration Chair

Songs of Love

by Joshua R. Jacobson

Love songs. What could be more basic to human expression? Music and love are both universal. Anthropologists have found music of some form in every human society. And love is an emotion that every healthy human being craves. Of course, there are many kinds of love: love of country, love of a parent, love of a child, love of God. This spring, *Zamir* focuses its repertoire on romantic love. Some of the songs we present are ancient, but their themes resonate across hundreds of years and thousands of miles.

Naturally, *Zamir* has chosen songs from the Jewish traditions. But what makes a love song “Jewish”? Perhaps it was composed by a Jew. Perhaps the people who sing it are Jews. Perhaps its subject is a Jewish person, or beliefs, rituals, or literary references that are uniquely Jewish. Perhaps the lyrics are in a Jewish language, such as Hebrew, Yiddish, or Ladino. Perhaps the melody resonates with motifs found in Jewish liturgical music.

The earliest love songs of the Jewish people have been preserved in the Hebrew Bible. *Shir Ha-shirim* (the Song of Songs, or the Most Sublime Song) is regarded by some as the work of King Solomon (tenth century BCE), by others as an anthology of women’s amorous airs from ancient Israel (perhaps from the third century BCE). Some have questioned why a collection such as this, in which God is not mentioned even once, should have found a place in the biblical canon. Yet Rabbi Akiva (d. 135 CE) considered *Shir Ha-shirim* the holiest of all the writings (*Mishna Yadayim* 3:5). Akiva also made it clear that these were not ribald ditties: “Whoever sings the Song of Songs in taverns, treating it like an ordinary song, has no place in the World to Come” (*Tosefta Sanhedrin* 12:10).

Indeed, the Song of Songs is no “ordinary song.” A surface reading does reveal erotic longing and a sensuality evoked through descriptions of visions, sounds, tastes, aromas, and touching. But a careful analysis reveals a deeply spiritual, monogamous “I-Thou” relationship, and, in the words of

Carey Ellen Walsh, “a yearning for things unseen.” While we do not know to what melodies these verses were sung in ancient Israel, we do have an unbroken tradition of more than 1,500 years for chanting *Shir Ha-shirim* every year on Passover.

Moreover, these verses have inspired many great composers, from Palestrina and Monteverdi in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy to twentieth-century Israelis Marc Lavri and Yehezkel Braun. Even popular songs from the Zionist movement were taken from or written in the style of *Shir Ha-shirim* (e.g., “Uri Tsafon,” “Dodi Li,” “Erev Shel Shoshanim,” “Hayoshevet Ba-ganim,” “El Ginnat Egoz”).

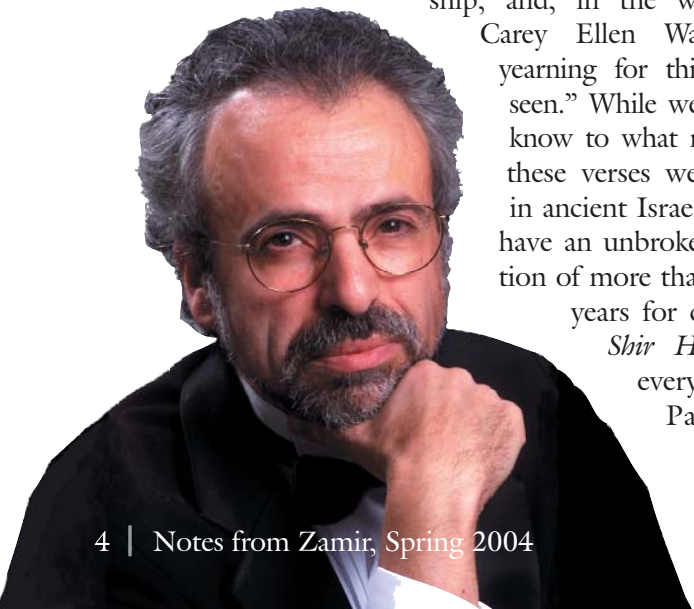
In the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora (after 70 CE), rabbis tried to prohibit the singing of secular songs. Music was considered inappropriate for a homeless people living in exile. But the urge for self-expression could not be repressed. Both the joy of love fulfilled and the pain of unrequited love found voice in poems that were sung, sometimes in private, sometimes for an audience of one special person, and sometimes in public presentation. A Jew in the Diaspora might sing a song she heard from her non-Jewish neighbor. She might alter it to reflect her circumstances, changing its language or introducing themes from the Jewish lifestyle. Or she might compose something completely original.

In twelfth-century Spain, some of the leading Hebrew scholars created love songs, among them Moses Ibn-Ezra and Yehudah Halevy. In addition, hundreds of songs have come down to us with no attribution. Sephardic Jews have a rich repertoire of *romanceros* and other love songs, some more than 500 years old. In many of these songs, a young man is in such an amorous state he declares he is “dying of love.” In others, a woman laments the state of an unhappy marriage and fantasizes about a handsome man who would come to take her away.

Similar themes can be found in the Ashkenazic world. The oldest surviving Yiddish love songs date from the early sixteenth century. A young man sings:

Where shall I go, where can I turn,
where will I wander?
I am aflame, my heart is on fire,
I can’t free myself.
I feel my heart is full
for the most beloved on earth.

After the middle of the nineteenth century, there was an efflorescence of love songs among the Jews of eastern Europe. Noted folklorist Ruth Rubin suggests that this phenomenon may have stemmed from both the new exposure to modernity and secular literature, and the gradual abandonment of the practice of arranged marriages. Rubin notes, “In eastern Europe of the nineteenth century, of all the categories of Yiddish folk songs, love songs were the most numerous, popular, melodious, and



poetic.” (p. 70) In “Papir Iz Dokh Vais,” a young student cannot concentrate on his books. He sings:

Paper is white and ink is black.
Sweet love, how my heart yearns for you!
I could sit for three days without stop
Kissing your pretty face and holding your hand.

Last night I went to a wedding.
I saw many pretty girls there.
Many pretty girls, but none to compare
With your dark eyes and black hair.

Your figure, your manner, your gentle ways!
In my heart burns a fire that none can see.
No one else can feel this burning.
My life and death are in your hands.

And young women sang songs that expressed new ideas of romantic love. “Tokhter Libe” is a dialogue song. The mother begins:

Daughter dear, devoted girl,
How could you fall in love with that boy?
What do you see in him?
He’s so poor, he has no clothes or shoes.
Better you should love a rich man.
What do you see in this pauper?
Try and find someone of your station
Someone who can be a proper husband.

In the second verse, the daughter answers:

Mother dear, devoted woman,
Don’t try to change my mind.
Recognize this fire within me,
And let me marry the man I choose.
I’ve fallen in love with his handsome face.
He has charmed me.
To the world he may be unattractive and poor,
But to me he is precious and lovely.

The establishment of Yiddish theater troupes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century created a new venue for the promulgation of love songs. Joseph Rumshinsky’s “Sheyn Vi Di Levoneh” had a simple lyric, but a catchy refrain that made it a hit on Second Avenue: “You are beautiful as the moon, brilliant as the stars, a gift from Heaven sent just for me.” Abe Ellstein wrote “Oy Mame, Bin Ikh Farlibt” for the actress Molly Picon: “Oh Mama! Am I in love! A klezmer violinist has me in such a state. I weep and laugh, and, Mama, I don’t know what world I’m in.” But the greatest of all love songs from the Yiddish theater was Sholom Secunda’s “Ba Mir Bistu Sheyn,” which, translated

into English, became the number-one song on the 1938 American Hit Parade.

In the cultural climate of the past 50 years, Diaspora Jews, by and large, no longer sing Jewish love songs. Indeed, Jewish composers such as Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Harold Arlen, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Leonard Bernstein, Jerry Lieber, Mike Stoller, Carole King, Neil Sedaka, and Barry Mann (to name a few), have made significant contributions to the corpus of American popular love songs. To find Jewish love songs today, one has to look to the Jewish State. Israeli songwriters have produced a stunning repertoire of love songs of all flavors, from romantic ballads to doo-wop and hip-hop.

