

V'SHINANTAM L'VANECHA:
JEWISH YOUTH CHOIRS AS A WELLSPRING FOR ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Music education is currently on the decline as school budgets are slashed and art and music classes disappear entirely. At the same time, synagogues are wrestling with how to engage children and young families in Jewish life in meaningful ways. Youth choirs both here and in Europe once played a significant role in filling this gap. While delivering real and meaningful musical engagement on the one hand, they served to educate and draw young Jews closer to their tradition. Many cantors, rabbis, educators, and Jewish professionals interviewed for this thesis describe the lifelong effect that singing in a Jewish youth choir had on them. But today, choral music in the synagogue has nearly disappeared and youth choirs, if they exist at all, merely teach children to sing in unison and often fail to engage in meaningful content, either musically or Jewishly.

Although they are few in number, there are examples of Jewish youth choir programs that exist today that engage students meaningfully in both Jewish and musical content. I suggest that through close study of these programs, we can better understand how they are successful and what distinguishes them from their less successful counterparts. How do they succeed in imparting meaningful Jewish and musical content in a way that is relevant and engaging to young Jews growing up today and what can be done to distill these best practices so that we can empower other similar programs across the country?

Much work has already been done in the secular world on how to effectively build a youth-choir program, how to teach singing to children, and how to build musicianship. There are also many helpful resources published through professional choral organizations like Chorus America that describe important elements of building,

promoting and maintaining a youth choir program.¹ Some of these studies focus on the long-term effects of singing in a choir, from social to even spiritual elements as others investigate how singing in a choir in particular imparts values, direction, and meaning to young choral singers.

While there are resources that relate specifically to Jewish choral involvement, the core of it seems to date from the 1950s through the 1970s, with work done by Harry Coopersmith, Richard Neumann, Joseph Portnoy and others. Their work includes aids to teaching Jewish music education, creating youth services, teaching and developing choirs, and how to cultivate musical youth leadership in a congregation. As valuable as their contributions have been, a significant gap is yet to be filled in by those of us who are invested in the future of Jewish choral and youth choir music.

Perhaps most interesting in the Jewish music arena is the contemporary work being done through the Zamir Choral Foundation. The Foundation recently published the first ever survey of Jewish choral music activity in North America.² Some of their findings show an exciting correlation between engagement in a Jewish choir and an enhanced connection with Jewish peoplehood, community, and spirituality. In addition, the survey concludes that singers in Jewish choral groups are a wellspring for leadership in their communities. There is also current interest in exploring how to engage young singers, especially coming from the Jewish Choral Festival. And the success of HaZamir, the youth branch of the Zamir Chorale, has been a source of inspiration for future programs.

¹ <https://www.chorusamerica.org/advocacy-research/> for instance, contains several excellent

² Diane Tickton Schuster and Ezra Kopelowitz, *Survey of Jewish Choral Activity in North America* (New York: Zamir Choral Foundation, 2010), accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.zamirchoralfoundation.org/Survey>.

While programs such as these are beginning to emerge, not much work has been done to document or investigate them. In order to really see what is going on and what is working, the first hand accounts of those who are doing excellent work in the field will be a very valuable resource. Through these personal interviews and observations it is possible to document the current best practices that exist today and discern what can be learned from their model and applied to other Jewish youth choir programs.

An important part of investigating the current state of youth choirs is also to look at the music repertoire at our disposal. What can be done to adapt the choral music of previous generations so that it still speaks to us esthetically and spiritually? And how can we look to the future and arrange, compose, or commission new, exciting, and engaging repertoire for our ensembles in a way that will bring youth choirs into the twenty first century in a relevant and meaningful way.

The Reform Movement's mantra is "informed choice." My hope is that this thesis may at least scratch the surface or plant a few seeds of inspiration for those who read it. The following pages will explore how Jewish youth choirs can inform the next generation with the skills they need to appreciate quality music and the richness of Jewish liturgy so that we can look forward to a vibrant future of meaningful musical worship in the synagogue.

