



Notes from Zamir (Spring 1998)

A SONG OF ASCENT

*When the Lord returns Zion's captives, we will be like dreamers.
Our mouths will be filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.
Then shall they say among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them!"
The Lord does great things for us and we rejoice.
Oh Lord, bring back our exiles like streams in the desert.
They who sow in tears shall reap in songs of joy.
The one who goes off weeping, carrying his bag of seed,
He shall return with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.*

Tradition tells us that these words from Psalm 126 were sung by the Jewish exiles as they returned to Jerusalem after a fifty-year captivity in Babylon in the sixth century b.c.e.

Throughout the Diaspora, for centuries, for millennia, that dream of returning home, coming back to Zion, the Jewish homeland, was kept alive in the hearts of the Jewish people.

One hundred years ago Theodore Herzl encouraged his fellow Jews to return to Zion with the words, "If you will it, it is no dream." And fifty years ago, when the Jewish homeland declared its independence, that dream became a reality. Once again, the captives ascended to Zion with songs of joy.

Musicians relate more easily to "dreamers" than to "realists." And so, for Zamir's musical celebration of Israel's Jubilee, we will pay homage to the dreamers, the idealists. Transcending the present, we will dream of a time of optimism, romance, enthusiasm and vision.

The centerpiece of our program will be the world premiere of Meira Warshauer's *We Are Dreamers*, commissioned by Zamir in honor of Israel's Jubilee. Meira has written a truly enchanting setting of Psalm 126 based on melodies from various Sephardic and Yemenite communities that she heard on her recent trip to Israel.

The rest of the program will comprise the old songs of the Yishuv, the early settlers, the dreamers. One of Israel's greatest songwriters, Yedidya Admon, will be represented by Hafley Va-fele, celebrating the miracle of the desert transformed into a garden, and Shedemati, the farmer's love song to his land. We will present several traditional Sephardic melodies, including the beautiful lullaby Hitrag'ut and the rousing Simhat Torah hymn, Adir Kevodo.

There will be plenty of horahs, too: Rad Ha-laylah, Zemer Lakh, Hey Harmonika, Mayim Be-sason, and

Horah Medurah. And we'll have great love songs: Ana Halakh Dodeykh, inspired by the Song of Songs, and Simona Mi-Dimona, an exotic romance for a lovely dark girl in a wilderness development town. The passion for the desert will also be heard, in Al Giv'at Sheikh Abrek and La-midbar Sa'enu.

Many of these tunes will be presented in new arrangements created for this concert, with plenty of opportunities for the audience to sing along. And the talented Jeff Warschauer and his ensemble will join us on several numbers, as well as performing instrumental renditions of music indigenous to the Middle East.

So come, let some inspiring music bring back the dreams. Our mouths will be filled with laughter, our tongues, with songs of joy.

-- Joshua Jacobson

World Premiere of "We Are Dreamers"

In a process begun almost two years ago, the Zamir Chorale of Boston commissioned composer Meira Maxine Warshauer of South Carolina to write a choral work honoring the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel, to be debuted at Zamir's 1998 spring concert. Partial funding for the commission was obtained from the Alfred Nash Patterson Foundation (through the Boston Foundation) and four choirs recruited as co-sponsors: the Rottenberg Chorale of New York, The Gratz College Choir of Pennsylvania, Zemer Chai of Washington DC, and Kol Dodi of New Jersey. This partnership has brought to life a wonderful new composition, *We Are Dreamers*, scored for SATB chorus, piano, clarinet and percussion. The piece will receive its world premiere at Zamir's spring concert, *Dreamers*, on Sunday, June 7, at 7:30 pm, in elegant Casey Theatre on the beautiful campus of Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts.

We Are Dreamers was inspired by field research Meira conducted during a six-week residency in Israel last spring (sponsored by the South Carolina Arts Commission and the University of South Carolina Hillel). "I was very moved by the reality of the return of the dispersed Jews to the land of Israel after the long exile," she says. "It is a saga of epic proportions that defies the normal human course of events, and a testament to the endurance of the faith kept over thousands of years." Meira found it inspiring "that we have kept alive this dream of return so strong in the midst of diverse cultures, hardship, persecution, and temptations to assimilate, that we are still praying in Hebrew, that I can go to a Yemenite service and follow the siddur and be welcomed by my Yemenite sisters, that we are actually living out the prophecy of return, even though much work remains to be done."

During her stay in Israel, Meira felt privileged to meet Jews from across the globe, in synagogues representing a wide range of cultures from the Diaspora, of which she writes: "I prayed with the pulsating rhythms of Yemen, swayed and danced with Hasidic followers of Reb Nachman of Bratslav, Lithuania, and was transformed by the elaborately melodic priestly blessings of Sephardic Jerusalem. I experienced the strong beat and intense yearnings of Moroccan musicians celebrating their traditional post-Passover feast day, and a young Ethiopian musician introduced me to the African rhythms and ornamented melodies of traditional Ethiopian music and its influence on Jewish-Ethiopian culture. Most inspiring were my visits to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, where the sounds of prayers from these contrasting musical cultures merge as one in the unity of the Hebrew words they intone."

For her lyrics Meira chose the words of Psalm 126 (*Shir HaMa'alot*) which have nourished the faith and desire for return of Jews everywhere. As part of her musical research at the Hebrew University Sound

Archives, Meira collected contrasting versions of Psalm 126 from various communities. "To me the various versions of Psalm 126 are a microcosm of the diversity of expression and cultural richness of Israel today. They represent the [bounty] of this return, the carrying of sheaves from a harvest of cultural riches gleaned from the diaspora experience." Versions of Psalm 126 that found their way into We Are Dreamers include a yearning Greek melody from Salonika representing "conflicts still unresolved and dreams yet unfulfilled," a sweet Moroccan version expressing the intimacy of reunion, and a joyful Yemenite melody evoking a great dance "calling for all to join in the joyous return." For Meira, these melodies represent "streams in the desert, returning to nourish the land and soul of Israel."

-- Sophia Bilides



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