We invite you to experience this dazzling musical variety at our June 6 concert at Casey Theatre in Weston, Mass. Let your heart melt with

*Both the joy of love
fulfilled and the pain of
unrequited love found voice
in poems that were sung.*

Seven Sephardic Romances and a setting of the Song of Songs by Israeli composer Yehezkel Braun. Experience the lyrical *Five Hebrew Love Songs* for chorus and string quartet by American composer Eric Whitacre. Enjoy “Shir Ahavah” for chorus and jazz quartet, composed for Zamir by Jef Labes (former pianist for Van Morrison). Relive Yiddish favorites such as “Papir Iz Doch Vais” and “Ba Mir Bistu Sheyn,” and Israeli standards, “Erev Shel Shoshanim,” “Dodi Li,” and “Aval Ahavah.”

We also invite you to explore further the love song theme in a three-part series, May 5, 12, and 19, cosponsored by Hebrew College and featuring Professors Marc Brettler, Jonathan Decter, and Lewis Glinert.

Enter our choral garden and savor these delicious musical fruits.

Recommended Reading

Bloch, Ariel and Chana Bloch. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Falk, Marcia. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation*. San Francisco: Harper, 1993.

Rubin, Ruth. *Voices of a People*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

Walsh, Carey Ellen. *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Joshua R. Jacobson, DMA, is Founder and Artistic Director of the Zamir Chorale of Boston and Visiting Professor of Jewish Music at Hebrew College. At Northeastern University, he is Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities. His book, *Chanting the Hebrew Bible: The Art of Cantillation* (Jewish Publication Society, 2002), was a National Jewish Book Award finalist in 2003.

Sheer Ahavah!

Inside “Five Hebrew Love Songs”

by Deborah A. Sosin

Even Hollywood’s finest screenwriter would be hard pressed to fashion a more romantic scenario: a man and a woman—he a pianist and composer, she a singer and poet—nestled in a small skiing village high in the Swiss Alps, falling in love while creating music together. The catch? They must produce, then perform, an original piece in a week’s time.

This idyllic plot forms the backdrop for Eric Whitacre’s *Five Hebrew Love Songs*, a lyrical setting of poems written by soprano Hila Plitmann—the composer’s then-girlfriend, now-wife—and the product of a real-life love story.

As Whitacre tells it, “In the spring of 1996, my great friend and brilliant violinist Friedemann Eichhorn invited me and Hila to give a concert with him in his home city of Speyer, Germany, one week later. We had all met that year as students at the Juilliard School and were inseparable. Because we were appearing as a band of traveling musicians, ‘Friedy’ asked me to write a set of troubadour songs for piano, violin, and soprano. I think he imagined us traveling the countryside, playing for the great courts of Europe. He’s a total romantic!”

For inspiration, Whitacre turned to Plitmann, whom he had been dating for seven months. “I asked Hila, who was born and raised in Jerusalem, to write me a few ‘postcards’ in her native tongue. She didn’t show them to me until they were finished, a few days later,” he says. “Then she slowly taught them to me, so that I began to hear the music that was hidden inside of her words.”

One day before the performance, Whitacre was nearly done with his composition. Was the creative mood frantic? Or was it an inspired, muse-like experience? “Both,” he notes. “There was no piano part yet—I improvised the premiere—and

no vocal part. I taught it to Hila while we were driving!”

Five Hebrew Love Songs was a success in Speyer and helped to cement the couple’s bond. Since then, Whitacre has created five different versions of the piece, including the setting for SATB chorus and string quartet that Zamir will perform this spring.

“Each of the songs captures a moment that Hila and I shared together,” he writes in the score. “‘Kala Kalla’ (Light Bride) was a pun I came up with while she was first teaching me Hebrew. The bells at the beginning of ‘Eyze Shel-leg’ are the exact pitches that awakened us each morning in Germany as they rang from a nearby cathedral.”

Whitacre and Plitmann were married in 1998 and now call Los Angeles home, although they are often on the road—together and apart—performing, teaching, composing, and recording. A 2003 Grammy nominee, Whitacre is a rising star in the choral and instrumental world. The youngest recipient to earn the coveted Raymond C. Brock commission by the American Choral Directors Association for his *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine*, he also composed *Water Night*, one of the top-selling choral publications in recent years. Plitmann, who won the prestigious Sony ES Prize in 1996 for her outstanding contribution to the vocal arts, is garnering acclaim on the international music scene as a recitalist and opera singer. In June 2004, Whitacre’s new opera, *Paradise Lost: Opera Electronica*, premieres in Los Angeles, with Plitmann in the starring role.

As their lives together blossom, both professionally and personally, the couple holds special affection for *Five Hebrew Love Songs*. “I had never set Hebrew text before, but I found it to be an exquisite language for music,” says Whitacre. “These pieces are so close to my heart, and every time I conduct them, I feel that blush of first love.”



Eric Whitacre



Hila Plitmann

תמונה

תמונה בלבי חרותה
נודדת בין אור ובין אופל.
מין דממה שכזו את גופך כך עוטה,
ושערך על פניך כך נופל.

כלה קלה

כלה קלה
כולה שלי,
ובקלות
תישק היא לי.

לרוב

לרוב, אמר גג לשמים,
המרחק שבינינו הוא עד.
אך לפני זמן עלו לכאן שנים,
ובינינו נשאר סנטימטר אחד.

איזה שלג!

איזה שלג!
כמו חלומות קטנים
נופלים מהשמים.

רכות

הוא היה מלא רכות,
היא היתה קשה.
וכל כמה שניסתה להשאר כך,
פשוט ובלי סיבה טובה,
לקח אותה אל תוך עצמו,
והניח
במקום הכי, הכי רך.

A PICTURE

A picture is engraved in my heart;
Moving between light and darkness:
A sort of silence envelops your body,
And your hair falls upon your face just so.

LIGHT BRIDE

Light bride
She is all mine,
And lightly
She will kiss me!

MOSTLY

"Mostly," said the roof to the sky,
"the distance between you and me is endlessness;
But a while ago two came up here,
and only one centimeter was left between us."

WHAT SNOW!

What snow!
Like little dreams
Falling from the sky.

TENDERNESS

He was full of tenderness;
She was very hard.
And as much as she tried to stay thus,
Simply, and with no good reason,
He took her into himself,
And set her down
in the softest, softest place.

—Hila Plitmann

CONDUCTOR'S NOTES

Eric Whitacre's *Five Hebrew Love Songs* is a romantic masterpiece. The composer has managed to create choruses that are sweet, but never cloying. Thoroughly post-modern, its melodies and harmonies are rooted in the modes of folk music and yet soar to the heights of artistry. Whitacre's colorful palette evokes a wide range of sonorities, from falling snow (violins playing harmonics and pizzicato) to the pealing of bells (aleatoric onomatopoeic vocalization).

The rhythms at times suggest the joyous heterometric dances of the eastern Mediterranean, and at times the free flow of chant. The choral writing and string orchestration are so idiomatic, one is surprised to discover that the songs were originally written for solo voice and piano. From the luminous yearning of the first movement, to the playful dance of the second, the intimate conversation of the third, the impressionistic imagery of the fourth, and the dulcet softness of the finale, these are love songs to cherish again and again. —Joshua R. Jacobson



Let Freedom Sing!

Zamir Performs at 2004 ACDA Convention

Despite a bitter cold that permeated the vaulted sanctuary of Boston's Church of the Covenant on February 12, the mood was distinctly warm. More than 500 participants attending this year's ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) Eastern Division Convention clapped and swayed in rhythm to Zamir's rendition of Elizabeth Swados's "Miriam" and, later, to the rousing music performed by the Westminster Jubilee Singers, a gospel group from New Jersey, who shared the bill for the convention's kickoff concert.