CHAPTER ONE

Background of Jewish Choirs and Youth Choirs

Our textual tradition abounds with references to music of various kinds. Aside from food and agriculture, the first creations made by humans in the Torah were musical instruments. Genesis 4:21 mentions Jubal, a descendant of Cain and the son of Lamech and Adah and describes him as the progenitor of all people who play musical instruments. References to singing in the Bible give us a glimpse into an ancient aesthetic, the first of which appears in Genesis 31:27 and is associated with happiness and festive occasions. Laban admonishes Jacob for stealing away in the night with his daughters. Laban asks his son in law, “Wherefore didst thou flee secretly, and outwit me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp.” Songs and music in this context are clearly reserved for festive occasions.

The next occurrence comes in Exodus 15:1, what we refer to as “Shirat Hayam,” the song of the sea. “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spoke, saying: I will sing unto Adonai, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. Adonai is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation; this is my God, and I will glorify Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him.” The Torah contains many more references to song, and Moses’s farewell address to the Jewish people is even presented in the form of a song. Singing has always been linked with celebration and the marking of important events in Jewish tradition. If it would be

impossible to imagine Judaism without songs, then the singing of Jewish music certainly helps connect us to our identity as Jews.

Very early rabbinic literature also contains discussions about music - especially as it related to worship in the Temple. Amongst other musical topics are details about the choirs of the Levites and young boys who sang with them. There is reference to the length of training required to sing in such service and even hints of mild resentment on the part of adult choristers of the younger singers and the special attention they received.³

The cantillation of biblical and prophetic texts as it occurred on market days, festivals, and Shabbat was from an early date marked by an immediate translation into the vernacular. In some Yemenite and Middle Eastern communities, the custom has remained until this day for the scripture to be chanted by an adult, and the vernacular or Aramaic to be sung in a different cantillation system by a child. Although it is unclear how far back this tradition dates, it is possible that the involvement of children in such chanting dates back to the centuries following the destruction of the temple.⁴

After the Rabbinic period, the next example we have of young singers in the Eastern European Jewish community comes from the tradition of the M'shor'im, the singing assistants in a kind of traveling musical troupe that would accompany itinerant cantors from town to town. Beginning as early as the mid-sixteenth century, the boy sopranos were known as "singerls" and would provide musical variety to the cantor's singing

³*Jewish Heritage Online Magazine*. Jhom - Choir - Levitical Song. Accessed May 14, 2014. <http://www.jhom.com/topics/choir/levites.htm>.

⁴ Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet Roland Walton, eds., *Two Liturgical Traditions, vol. 3, Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 24.

along with a bass or baritone who would round out the trio.⁵ The m'shor'rim were not choral groups as we think of them today, however and neither three-part harmonic or polyphonic singing existed until the late eighteenth century. The texture was mostly that of alternating solo sections with an occasional duet texture. In such harmonic sections, metrical accompaniment was borrowed from dance forms or marches and would often imitate Baroque and eventually Classical instrumental accompaniment textures. Pedal accompaniment was common in either the bass or soprano voice as well as parallel thirds and the occasional and brief two or three note chord.⁶

A good singerl was very highly valued by cantors and many cantors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries started as boys in such groups. In fact, when the famous David Roitman's father refused to permit him to join one such group he "stole a few rubles from his father, put on three or four shirts to have something to change to and was on his way ... Cantors fought over him and resorted to various tricks to steal him away from each other."⁷ In an age when much of the repertoire was transmitted orally, and when manuscripts were hard to come by, a singerl's memory was a veritable treasury of melodies and liturgical material. It was not unheard of for rival cantors to lure singerls away from one another for their own m'shor'rim groups.

These musical trends in Germany and other western countries did not happen in a vacuum, of course. Gradually, as the secular and church music of Western Europe grew more accustomed to classically influenced choir and organ music, the phenomenon of the

⁵ Sholom Kalib, *The Musical Tradition of the Eastern European Synagogue, Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 66.

⁶ Kalib, 66.

⁷ Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate*, pbk. ed., *Music in American Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 14.

“khorshul” developed in Jewish worship, and synagogue choirs grew in a style more similar to what we think of today.⁸ When the first congregation founded on the ideas of Israel Jacobson opened in Hamburg in 1818, it contained not only an organ but also choral singing.⁹ The alternating texture of cantor and choir that was born out of the m’shor’rim tradition continued now with a choir composed of men and boys.

