**The Zamir Chorale of Boston – In the Beginning…**

by Joshua Jacobson

**T**owards the end of my senior year in college, I received a phone call from Stanley Sperber. Stanley had been my music counselor at Camp Yavneh in the early 1960s, and was responsible for my transition from a guitar-playing folkie to a student of classical music and an aspiring choral conductor. In 1960, Stanley had started a youth chorus in Manhattan composed of teenagers who had sung together in the summers at Camp Massad. The ensemble was dedicated to the performance of Israeli and Jewish music. Eventually they gave their chorus a name: Zamir.

Stanley was phoning to invite me to start a Zamir Chorale in Boston. And so, with naïve enthusiasm and youthful determination, I accepted and dived right in. With the assistance of Lou Garber (z”l) and Gerry Halpern, we assembled a group of about 40 students from the area. Boston University Hillel was kind enough to allow us to use their auditorium for rehearsals, and in October of 1969 some forty students gathered for what would be the first of thousands of rehearsals of the Zamir Chorale of Boston.

Stanley and his colleagues were generous in their encouragement and assistance. We flourished! Our first concert in January of 1970 at Temple Ohabei Shalom for the New England Jewish Music Forum felt like a great success (although I suspect I would cringe if I were to hear a recording of that performance today).

We continued to have excellent relations with our “parent” chorus in New York, and arranged numerous joint concerts.

Neither Stanley nor I was aware that we were actually carrying on a choral tradition. We had assumed that we were bold innovators, creating a new form of expression for our generation—Jewish cultural identification independent of the Jewish establishment. But we were wrong. About 40 years ago I realized that we were not the first Zamirs. That credit goes to Joseph Rumshinski and a group of young singers in Lodz Poland, who in 1899 founded a secular Jewish chorus, which they called Ha-Zomir.

Today the Zamir movement continues to flourish. The American Record Guide dubbed our Boston branch, “America’s foremost Jewish choral ensemble.” And the New York Zamir (now a Foundation) hosts a Jewish Choral Festival every summer that attracts hundreds of singers from all across the continent, and their current director, Matthew Lazar, has initiated a successful franchise of “Ha-Zamir” choruses for Jewish teenagers all across North America, and with several branches in Israel, as well. The seeds that Stanley Sperber planted have borne beautiful fruit!