Opening the program, Joshua Jacobson led the audience of choral conductors in a read-through of Salamone Rossi's "Elohim Hashivenu," a setting of Psalm 80. "It was moving to hear the combined voices of our choral colleagues bringing Jewish music to life in this beautiful setting," said Jacobson.

Zamir, one of the convention's select invited choirs, entertained the standing-room-only crowd with repertoire ranging from liturgical Renaissance music to Israeli folk songs to show music. "The audience was so responsive," said Jacobson, who was approached by numerous colleagues inquiring about Zamir's music. "I think we can look for more than 'dreydel

songs' in the programming of school and community choirs in the near future."

"The Zamir Chorale is a model of what adult community choirs can be," said E. Wayne Abercrombie, president-elect of ACDA's Eastern Division. "The quality of programming and performance is uniformly high. Each singer is completely engaged in the music and its meaning and seems joyfully intent on communicating that to every audience."

Nearly 1,100 participants from all over the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states attended this year's three-day event, "Let Freedom Sing!" A professional organization for 18,000 choral directors who represent more than one million singers across the United States, ACDA holds annual conferences featuring concert performances by accomplished choirs, educational clinics by leading experts, and exhibits by music-industry representatives. Members teach choral music at all ages and levels, including adult and children's choirs, junior and senior high school choruses, college groups, ethnic choirs, vocal jazz ensembles, and symphony choruses.

Yes! I wish to make a donation to the Zamir Chorale of Boston.

Our fiscal year ends on June 30. Please help to support the artistic and educational mission of the chorus.

- ☐ **Friend (\$36+)**
- ☐ **Donor (\$100+)**
- ☐ **Patron (\$360+)** *As our thanks to you, receive your choice of Zamir CD or video.*
- ☐ **Benefactor (\$1,000+)** *Receive above, plus two tickets to Zamir annual concert and private reception*
- ☐ **Shir Chadash Circle (\$3,600+)** *Receive above, plus two additional tickets and naming opportunities*
- ☐ **Conductor's Circle (\$10,000+)** *Receive above, plus private Zamir concert in your home*
- ☐ **Other** _____

Tax-deductible donations may be made by check, payable to Zamir Chorale of Boston, or by credit card.

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Please return to Zamir Chorale of Boston, P. O. Box 590126, Newton, MA 02459

Questions? Call toll-free 866-926-4720, or email manager@zamir.org.

Love in a New Land

THE ISRAELI ROMANTIC LYRIC

by Lewis Glinert

“Do you love me?” Tevye asks Golde in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Her quizzical reply—“Do I love you? For twenty-five years I’ve washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house. Twenty-five years my bed is his. If that’s not love, what is?”—encapsulates traditional notions of love in the late-nineteenth-century shtetl.

But things were changing all around Golde. Demure Jewish maidens were spending their every spare moment reading Yiddish renditions of *Madame Bovary* and *David Copperfield*, ex-yeshiva students were penning the first modern Hebrew love lyrics—and in 1853, an aspiring Lithuanian intellectual named Avraham Mapu had already published the first Hebrew novel, *Ahavat Zion* (Love of Zion).

A tale of romance, heart-break, and intrigue set in ancient Judea, *Ahavat Zion* proclaimed not only love for Israel but also love *in* Israel. The effect was electric. Jews everywhere read, declaimed, and breathed *Ahavat Zion*. More than any other piece of writing, this romance would inspire young men and women to join the first waves of Aliyah (immigration) at the turn of the century—and to seek not only to resettle Eretz Yisrael but to create a new type of Jew and a new culture. This was to be a culture of youth, of manual work, of passion and romance.

A vital ingredient in the emergent Eretz-Yisraeli culture was popular song. Intense thought and activity went into creating “Israeli song” and its contribution to the new Israeli identity, as the music historian Natan Shahar has demonstrated. (I shall henceforth use “Israeli” to denote the entire period from the First Aliyah, which began in 1882, to the present.)

Love of the Motherland

Of the “high culture” of the new Israel, much has been written. But not so of its popular culture, particularly where

this doesn’t fit the “canonical” vision of the Zionist dream. Many readers will know something of Israel’s best poets and novelists, but little of the murder mysteries or school texts that Israelis have more often been reading. Similarly, Israeli popular music for generations of Americans has been synonymous with “Hava Nagila,” “Yerushalayim shel Zahav,” and a handful of other numbers. Meanwhile,

Shahar has counted over 1,200 new Hebrew songs actively circulated and sung just in the pre-State era alone.

What, then, were they singing about? To most Americans today, the idea of a “popular lyric” evokes, first and foremost, love lyrics—thanks, no doubt, to Tin Pan Alley, R&B, country and western, rock, and the rest. Singing about our hometowns or jobs or just about life may not seem the obvious thing to do.

In pre-1948 Israel, however, it was precisely of life and locale that people sang, at least when they sang in Hebrew. Here, Shahar has gathered some fascinating data, looking at the songbooks that circulated: The First Aliyah (1882–1903) sang songs of Zion and liturgical melodies—“Chushu Achim Chushu” (Hasten, brethren, hasten to the land of our youth!) and “Al Naharot Bavel” (By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept). With the Second and Third Aliyot (1904–1923), road building, agriculture, and the beauty of the land became the great themes, often drawing

on biblical idiom, and the new Hebrew schools began to create the familiar repertoire of Israeli children’s songs for the holidays. And as the country went onto a war footing in the 1940s, soldiering and underground struggle became dominant themes.

Remarkably, love and courtship was never a dominant theme in those heady, hectic days. People did sometimes sing in Hebrew of love, but wrapped up in other things that were deemed more important, above all love of the

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motherland. This was, after all, the era of the great collective struggle, when visions ruled people's lives and a Jewish state was constructed out of sand and the human will.

"Hayu Leylot," a haunting ballad written in the 1940s by Yosef Orland (with music by Mordechai Zeira), is a case in point. The first stanza reads (in my translation):

Those were nights, I remember them well,
'Til my days end I shall carry them with me.
On the paths between Degania and Kinneret
My life's cart stood laden.
And he approached: "Listen to me, my little one,
I have built a home for you to dwell;
You will embroider me a shirt by night
And by day I shall drive your cart."
He was then a shining figure, towering tall,
Driving the wagons to the wide fields,
And I would embroider a shirt for him,
A shirt of sky blue with a flower of gold.

From the same period come the ballads "Shenei Shoshanim" (Two Roses) by Orland and "Kalaniyot" (Poppies) by Natan Alterman, poet laureate of Labor Zionism. "Shenei Shoshanim" is an allegory of two roses, one white and one red, that bloomed together "like brothers," only

for one to be plucked and the other to wither. In "Kalaniyot" we see a little girl picking red poppies in the valley for her mother, then gathering poppies red with desire for her sweetheart, and then years later watching her own granddaughter picking poppies for her. Both ballads carefully manage

the erotic. The girl and her poppies are simultaneously situated in another realm of meaning, the cycle of life—while the two roses are essentially gender-neutral and equally capable of denoting two comrades-in-arms.

War and Resistance

War also provided a background—indeed an excuse—for romance, most memorably in the hauntingly muted lyrics

of Chaim Chefer, bard of Israel's War of Liberation. In "Yatzanu At" (We Slowly Left), the songster bids his beloved to remember how "we parted with a silent smile"—but this "we" is studiously ambiguous: the repeated "we" of the song is also the collective "we" who "slowly left" for battle. The individuals must never forget the group.

In "Hu Lo Yada et Shemah" (He Did Not Know Her Name), a couple's chance encounter with love has to end, for duty calls—"the company marched on, and he marched on with it"—and when they meet again, she is in nurse's robes and he dies in her hands without asking her name. And yet, "he knew a day would come when they would meet again in a dewy dawn or an evening sun." The dying sparks of love are swept up (dare one say "sublimated"?) in an entire society's hopes for a new dawn. Other such songs were "Shoshana" and "Li Kol Gal" (Ruti). It is often also instructive to look beyond the lyrics themselves to ask how they actually *functioned*. Thus, "Kalaniyot" was sung as a song of Jewish resistance, the "poppy" serving as a code word for the hated British Red Berets (the Paras).