With the growth of classically oriented synagogue music in Western Europe, the choral compositions and publications of Salomon Sulzer and Louis Lewandowski meant that any great synagogue aspired to have a great choir. Eventually, as this choral trend spread eastward, the influence of choral and organ music can be seen there as well.¹⁰

Choral singing in America also goes back to the early days of the nineteenth century. In 1818 when the Mill Street synagogue of New York City, now Congregation Shearith Israel, reconstructed its building, the community started a mixed choir of male and female voices. In 1825, Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia followed suit with the hope that the “very respectable class of singers in the synagogue” would become a regular staple of synagogue worship.¹¹

The influence of Salomon Sulzer cannot be overstated in considering the development and impact of choirs on synagogue culture in the nineteenth century. An outgrowth of the Haskalah movement in Eastern Europe, Jews sought an atmosphere of worship that focused less on chazzanut and more on the “refined, disciplined vocal style in emulation of Western European art song, oratorio and opera, and choral singing in

⁸Wendy Heller. 2010. Cantors. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Cantors> (accessed May 13, 2014).

⁹ Kalib, 68

¹⁰ Heller, 2010

¹¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 47.

classical-style four-voice harmony.”¹² It was this aesthetic that drew the interest of wealthy and upper class Jews, members of the intellectual elite with an interest in art and culture. Following in the style of Sulzer’s Seitenstettengasse Temple in Vienna, the Brody Synagogue in Odessa became a center for the intersection of high art music and Jewish worship. The Brody Shul was home to such Jewish musical greats as Nissan Blumenthal, Pinchas Minkowsky, and David Nowakowsky, all of whom advanced compositions for choir in four-voice polyphony in the contemporary classical style.

A staple of the choral music in this style was the inclusion of boy sopranos and altos. If not earlier, the Brody synagogue was known to have featured boy sopranos in 1841 when Chazzan Blumenthal was hired. Nowakowsky, who was hired as choirmaster, himself sang as a choirboy in Berdichev where he also trained in theory, counterpoint, and cantorial arts.¹³ A picture of the Brody synagogue choir from the late 19th century clearly displays 14 boy sopranos, 13 boy altos, 4 adult tenors, and 5 adult basses. Nowakowsky also taught and led a children’s choir at a local orphanage in Odessa where he performed both liturgical and non-liturgical music.¹⁴ Even in more mainstream Eastern European synagogues, where the emphasis remained on chazzanut, choral compositions by Sulzer, Lewandowski, and Naumbourg made their way into the repertoire of cantors.¹⁵ Gradually the presence of choirs in synagogues began to permeate both Eastern as well as Western synagogues to the point where synagogue choirs were quite common.

¹² Kalib, 90

¹³ Emanuel Rubin, “*The Music of David Nowakowsky (1848-1921): A New Voice from Old Odessa*”, *Textures and Meanings: Thirty Years of Judaic Studies at University of Massachusetts Amherst* (2006): 404.

¹⁴ Rubin, 412

¹⁵ Kalib, 91

In America as well as in Europe, choral groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries grew increasingly popular not only in synagogues but also amongst Yiddish organizations such as the Workmen's Circle and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The repertoire for such choral organizations included traditional Jewish songs in Yiddish as well as choral masterworks from the classical repertoire.¹⁶ Choral music grew in popularity through the 1930s and 1940s, with wealthier congregations even hiring professional singers in their ensembles.¹⁷

But synagogue music in the late twentieth century began to shift focus. Following the establishment of the state of Israel, there was renewed interest in singing the music of both the early pioneers as well as the more contemporary composers and songwriters like Naomi Shemer and Nurit Hirsh. Following this trend in America, congregations began to find a different kind of inspiration from song leaders such as Shlomo Carlebach, Debbie Friedman, and Craig Taubman who wrote in a very melodic and accessible style with melodies simple enough so that everyone could sing along and participate. The resulting shift in musical taste had an immediate impact on synagogue choral music.¹⁸