The songs we have been talking about thus far form a genre that Israelis call *shirim ivriyim* or *shirei Eretz Yisrael*, best translated as "songs of the Land of Israel"—in other words, songs expressing the spirit of the new Israel. The great majority were composed right there, on the *kibbutzim*

(collective settlements), at the very political-cultural heart of Zionism. And in these places, there was little taste for romance. As historian Amos Elon has noted, pioneers dedicated to collective labor and ideology spurned sentimentality and private emotions as a bourgeois indulgence of the

Old Europe, and as threat to the cohesion of the group. Another striking musical indication of this was the kind of dancing favored in these circles: not in couples but in circles (no pun intended!). Talila Eliram of Bar Ilan University, in a fascinating musical survey of the period, has noted that the *shirei Eretz Yisrael* were predominantly in 2/4 and 4/4 dance rhythms, often with that initial skipped beat characteristic of the hora.



"A Hora Dance at Kibbutz Dalia," 1945

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Love Fulfilled or Love Frustrated?

INTERPRETING THE SONG OF SONGS

by Marc Zvi Brettler

Saadya Gaon, biblical translator, commentator, and philosopher, the head of the Babylonian community in the early tenth century, noted that the Song of Songs is “like a lock whose key is lost, like a diamond too expensive to purchase.” This is a quite paradoxical statement—we typically discard locks when we lose their keys. How can a text simultaneously be “a lock whose key is lost” and “a diamond too expensive to purchase”?

It may be a paradox, but the Song of Songs, whose title expresses a superlative—the best or finest song—is exquisite like that diamond, but ultimately resists any single, clear, persuasive interpretation, much like the old lock. These two characteristics, beauty and impenetrability, work together to make the Song the most magnificent, and one of the most impenetrable, books in the entire Bible.

The Problems of the Song

The difficulties of the Song differ from those found in many other biblical books, where we find very odd grammatical constructions, or unique Hebrew words, whose meaning we don’t know. The vocabulary of the Song is not simple—it is a highly poetic book—but we have a good sense of what almost every word means (in contrast to books like Job). Even when a word is unique to the Song, and thus it would be difficult to know with certainty what it means, context, or the use of related words in different languages, often provides us with helpful clues.

For example, Song of Songs 3:9 states, “King Solomon made himself an *apiryon* from Lebanon wood.” The word *apiryon* appears only here in the Bible, but context makes it clear that it is some sort of litter or palanquin used to carry royalty, perhaps a type of ancient, high-class rickshaw. In fact, it has

a similar meaning in Old Persian and was likely borrowed into Hebrew from that language. Thus, the problems of interpreting the Song are not on the level of “what does this word mean”—they are far more complex.

In the Beginning

The problems begin already with the highly alliterative first verse: *shir hashirim asher lishlomoh*—“Solomon’s superlative song.” [All translations are the author’s.] How are we to take this? Is it a statement of authorship? But if so, why is Solomon elsewhere referred to in the third person, as in 3:9,

cited just above? If Solomon is the author, we would have expected: “I made *for myself* a palanquin from Lebanon wood”! Furthermore, how would a Persian loanword enter into Hebrew during Solomon’s period (mid-tenth century BCE), well before the Persians established a powerful empire in the ancient Near East (late-sixth century BCE).

To add another complication: everywhere else in the Song, the relative pronoun “which” or “that” is expressed through the letter *shin*, pronounced *she*, as in the middle of 4:1: “Your hair is like a flock of goats that (*she*) streamed down Mount Gilead.” However, the opening verse, uniquely to the Song, uses the relative pronoun *asher*: *shir hashirim asher lishlomoh*, literally, “the song of songs that is Solomon’s.” Why would a single author choose to use a different word here? It would be like a novelist using American spelling throughout (*color*; *honor*), then suddenly using a single British spelling (*colour*; *honour*). Surely, as readers we would then be suspicious that this single odd spelling did not reflect the original author,

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but was secondary, inserted perhaps by a careless British proofreader.

We must then be wary concerning the first verse of the Song, which does not fit in a variety of ways with what follows. It is not original, and thus gives us our first hint that the Song of Songs may have a complicated history of composition, and may indeed not be a (single) song at all, but a compilation of songs, brought together by a later editor who wrote the first verse as a type of title, meant to subsume all that follows: Solomon's superlative song.

This brings up significant problems that frame how we might view the Song of Songs. It claims to be a single song ("Solomon's superlative song"), but the evidence of that first verse, and other evidence in the rest of the Song, suggests that it is a *collection* of songs. How are we to interpret it—as one or as many? And if as many, as how many—where does each song begin and end? (The chapter numbers are relatively recent and are of no use in this regard.) Or should we interpret it as a song cycle, where each song has its own meaning, but the totality of songs combines into a larger meaning? And what of the Solomonic attribution? Do we ignore it as late and ahistorical, or do we say that even if it is historically incorrect it is there, and it should somehow frame our understanding of the work as a whole? But how?

Who's Who?

Most translations of the second verse obscure another underlying problem of the Song. In the standard *Tanakh* New Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation, we read: "Oh, give me of the kisses of your mouth, For your love is more delightful than wine." This is inaccurate—the first verb, *yishakeni*, is actually third person, "may he kiss me," and a better rendering of the verse is: "May he kiss me of the kisses of his mouth (repeatedly?), for your lovemaking is more wonderful than wine." The *Tanakh* translation has somewhat de-eroticized the Song, as *dodim*, which almost always refers to the physical act of lovemaking in the Song, becomes the metaphysical "love."

Furthermore, this translation has ignored the change in person, from "may *he* kiss" to "*your* lovemaking." We do not know what has evoked this change, but it seems to offer an important clue to how the Song should be read. The change in person may suggest that in the first half of the verse, the woman is alone, and that the male lover (not the "husband"—the couple is not depicted as married) enters in the second half; this may support what is often called the dramatic reading of the Song. To others, the verse suggests that the woman desires her lover so much that she moves from this desire, "may he," to imagining that he is actually present, "your lovemaking." Indeed, some even believe that the entire Song is a song of (exquisite) desire, with the woman yearning for her imagined ideal lover, even dreaming up what he will say and do to her.

But which is right? Is the Song a drama with actors? The woman is often called the Shulamite on the basis of 7:1: "Come back, come back, O Shulamite." But this assumes incorrectly that the Song is a unity and that all the female lovers represent a single individual. Then there is the male lover—is he King Solomon? Perhaps the rest of the "cast" includes the mysterious "daughters of Jerusalem," mentioned seven times, often in the formula "I adjure, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not awake love (or the lovers) until it (or they) are ready." Or is the Song like the play *Golda*, a one-woman play—or perhaps not a drama at all, but rather a long fantasy poem? Clues in the Song point in different directions, and thus no one of these interpretations is decisive.



The Idyllic Song?

But certain things are “for sure” concerning the Song, right? We all know that it is an idyllic song about love, don’t we? Even that much is unsure. Much of the Song is idyllic, full of images of nature and gardens. It is suffused with “Spikenard and saffron, reed and cinnamon ... myrrh and aloes” (4:14). All of the poems seem to have a happy ending. For example, the verses from chapter 3 that Yehezkel Braun has set to music begin with the woman searching for her lover, first in her bed, and then in the streets and squares. She asks the guards, making the rounds, if they have seen him—but she doesn’t even give them a chance to answer, for she successfully finds “the one that my most innermost being loves.” All’s well that ends well.

But not all episodes in the Song have such happy endings. The Song contains a second dream sequence that begins in 5:2: “I was asleep but my heart was awake.” Here too the woman leaves the security of her house to search for her lover, and here too she meets the guards making their rounds. But in this sequence, she cannot find her lover, and in an ironic and painful twist, “The guards making their rounds in the city found me; they hit me, they wounded me. The guards of the walls stripped me of my cloak.” After this scene, perhaps a veiled reference to a rape, she continues to search, even enlisting the help of “the daughters of Jerusalem.” But it is too late: “My lover had slipped away, passed by”—“I sought him and found him not; I called him, but he did not answer me.” No happy ending here. Not surprisingly, though much of the Song has been set to music, I know of no musical setting for these verses.

All’s Well That Ends Well?

But does the Song itself have a happy ending? Again—it depends on which translation you use, and on how you interpret that translation. The final verse in the JPS translation reads, “Hurry, my beloved/Swift as a gazelle or a young stag/To the hills of spices!” Spoken by the female, this seems to suggest her desire for her male lover to join her in some faraway place, “the hill of spices.” However, the word translated as “hurry,” Hebrew *berach*, actually means “flee”—we would expect hurrying to be expressed by a quite different verb, *maher*. So instead of fleeing together to a spicy tryst, she may simply be telling her lover to scam.

Or perhaps not. “Hills” in the Song likely refer several times to the woman’s breasts. In fact, 1:13 likely reflects the ancient equivalent of deodorant, where the woman wears a “bag of myrrh” hanging from her neck, “lodging between [her] breasts.” So this may be the hill of spices to which the woman is inviting her lover to flee: “Flee my lover—like a gazelle or the young of a stag upon the spicy hills.” The woman may be inviting her lover to partake of *her* delights.

The multiple levels of meaning, the uncertainty of where units begin and end and how they interrelate, abiding questions about whether the Song narrates or acts out love fulfilled or love frustrated—the more one studies the Song, the more elusive it becomes. History of interpretation further complicates the issue; it is clear that by the second century CE, the Song was interpreted as an allegory, often a historical allegory, describing the relationship between God and Israel. When looking at all of these interpretive possibilities, “all” we are left with is “a lock whose key is lost ... a diamond too expensive to purchase.”

Marc Zvi Brettler, PhD, is Dora Golding Professor of Biblical Studies and Chair of the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, where he received the Michael L. Walzer Award for Excellence in Teaching. He wrote *Biblical Hebrew for Students of Modern Hebrew* (Yale University Press, 2001) and co-edited with Adele Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2004).



Shir Ha-shirim as Source

In the 1950s, following the creation of the State, a further type of love lyric came to prominence. Hitherto, songwriters had drawn on the Bible for new-but-old messages about the Land of Israel, its farming festivals and the dawning of a new (secular) messianic age—above all, from Isaiah and Psalms (“Uri Tsion,” “Ush’avtem Mayim,” “Ki Tavo’u el Ha-aretz,” “Al Tira Avdi Ya’akov,” “Hazor’im Bedim’ah”). But now it was the turn of *Shir Ha-shirim* (the Song of Songs) to provide lyrics for songs like “Ana Halach Dodech,” “Nitzanim Nir’u Ba-aretz,” and “El Ginat Egoz.” The lyrics of “Dodi Li” and “Itti Mi-levanon” are typical—and I have used an archaic English to convey the antique ring of the Hebrew:

My beloved is mine and I am his.
He feedeth among the lilies.

Come away with me from the Lebanon,
come, my bride,
From lions’ lairs, from the peak of Senir and Hermon.
Behold, thou art fair, my love, thine eyes are as doves.
This is my lover, this is my companion, O daughters
of Jerusalem, this is my companion.

The charming montage of a lush biblical landscape and a pastoral romance that *Shir Ha-shirim* supplied proved irresistible. But there is a rich irony here: In ancient times, the rabbis of the Talmud had warned against using *Shir Ha-shirim* as a mere drinking song—these were sacred lyrics. And now, in the new secular State of Israel, the theme of love was being, if not sanctified, at least idealized, a kind of decoration for the Zionist dream.

Leafing through old *shironim* (songbooks) bears this out: In *Beron Yachad*, for example, a songbook issued in 1963 to mark the 50th jubilee of the ultra-left Hashomer Hatsa’ir movement, I counted about 160 songs, grouped by theme, such as “We Shall Be the First,” “Rejoice, O Laborers,” “The Shtetl Is Burning.” The very last group is titled “Come, My Love”; it consists of just 16 songs, a mere 10 percent of the total—and every single one of them is derived from *Shir Ha-shirim*, giving them a mythical and quite depersonalized quality. Of course, one might retort, to sing of a locale as a backdrop to love has long been the very stuff of romantic song—from Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” to Jacques Brel’s “Les Prénoms de Paris”—but the sheer paucity of such songs in the emerging Israel calls for an alternative explanation.

Urban Motifs

But all the time, some Israelis were also singing another genre of Hebrew song, quite different from the “songs of

the Land of Israel,” grounded neither in the settlement movement nor the labor movement. I am not referring to the songs of the Old Country, which the immigrants brought with them and went on singing—no doubt, mothers continued to murmur the old lullabies. Russian-speaking immigrants went on singing Russian songs of dark, passionate love, while German and Yiddish speakers remained attached to the romance of the Lorelei and of Reizel.

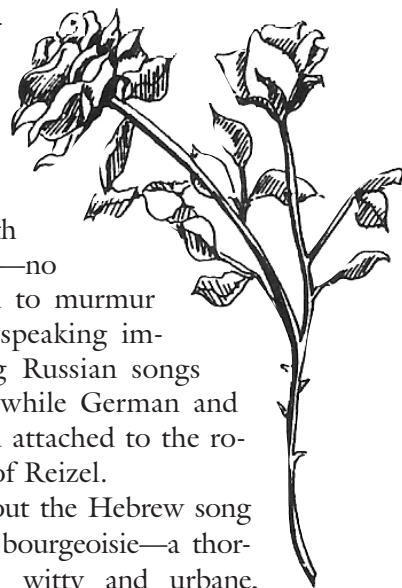
Rather, I am talking about the Hebrew song culture of the Tel Avivian bourgeoisie—a thoroughly European culture, witty and urbane, redolent of Warsaw and Berlin. Most of the Polish city Jews who arrived in Israel in the mid-1920s, the so-called Grabsky Aliyah, came not to find themselves or make the desert bloom but to escape hardship. Most of the German refugees who arrived in the 1930s had similar motives. They proceeded to create Tel Aviv, “the first Hebrew city,” a thoroughly European place and a gem of Bauhaus architecture. Indeed, the art historian Gideon Ofrat has shown how Tel Aviv and Jerusalem represented, from the start, two diametrically opposed cultures and types of art. Musically, the bourgeoisie went on enjoying the salon dances, the irony-laden cabarets—and the slightly sleazy love song.

And the Hebrew songwriters obliged. Little of this can be found in the *shironim* or in the reissues of the old Hebrew songs. What Gil Aldema calls the “musical establishment” has made sure of that. But to ignore this music may be to ignore a vital part of Israel’s popular heritage. Probably the best known of these love songs was “Rina,” the lyrics by the great poet Natan Alterman and a marvelous feat of ironic repartee and mock romance, to which translation does no justice. It begins:

Rina, I adore the sky.
Rina, I adore the bench.
Rina, I adore your sandals.
The light of your eyes, the wallet that you dropped.

Don’t talk in such dramatic tones,
Don’t be so debonair.
I heard it from my Momma:
Daughter, don’t trust men.

No, no, I am no man.
I am no rakish Don Juan.
My love is fiercer than the plague.
That’s how I’ve always been, since Sheik Abreik. . . .



Altogether less witty, but no less humorous, was the early composition “Hayah Zeh Ba-sadeh,” a ballad of two simple souls with a rollicking reprise:

Once a young lad went out to the road,
Once a young lad went out
And found a pretty girl
It happened in the field right next to the camp.