“Where once congregants expected to sit back passively to watch a service choreographed by the rabbi and the cantor, perhaps with the assistance of the choir and the organist, now more of them expected to participate in the service actively: praying aloud, singing, and even dancing in the aisles. Formal sermons in many synagogues became less frequent, replaced by interactive discussions and “words of Torah” prepared by lay members. Synagogue music also changed, becoming less operatic and more

¹⁶ Diane Tickton Schuster, “*Developing Musically, Spiritually, and Jewishly All at One Time: Jewish Choral Activity as Adult Jewish Education*”, *Journal of Jewish Education* 77, no. 3 (2011): 174.

¹⁷ Tickton Schuster, 175

¹⁸ Tickton Schuster, 175

participatory; organs, in some synagogues, gave way to pianos and guitars.”¹⁹

Jewish choral groups began to follow a model more similar to the secular Yiddish organizations. In 1960 in New York City, the Zamir Chorale was founded as an interdenominational community chorus of young adult singers. The Chorale experienced great success and has expanded to include a network of additional choirs, serving a wide variety of age groups. HaZamir, the youth division of the Zamir foundation, was founded in 1993 and has grown to become an international success, currently with twenty-six chapters worldwide.²⁰

¹⁹ Kalib, 324

²⁰ Vivian Lazar Interviewed by author, New York, NY, December 30, 2014.

CHAPTER TWO

Singing in a Jewish Youth Choir Builds Lifelong Engagement

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben in his book Raising Jewish Children in a Contemporary World states: “One of the most striking distinctions between Judaism and other religious groups is that what binds Jews together in their identity is not primarily belief but belonging. It is the sense of belonging to a community, a people, a culture, a common history, and an ancient civilization that provides the primary focus and strength of Jewish identification, no matter where in the world Jews are found.”²¹

It should come as no surprise to anyone then that singing in a Jewish youth choir as a child can build a lifelong connection with the Jewish religion, pride in one’s own heritage, and a connection to other Jews. The connection between Jewish music and group identity can be seen interestingly enough in the evolution of the Union Hymnal. As Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller points out, “Already in the 1914 hymnal, the education of children had been prominent. Reflecting the continued shift of focus to education, the 1932 hymnal expanded its ‘Children’s Services’ to nineteen! The children’s services of this hymnal thus became part and parcel of an increasingly child-centered Judaism designed above all to ensure that the next generation would become dedicated members of the Jewish people.”²²

²¹ Steven Carr Reuben, *Raising Jewish Children in a Contemporary World: The Modern Parent’s Guide to Creating a Jewish Home* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Pub., 1992), 145.

²² Benjie Ellen Schiller, *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish And Christian Experience* (Notre Dame: University Of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 199.

In fact, choral singing whether Jewish in nature or not is linked with some amazing results as investigated by the “Chorus Impact Study” published by Chorus America in 2009. They surveyed over two thousand singers of all varieties, five hundred parents of children singers, and three hundred K-12 educators to gather their data. The study shows that where children who sing in a choir are concerned, seventy percent of parents report an increase in their child’s self-confidence and self-discipline. Eighty percent of parents say that choir participation has enhanced their child’s academic and social skills, and eighty-nine percent of educators say that choir participation can help students get more involved in their communities.

Overall, parents and educators from every discipline attribute a significant part of academic success to singing in a choir. Parents date their child’s improvements in a variety of different activities to correlate with the time when they began singing with a choir. Ninety percent of educators agree that singing in a choir helps a child to stay engaged. The study also concludes, “Ninety-one percent of educators believe choruses add to a school’s overall sense of community, with as many as ninety-five percent of the teachers whose schools have choral programs and another ninety-five percent of those who teach in schools where chorus participation is high agreeing with this assessment.”²³

How to encourage engagement and build community are the million dollar questions in synagogue life today. How much more impressive would the results be therefore if we tie in a connection with Jewish identity, Jewish values, and Jewish liturgy? Reuben writes, “Helping your child feel Jewish is a function of involving your child in Jewish

²³ “Chorus Impact Study,” Chorus America, accessed May 16, 2014, https://www.chorusamerica.org/system/files/resources/ImpactStudy09_Report.pdf.

activities, experiences, special moments and celebrations. Feeling grows primarily out of doing, so the more you expose your child to positive, enjoyable, nurturing Jewish experiences, the more he or she will develop a positive Jewish self-image.”²⁴

It is no coincidence that when the early founders of the State of Israel were searching for a way to unify a diverse group of children from all kinds of backgrounds, where Hebrew was often not the language spoken by parents, they looked to music education and specifically to singing in choirs as a way to bring everyone together. “In addition to being a basic tool for music training, song was viewed as a powerful vehicle for unifying the disparate immigrant populations and composers were encouraged to write pedagogical music for schools as well as social and art songs. The majority of public school students were from immigrant families that did not speak Hebrew at home, so singing was a tool in accustoming them to their new language.”²⁵ In addition to using songs to acclimate children to the language of Hebrew, the hope was to instill in them a lifelong love for music and art.²⁶ If children’s choirs were successful for the state of Israel, they may be of further use to us today, even if we do not advocate the use of children’s villages to advance their musical training.

Even more recent than the “Chorus Impact Study,” and of immediate relevance to this discussion, is the first ever “Survey of Jewish Choral Activity in North America” published by the Zamir Choral Foundation in 2010. One of the explicit goals stated in the survey is to: “Obtain demographic and Jewish identity information about singers,

²⁴ Carr, 207

²⁵ Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, *Detroit Monographs in Musicology/studies in Music*, vol. 47, *Music in Jewish History and Culture* (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2006), 329.

²⁶ Ibid, 330

both adults and teens in HaZamir: The International Jewish High School Choir.”²⁷ The survey reached over two thousand respondents who included Jewish choral singers, Jewish professionals, and Jewish choral supporters made up of friends and family members of those singers.

Amongst the survey questions in the category labeled “Jewish Competence,” the statistic that stands out the most is that seventy-nine percent of participants agree with the statement, “[Jewish choral singing] helps me learn about the rich and varied Jewish musical tradition.”²⁸ We are the inheritors of a dynamic Jewish musical tradition that spans four hundred years by conservative estimates, and yet, many Jewish children will grow up without ever experiencing even a slim fraction of that diversity.

In the category of “Peoplehood,” seventy-one percent of those who completed the survey reported that their involvement with a Jewish choir “makes me feel connected to k’lal Yisrael (the Jewish people).”²⁹ It is interesting to note then that whereas singing in a choir has the expected result of creating a sense of community within the immediate context of the choir itself, Jewish choirs have the very likely potential to create a sense of community on even a global scale. One of the factors that continues to make the Birthright Israel program so immensely effective in attracting the participation of young Jews is its ability to create or instill a sense of community and connectedness for its participants. A study published in 2013 from Brandeis University found that Birthright participants “demonstrate stronger feelings of connection to Israel and the Jewish

²⁷ “Survey of Jewish Choral Activity in North America,” Zamir Choral Foundation, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.zamirchoralfoundation.org/Survey>

²⁸ Ibid, 11

²⁹ Ibid, 12

community than nonparticipants ... Taglit's greatest impact is observed on [sic] connection to Israel, where participants were 2.5 times as likely to feel 'very much' connected to Israel."³⁰ Especially in a world where geographic boundaries and limitations are constrained only by an internet connection, Jewish choirs, especially those in the HaZamir network that are so closely connected with their Israeli chapters, are giving teenage choral singers a portal through which they can self-identify as part of a larger Jewish world.

The purpose of Jewish choral music, unlike a school choir for instance, is not merely communal and musical, but must focus to some degree intrinsically on its own Jewish nature. A significant subset of that category worthy of investigation is religious or spiritual music, music that connects the Jewish people to prayer and to God. The Zamir Choral Foundation study found that more than three quarters of their participants felt that their involvement in a Jewish choir gave them a venue for experiencing a genuine spiritual experience in a Jewish context. Nearly as many, seventy-five percent felt that "it helps me to connect emotionally with my Judaism."