“Listen, my dear,” thus he said.
“Listen, my dear,
To the pounding of my heart!”
It happened in the field right next to the camp.

“My Daddy has bags of money,” thus she said.
“My Daddy has bags of money.
Let’s get wed and move in with him.”
It happened in the field right next to the camp. . . .

Many more “un-Zionist” love songs filled the ether and the record cabinet in the 1950s and early 1960s—“Od Nitra’eh,” “Simona Mi-dimona,” “At Chaki Li Va’achzor,” “Al Tishkacheni,” to name a few. Many of them had a Greek or Italian feel. If it is the humorous numbers that are remembered today among those bourgeois love songs, it may be because this was all that the collective Israeli musical consciousness has seen fit to recall.

Almost as soon as the State was established, the Zionist spirit began slowly to wane, as routine sank in and people got on with their lives. Looking back now over the past 50 years, it can appear as if Israel has been morphing all this while into a thoroughly Westernized, self-absorbed, affluence-seeking “society without a vision.” But reports of the death of Zionism have been somewhat premature, and what Israelis sing about could be used in evidence.

Genres of the 1960s

The beginnings of American and British influence came in the 1960s, from two directions: jazz and rock—and largely in the form of love lyrics. In 1964, the Gesher Ha-yarkon Trio (Arik Einstein, Yehoram Gaon, and Benny Amdursky) changed the course of Israeli song with their LP *Ahava Rishona* (First Love), the first composed entirely of love lyrics—with a strong admixture of jazz. Shortly thereafter, Israel hosted a new kind of tourist: the British rock group Cliff Richard and the Shadows. A tour by the Beatles was promptly banned when Ben-Gurion denied them visas. This was an Israel where no TV existed until 1968.

But “traditional” Israeli culture did not keel over and die. Rather, it transmuted. Three distinctively Israeli love genres were emerging in the ’50s and ’60s. The first involved remaining faithful to the characteristic imagery of the Song of Songs and mimicking its biblical diction but without actually using its text—a subtle and creative solution to the problem of continuity amid change. Indeed, as the political

anthropologists Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiye have observed, the reinterpretation of traditional symbol and ritual into old-new molds is at the very core of Israeli culture. “Erev Shel Shoshanim” (1958) and “Tapuach Chenani” (1965) are two much-sung examples of this genre. Others were “Ro’eh Vero’ah” and “Ta’am Ha-man.”

An evening of roses—let us go forth to the grove.
Myrrh, spices and frankincense are a threshold at thy feet.
Night falls slowly and a rosy breeze does blow.
Come let me whisper thee a secret song, a melody of love. . . .
(from “Erev Shel Shoshanim”)

A solitary tree—the breeze stroked its crown and kissed its leaves.
There in the garden, my beauty plucked an apple,
with her laugh of ivory.
Would that I were a tree and she a breeze that kissed me too—
Or that she plucked me, a comely apple!
Ah, when will the day’s breeze blow so I may lift up my voice:
My beauty, come down to muse in my garden.
(from “Tapuach Chenani”)

This genre has since faded, and archaic diction is widely mocked. But a second genre has had more staying power, closely associated with the great lyricist-melodist Naomi Shemer. Starting in the late 1950s, among an extraordinary range of themes, she developed an upbeat, often quirky love lyric that lovingly takes contemporary Israeli reality for a setting. “Bisdeh Tiltan,” “Leyl Emesh,” “Mitriya Bishnayim” and “Ahavat Po’aley Binyan” were some of her early hits. Here is the start of “Mitriya Bishnayim”:

Both: What luck: I decided to go
To the second picture show.

She: What luck: It began to rain.

He: What luck that you had no umbrella!

She: What luck: I recognized your face.

He: What luck: You suddenly shot me a smile.

She: What luck: You invited me to go
With you together, and you said, “There’s room!”

Both: The two of us together under one umbrella,
Both skipping over the puddles.
And the rainy city is saying to us:
“Life is beautiful, living is a good idea.”

For Naomi Shemer and many songsters who have followed her, love is part of a love of Israel and a love of life.

Drawing from Israel’s Poets

A third genre has involved the setting to music of some of the most powerful romantic lyrics of Israel’s poets, from

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Zamir Beach in Haifa, Israel, 2002

Rachel of the Third Aliyah to the contemporary Natan Yonatan. Here, Chava Alberstein has been one of the leading interpreters. Again, although Israeli poetry has largely turned inward, its very depth has lent these songs a peculiarly Israeli quality—together with the remarkable fact that Israeli song is still very much *shira betzibur*, group singing. Talila Eliram has observed how strong the need is for Israelis to get together and sing, both the old songs and the new. This in itself adds an extra layer of experienced Israeli-hood to these songs. And as should already be clear, we are talking not about song as an act of composition but as an act of performance and “hearer response.” Here is a part of the Leah Goldberg poem “Bo’i Kala,” as sung by Ahinoam Nini:

Your closeness and the closeness of the sea have
robbed me of my sleep.
Your nostril’s breath blows from the sea
And finds its salty way into my home.
And weeping billows moan to my love’s heights
Come my bride. . . .

Alongside all of this, of course, is a generic love lyric, which some might label “global” rather than “Israeli,” the kind of thing Aviv Geffen sings in “Shalechet” (Fall):

You’re asleep
He’s also in bed
But not in yours.
You’re dreaming of him
And feel good now
And he feels good with her, feels good with her.
You remind me of the Fall
When you fall silently
All the time dreaming
And he’s got up.
If he goes, you’ll cry.
If he goes, he’ll sing to you
And what happened to him you’ll never know.

Indefinably “Israel”

And yet, so many such lyrics *are* still indefinably “Israel”—not, to be sure, the Israel of once upon a time, but something of the old spirit that coheres and persists and resists, mixed perhaps with that same bittersweet, self-deprecating element that gives Jewish humor its unmistakable tone.

The Israeli love song, we have seen, has in many ways been “embedded” in another, more significant discourse. But what, finally, of the musical world beyond the love song? In many countries, crass commercialization has left young people with little beyond a generic love lyric. But incredibly, despite all else that is now so Westernized, the love lyric in no way monopolizes popular song in Israel today. There is also the wind and the sea and the sadness. Israel, indeed, is very different from any other country. A poignant testimony to this: the day in 1995 when the cream of Israel’s singers gathered in a Tel Aviv square to memorialize Yitzhak Rabin, intoning some of the most heartfelt songs of the decade. Listen, if you will, to the album they issued, *Shalom Chaver*, and it will be apparent how much other than romance Israelis still feel a need to sing about.

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Lewis Glinert, PhD, is Professor of Hebraic Studies and Linguistics at Dartmouth College and former Chair of the Centre for Jewish Studies at London University. Author of *The Grammar of Modern Hebrew* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) and the best-selling *The Joys of Hebrew* (Oxford University Press, 1993), he has published widely on Hebrew and Yiddish culture. His BBC documentary on the rebirth of spoken Hebrew, *Tongue of Tongues*, was a 1992 SONY Award nominee.

INSYNCWITH...

by Deborah A. Sosin

In March, NFZ chatted with Allan Friedman about his musical experiences—at home and abroad—from living in South Africa to conducting multi-age groups to researching non-Western music. On the cusp of completing his doctoral dissertation at Boston University, “Sacred Choral Compositions of the Russian-Jewish School: 1910–1950,” Friedman shared his thoughts about his work and his goals.

Q For your dissertation, you’ve been researching the liturgical choral works of Lazare Saminsky, Alexander Krein, and Joseph Achron, Jewish composers from the early twentieth century. Tell us about this group.

A The society is called the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music, which started in about 1908. Just as there was Russian nationalist music, Hungarian nationalist music, and Finnish nationalist music, Jews felt they should have a Jewish nationalist music, even though they didn’t have a country. These musicians were all studying with the famous non-Jewish Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov, who told them, “We’re waiting. Why do you fake, why do you imitate German and Russian music? Write your own music, write Jewish music.” And so they set out to do that in the next ten years or so before the revolution, at which time they all dispersed. So I am studying both the music of those pre-revolution years, when they were trying to write a similar kind of music, and then how those ten years affected the music they wrote from that point on.

Q Why don’t most of us know about these composers?

A These compositions were meant for a very specific time and place. The bulk of them were written by Saminsky,

who performed them as part of the services at the historic Congregation Emanu-El in New York. After his tenure, the pieces fell into disuse. Similarly, the music of Krein and Achron wasn’t performed after the composers’ deaths. The lack of a strong choral tradition in the Reform synagogues and the liturgical restrictions placed on music in the Conservative synagogues prevented the dissemination of this music to a wider audience.

Q How did you find the music?

A It took a long time to locate it—it was spread across the country, but I found it on the Internet. My heritage is Russian-Jewish, so that’s one of the reasons it appealed to me, and the fact that I didn’t know much about it was appealing. I was scared to death I would get this music and hate it. But when I got the first four or five scores, it was such a gratifying feeling to know that I was going to love this music that I was going to study.

Q You loved it from studying the scores, but you’ve never actually heard the music?

A No recordings exist. The last time it was performed was in the 1930s, when Saminsky was in charge of Congregation Emanu-El in New York City. A lot of it is in poor shape, but we’re hoping to change that so Zamir and other choirs can sing it in the near future.

Q Your interests have an international flavor, including the dissertation research and your work this past year at Boston University on Asian art music. And as a junior at Duke, you spent a semester in South Africa. Tell us about your experience.

A My time in South Africa was almost a crucible. I went there by

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ALLAN FRIEDMAN

Mary Wolfman Epstein Conducting Intern

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myself with no expectations. I knew I was going to study music, but I didn't know much about the city of Durban, which has about a million people. I lived in a dorm with 2,000 people. I was the only white person and it was just an amazing experience. I would walk to school every day and people I didn't even know would say, "Hi, Allan, how are you?" Everyone knew there was a white guy named Allan from America!

I had the chance to sing in a classical choir—we sang Beethoven's Ninth. I also sang in a jazz choir led by Darius Brubeck, Dave Brubeck's son, who's the head of the jazz program there. I got to sing in a small Zulu choir, Lady-smith Black Mambazo, the group that sang with Paul Simon on *Graceland*. Their leader, Joseph Shabalala, is a professor at this school.

I also sang in a Xhosa Zulu choir—the rehearsals were in Zulu. I learned the words for *louder, softer, tenor, soprano, alto, bass* and nudged someone when I didn't know what was going on. We were also in a competition, 40 choirs, about 40 to 50 singers in each choir. I was the only white person, and I got to the point where I forgot that I was white. It didn't matter anymore, which was the most amazing feeling. In America, you're always thinking about race in one way or another. In South Africa, for a few blessed weeks, I stopped thinking about it. It was just me and my fellow singers.

I came back with a passion both to cultivate that music and to find other musics around the globe that interested and touched me as deeply. Because while Mozart and Bach shaped my soul, so does Asian music, so does Russian music, and so does Jewish music.

Q In South Africa, did your identity as a Jew come into play?

A I didn't feel as much of an outsider as one normally might, because growing up in northern Minnesota as a Jew, you are an outsider. We were the only Jewish family in the county. Our synagogue had maybe 40 families and the next synagogue was 150 miles away. I always felt like a minority. When we sang the Chanukah piece in choir, it was obvious whom we were singing it for—me. And it was obvious when the school Christmas decorations were up, the one menorah was for me. So going to South Africa, that feeling of being an outsider helped me. There was a rather large South African Jewish community in Durban, which was nice to see, too. I was taken in and got to go to High Holidays.

Q Growing up in Minnesota, did you always want to be a musician?

A I came to choral music very late. I played saxophone in the band growing up, but I transferred

high schools and decided that it was much easier to carry my voice around than my saxophone. So I started singing in choir, found quickly that I was good at it, and that I could read the music fairly fast and enjoyed it. In college, I planned at first to be a history major until I took one music class and thought maybe I should double major. And so really this is my seventh year of studying music seriously.

Q As a Mary Wolfman Epstein conducting intern, what are your responsibilities?

A Part of the internship, aside from being in Zamir rehearsals, leading them occasionally, and learning Jewish choral music, is meeting regularly with Josh Jacobson. In my first year, we studied Jewish music and Jewish composers from the Bible till now. And since I was fortunate enough to get the internship again this year, we decided to focus on my dissertation topic. So Josh and I discuss the music that I found and he lends insight into connections I wouldn't know of, and he has opened doors to other researchers.

Q There's a rumor that you're involved in *five* choirs right now?

A Right. I sing with Zamir, I conduct the Harbour Choral Arts Society in Hanover, and a church choir at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Canton. And I sing in BU's symphonic choir and chamber chorus.

Q Which side of the podium do you prefer?

A Well, growing up you always love singing in choirs and you always think, I could never be up there in front, and then you get the chance to try it and it's terrifying and exhilarating all at once. Now I enjoy being on the podium so much that sitting in the choir is more relaxation than anything else, only worrying about one part at a time.

Q Where do you see yourself in ten years?

A First, I'd love to be married (take note, all you single Jewish women out there). Second, I'd love to be conducting a choir, perhaps at a small liberal-arts school. I'd prefer to be in the U.S., close enough to my family. I want to be conducting, and to compose on the side, maybe in the summer. And to continue to be exposed to new music and new people and new ideas. It's so important for me to keep my education and my learning and my zest for trying new things throughout my life, right to the bitter end—or non-bitter end, if I do it right.

Q If you could form the Allan Friedman Chorale, what would it be?

A It would consist of 40 singers of mixed age. I love working with college-age kids, I love their energy. But I also love the seriousness of older people and the passion they bring to the music. Sometimes younger kids can take things for granted: “Oh, I can sing for the rest of my life.” Whereas you get in a group of people like Zamir, where people have been in for 30, 35 years, it shows amazing dedication and desire to make music. I love Renaissance music, modern music, and everything in between. I think variety is really the spice of conducting because not only can you keep yourself fresh and interested, but you can bring so much history and knowledge to your singers, and open up new worlds to them.

Q Can you sum up your Zamir experience?

A I’ve learned over 150 pieces of Jewish music—just so much quality music that I will be able to program easily for the rest of my life. I find connections every day between this music and other musics I’ve sung. Having that knowledge in my back pocket is something I’m very excited about. Also, Zamir has been a spiritual experience for me. It has been my connection to Judaism here in Boston. In a way, it’s my Shabbos, my holy time, Tuesday nights [when Zamir rehearses], when I can commune with Jewish people doing something that I love, something that I’ve always felt is holy and spiritual—singing. Whether I’m doing it by myself in the shower, or in a huge choir, it’s always something sacred to me.

Zamir is pleased to announce the appointment of Rebecca Incledon as a 2004–05 intern. A graduate of Brandeis University, she sang with the Brandeis University Chorus, Chamber Choir, and Early Music Ensemble. In 2003, Rebecca served as a conducting intern with the renowned PALS children’s chorus, led by Johanna Hill Simpson.

Candidates interested in applying for the Mary Wolfman Epstein Conducting Fellowship may send application materials to Prof. Joshua Jacobson, P. O. Box 590126, Newton, MA 02459, or email conductor@zamir.org.

THE MARYWOLFMANEPSTEIN CONDUCTING FELLOWSHIP

The Mary Wolfman Epstein Conducting Fellowship was established in September 2000 to train conductors in the area of Jewish choral music. Thanks to a grant from the Offen family, the Zamir Chorale of Boston each year provides training for up to three conducting interns.

EACH INTERN

- is engaged in a study of Jewish choral repertoire with the Chorale’s Artistic Director.
- sings as a regular member of the Chorale, attending all rehearsals and concerts.
- attends monthly staff meetings.
- may be given opportunities to conduct the Chorale in rehearsals (both tutti and break-out rehearsals) and in concert.
- may sit in on auditions for new members.