Music at its very essence is emotional and has always helped connect people to Judaism, to a religion that demands intellectual engagement of its people. While the two might seem, and indeed at times have been, at odds with one another through various prohibitions, music has and continues today to illuminate and breath life into study and prayer where mere words alone fall short. The *Lern shtayger* or "Study mode" for

³⁰ Leonard Saxe et al., *Young Adults and Jewish Engagement: The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel* (Waltham: Brandeis University, 2013), 13.

instance is perhaps most well known for its use in the chanting of *Mah Nishtanah* in the Passover Haggadah.

מה נשתנה

Nº 764.

Mah nischtan - noh hal.lajloh has.seh mik.kol hal.le.los shebb'chol hal.le.los o.nu o.eh' lin chomez u.maz.
 zoh hallajloh has.seh kullo maz.zoh shebb'chol hal.le.los o.nu oeh'lin seh' or j' rokos hal.lajloh hasseh kul.
 lo mo.ror shebb'chol hal.le.los en o.nu mat.bi.lin a fi.lu pa.am e - chos hal.lajloh has - seh seh'te p' o -
 mim shebb'chol hal.le.los o.nu oeh'lin ben josh' win uwen m' subbin hal.lajloh hasseh kul.lo.nu m' sub - bin.

31

This example notated in Abraham Baer's collection, *Baal T'fillah* of 1877, demonstrates perfectly how an otherwise plain text, from Mishna Pesachim 10:4, is committed to memory by children through of all things, music. But the Study mode is typically used for the learning of much longer texts in *cheider*³², even whole tractates of mishna.³³ Shlomo Kalib writes of the mode that it “also served an aesthetic need to the extent that hours-long poring over complex Talmudic disputations was made more palatable through the chant.”³⁴

Jewish music is inexorably emotional in nature however, and tradition was not content to leave the Study mode as a simple learning tool for memorizing long passages of text. Through the compositions of great Hazzanim the mode became something artistic in itself, something with emotional gravitas. Kalib elaborates: “It was only

³¹ Abraham Baer, *Baal T'fillah: Der practische Vorbeter* (Verlag von J. Kauffmann, Frankfurt am Main, 1877) 170.

³² Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary defines “cheider” in the following way: (esp. formerly in E Europe) a private Jewish school for teaching young children the fundamentals of Judaism.

³³ Sholom Kalib, *The Musical Tradition of the Eastern European Synagogue*, Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 43. See volume II pp. 52-53 for complete, musically notated examples.

³⁴ Ibid, 118

logical for *chazzônim* however, when intoning a Talmudic text within a service, to draw precisely upon the Study mode, not merely for an occasional gesture, but ... they expanded upon it through embellishment techniques ... to the delight of the *amchô*.”³⁵ In other words, music has become inextricably linked in many instances with the texts of our tradition, providing an essential bridge between emotion and intellect.

Community was a topic of great interest amongst participants of the Zamir Choral Survey. Eighty-three percent of the participants identified strongly with the statement, “[Singing in a Jewish choir] provides me with a community of Jews who share my love of music.” At the same time, eighty-two percent of respondents said: “It is something that I contribute to my Jewish community,” and the same percentage agreed, “it connects me with musical peers who share my religious and/or cultural background.”³⁶ What we have in these three statements are concentric circles of identity that branch outward. They encompass first individual peers or friendships, next the choir as a micro-community, and finally the larger macro-community of which the choir itself is a part.

As heartwarming as all of these statistics are, it is important to tie all of this information back to the central question: “How does singing in a Jewish youth choir build lifelong engagement?” Although this is not a thesis on sociology, it is useful to borrow a few definitions from that field and the work that has been done over the past century. George Herbert Mead, regarded as one of the founders of modern social psychology, stated that “selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves.”³⁷ In other words, the identities that a person forms for his or herself depend directly upon the

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ “Survey of Jewish Choral Activity in North America,” 13

³⁷ George Herbert Mead, *On Social Psychology* (The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 277.

situations and people that they interact with regularly to the degree that “we divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances.”³⁸ If those acquaintances and social interactions are formed in a synagogue, and not least of all in a synagogue choir, which we already know carries strong tendencies toward social bonding, then the identities formed are bound to be “Jewish” identities.