Interns may also serve as assistant conductors, vocal coaches, and/or section leaders.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Excellent skills and experience in choral conducting
- A pleasant voice, appropriate for choral work
- Advanced musical literacy
- Interpersonal and leadership skills
- An interest in Jewish choral music

* * *

A voice teacher, professional singer, and impresario who helped the careers of many fine performers, Mary Wolfman Epstein was for many decades the leading force in Jewish music in Boston. She also led choruses at Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline, Mass., and was a founding member of the New England Jewish Music Forum. Active in the National Association of Teachers of Singing, she established a scholarship fund there.



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by Rachel C. King

February 29 held dual significance this winter as Zamir marked Leap Day with its annual back-to-back outreach concerts in the Greater Boston area. At the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston (SSDS) in Newton, then at the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center for Aged in Roslindale, audience members from age three to 103 clapped, sang, and danced along with Zamir's selections from folk, classical, and theater traditions.

Marching in to a pulsing drumbeat, pep-rally style, Zamir began the day in the SSDS gymnasium, performing the opening movement of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* for a standing-room-only crowd of more than 500 parents and children. To conclude the set, Joshua Jacobson led the audience in a spirited call-and-response during Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So."

"The kids love listening to Zamir," said Trudy Shulman Fagen, the school's Creative Arts Coordinator. "They are charmed by how high the sopranos sing and how low the basses go. One child said he looks forward to wearing a tuxedo someday so his voice will go even lower and he can join Zamir!"

Other future Zamirniks could undoubtedly be counted among the 200 children, ages eight to 14, who sing in the school's four choirs. "Our kids are trained to listen hard and discern the harmonies," said Fagen, whose colleagues, Eugenia Gerstein and Ilana Dorfman, shared conducting responsibilities.

Demonstrating both enthusiasm and discipline, each Schechter choir performed in turn, then joined Zamir for "Eyn Adir" and "Zol Zain Sholem." In a moving finale, the combined groups sang "Hatikvah."

"We were honored and delighted to host Zamir for the second year in a row," said Arnold Zar-Kessler, SSDS Head of School. "Music is a vital part of our arts-based curriculum, so a Zamir concert is a special opportunity to learn from, and enjoy, this superb music."

Noted Jacobson, "Our annual children's concert is a highlight of the season. And this year, the Schechter kids are recording a CD with us this spring, which we hope to release by Chanukah."

Just an hour later and a few miles away, Zamir entertained an equally enthusiastic audience in the sanctuary of the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center, which was filled with residents and their families. Zamir's program, drawn largely from Jewish musical theater, spurred many residents to sing along to the Yiddish lyrics—and even to dance. "You know this is a successful concert," announced Carol Rose, Director of Recreational Therapy, "when our oldest resident, age 103, gets up to dance in the aisles!"

Afterward, Zamir singers chatted with residents, some of whom shared their own musical memories. "The singers and their blend were fantastic—Zamir sounded better than the Broadway show of *Fiddler on the Roof*! I felt like I was flying," said Harriet Rucker, a former Big Band vocalist.

Added Dorothy Rosenberg, volunteer director of the center's own choral group, "Thank you for bringing so many of our residents joy today. You proved that music is an invisible medicine."

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The festival features five days of intensive workshops, study, and concerts. More than 500 participants take part in daily community sings and "instant ensembles." Evening concerts feature outstanding vocal ensembles, choruses, and soloists. Workshops cover everything from vocal and conducting techniques to the history of Jewish music and ritual. Late-night gatherings include Jewish music sing-alongs, videos, and more.

Sponsored by the Zamir Choral Foundation, New York—Matthew Lazar, Founder and Director
For details, visit www.zamirfdn.org.

Don't miss the Zamir Choral of Boston's performance on Sunday night, July 11!

Singing by Heart

by Daniel Nesson

“You have captured my heart, my bride, with one glance of your eyes” (*Shir Ha-shirim* 4:9).

Where is she?! I couldn’t help feeling all out of sorts. She was late and it was time to chant the familiar verses from the Song of Songs. Well, I hope she’s just a little late, but where is she?!

The one-sided conversation echoed in the back of my head as I chanted some of the most gorgeous love poetry even written. I had taken great pains to get the words just right, since I was going to end by asking (from the *bima* no less) Sue Carp to be my bride. It turns out she was still sleeping, and by the time she arrived in *shul*...well, she missed her proposal. It was Passover 1988. Later that day, much to my relief, she accepted.

So imagine you’re planning your wedding. First you set the date—in June, of course. Next you pick a location, find a caterer, do the invitations. Right? Not us. We consulted our calendars for the 1989 Zamir schedule. You can’t have your wedding on a concert date!

Then you sort through dozens of songs to decide which ones your Zamir friends will be able to sing. We spent more time picking out music than planning the food! The engagement party, the bridal shower. Our Zamir community celebrated with us at every step.

When we met in the spring of 1977 at a party at Brandeis, we danced all night (and maybe partied a little too hard). The next time I saw Sue was in September, when she greeted me at my first Zamir audition. (She’d been a member since 1973.) I didn’t remember who she was! *Oops*. But, since I didn’t have a car, I mooched rides from her to rehearsals at BU Hillel. We began hanging out, then it developed into more, off and on, until the 1988 proposal.

Our lives in the past 15 years have revolved around Zamir schedules. How many



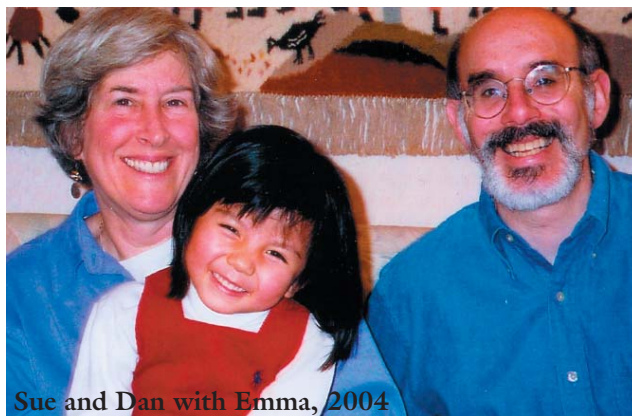
Sue and Dan, 1984

people would spend their tenth wedding anniversary packing for a concert tour to Eastern Europe? But, really, our love story began because of Zamir and has been sustained by it. We’ve met many of our closest friends through the choir, and Zamir has become like an extended family. We celebrate engagements, weddings, and births—we experience illnesses and deaths together. Before we brought our daughter, Emma Rose, home from China in July 2001, our Zamir friends threw us a baby shower, welcoming in a new member, maybe a future alto?

Hundreds of memories. One that was central to our Zamir experience was the tour to Eastern Europe. For 20 years, we’d heard Josh explain the origin of “Ha-zamir,” our anthem, at virtually every concert. He told us that the original Zamir was founded in Lodz, Poland, in 1899. So, on the 100th anniversary, to stand at the place where it started, to stand in the soulprints of our predecessors in Lodz, was an apotheosis.

I remember my former colleague from Hartford, Rabbi Gerald Zelermyer, used to say that while he talked for a living, his wife, Heske, lived for talking. I think the same can be said about us—but in song. In my work as ritual director at Temple Emanuel in Newton, I am required to sing every day, whether leading a minyan or teaching *b’nai mitzvah*. But Sue is really the singer—she sings all day. It is core of her soul. And now, Emma, almost four, wakes up singing every morning. What a gift to pass on!

The relationship between Jacob and Joseph is described in the Torah as “nafsho k’shurah b’nafsho”—their souls were combined so that you couldn’t tell where one ended and the other began. After 56 combined years in Zamir, Susan Carp-Nesson, Daniel Nesson, and the Zamir Chorale of Boston are entwined as a “seal upon our hearts.”



Sue and Dan with Emma, 2004

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