Anthropologist Dorothy Holland writes: “People tell others who they are, but even more important they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities.”³⁹ The strong emotional nature of choral singing can quickly be seen then as a contributor to the formation of an identity as a “choral singer,” as someone who belongs in that particular milieu, in this case, a Jewish choral singer.

In an article on music and its effect on adolescent identity, Adrian North and David Hargreaves put forth the idea that music can be a kind of badge that students will use to select into certain social groups. Interest in a certain type of music in itself, like interest in a certain style of clothing, will convey to others an acceptance of certain values, attitudes, and opinions.⁴⁰ This mutual interest then helps build bonds between students and facilitates the building of positive social identities that go on to last a lifetime.

Although bordering on the obvious, it should be stated that if children are developing strong preferences or musical badges as a means to self-identify externally, they are also

³⁸ Ibid, 207

³⁹ Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

⁴⁰ Adrian North, David Hargreaves, *Music and adolescent identity* (Music education research, 1(1)), 76.

developing strong musical preferences internally. These private preferences, be it for specific genres or music, specific composers, or specific compositions will also play a permanent role in a person's identity development as a life-long musician and their choices to continue involvement with choral singing opportunities into adulthood.

CHAPTER THREE

Building a Synagogue Youth Choir: Formation, Philosophy, and Recruitment

From surveying a core portion of the literature that exists on children's choirs, one of the most oft-repeated pieces of advice was, interview and observe other children's choir directors as much as possible. The literature states, the best way to learn is through a personal connection to other successful youth choir directors. "Those who build professional camaraderie, nurturing and supporting one another, are more likely to survive the inevitable difficulties with grace and patience. The best advice often passes from director to director over a cup of coffee."⁴¹

The following chapters will help to organize and synthesize some of the best advice collected from a number of such interviews conducted by the author with leading synagogue and Jewish youth choir directors. Many of the best practices, as they exist in the available youth choir instructional literature, are also organized in the pages that follow. The hope is that this will serve as a point of departure for any interested or would-be synagogue youth choir directors, to enable them to begin formulating their own philosophies, and to have informed conversations of their own with the experienced choral directors available to them.

⁴¹ David T. Nastal, *Children's Choir Basics: Handbook for Planning, Developing, and Maintaining a Children's Choir in the Parish Community* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Pr, 1999), 12.

Formulating Goals and Philosophy

The very first step in putting together a children's or youth choir is to strategize. At the earliest stages, the best thing to do is to establish goals and outline the philosophies that will guide you in the process of building the program. The task of starting a choir is complex and in all likelihood, it will take several seasons to establish a steady flow of membership. The director in early stages should decide what kind of choirs to create, how the choirs will be divided by age and/or ability, and what the choirs' singing schedule will look like.

Taking the time early on to define the purpose of the youth choir will pay dividends in the long run.⁴² It is especially important to communicate these philosophies to the rest of the congregational staff and leadership. This initial collaboration will help foster mutual goals and support in the future life of the choir. Staff members in the education department should especially be encouraged to provide input since the choir should, from its inception, be regarded as an extension of the education program.⁴³ Involving different important constituencies will broaden the base of support for the choir. Misunderstandings can be avoided with regard to the choir's goals and commitments if such goals and schedules are set early. The more informed the congregation and administration are, the more appreciative and supportive they will be of the choir's development.⁴⁴ Ongoing communication about the choir and its successes will result in increased interest and pride from the community.

⁴² Shirley W. McRae, *Directing the Children's Choir: a Comprehensive Resource* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), 3.

⁴³ Ibid, 6

⁴⁴ Ibid, 4

When outlining your guiding philosophies, be wary of the temptation to capitalize merely on the “cuteness factor” of the choir. Shirley W. McRae especially insists that this must be avoided or else it will threaten the integrity of the program as a whole.⁴⁵ Other experts agree that the choir needs to be perceived as a serious educational vehicle and not merely as a sing-along with the rabbi, cantor, or synagogue educator.⁴⁶ Set short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals looking ahead approximately one, three, and five years down the road. Take the time early on to chart out how the youth choir will ultimately influence the synagogue community.

Ask yourself the following four questions based on suggestions by David T. Nastal: How will the choir help synagogue children engage in prayer and in Shabbat and festival services? What will children learn about God, Torah, and Israel through their involvement? Are your goals for the first year realistic? Can your goals be accomplished *in this community*?⁴⁷ It is important to have workable goals that you can reflect on down the road to measure success. Some of the recommended goals for members of a youth or teen choir encountered in the literature are:

- To learn about the liturgy of the synagogue
- To grow in the understanding of worship
- To develop a sense of responsibility and commitment
- To develop or exercise self-control
- To experience emotional release in music
- To develop an appreciation for Jewish music of all kinds
- To develop good singing habits
- To learn five (or more) new prayer settings each year
- To “find” his/her singing voice
- To develop a repertoire of quality music from a variety of periods and styles

⁴⁵ Ibid, 3

⁴⁶ Ann Carter-Cox, phone conversation with author, New York, NY, January 19, 2015, et al.

⁴⁷ Nastal, 13

- To develop musicianship skills⁴⁸

Once you have a basic philosophy and goals in mind, it is time to enlist parental support. Early on, one of the best strategies to employ is sharing your goals and passions with parents who will then become choir advocates. It will be impossible to do everything on your own and having a group of committed parents behind you will help pave the way with initial successes. Nastal writes, “You cannot do this without them! If parents take ownership of the program, half your battles are already won.”⁴⁹

One of the most important items to consider early on is, when and how often will the choir perform? Too many singing responsibilities throughout the year will detract from the choir’s ability to invest time in educational components and initial musicianship building – in many cases the primary goal for such a group.⁵⁰ The choir must not be scheduled above and beyond what they are capable of preparing. If there are multiple choirs, the younger and less experienced choirs should not sing as frequently as the older choirs. Spell these intentions out clearly in advance both for yourself and for others in the synagogue.⁵¹ A best practice is to have the choir sing one particular service a month on a given week. That will create frequent enough opportunities and a regular schedule that both choir families and congregants can anticipate.⁵²

⁴⁸ McRae, 5

⁴⁹ Nastal, 12

⁵⁰ McRae, 4

⁵¹ Ibid, 4

⁵² Barbara J. Mitchell and Cheryl M. Staats: illustrated by Diane Johnson, *Making Children's Choirs Work: Ideas for Developing a Successful Children's Choir* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Pub, 1986), 50.

Deciding What Kind of Choirs to Form

Once you have an idea how often the choir or choirs will sing, the next thing to do is to set up an initial choir that meets the needs of most of your interested singers while you build membership. This first starter-group will probably be a mixed ensemble of about two-thirds girls and one-third boys. If however you find that you have forty girls and only three boys then run with it and work towards a more even balance.⁵³ If you are working in a fairly large congregation with a population of children that enables the formation of multiple choirs, you may still find that you have an excess group of girls that want to sing. If this is the case, consider establishing a secondary SSA choir, perhaps of younger voices.

Especially since the synagogue youth choir is an educational, and not just a musical endeavor, consider grouping the various choirs in the program not by musical ability but by age range. Children mature very rapidly, especially at younger ages such that a difference of two or three years can create groups of children that are incompatible with one another for the purposes of organizing a successful choir. If you need to combine ages say, six through eleven, it would be most advisable to divide the groups and rehearse them separately, younger singers age six through eight and older, nine through eleven.⁵⁴ McRae suggests three different groupings: Choir I made up of preschool ages, four and five, Choir II made up of grades 1-3, ages six through eight, and Choir III made up of grades 4-6, ages nine through eleven.⁵⁵

⁵³ Walter Lamble, *A Handbook for Beginning Choral Educators* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2-3.

⁵⁴ McRae, 13

⁵⁵ Ibid, 13

Recruiting for the Choir

Perhaps one of the most difficult and ongoing challenges for any choir director is recruiting. The first and most direct option is to get to know the children in the synagogue. Lamble recommends a simple approach: “Talk with children, not just about music; learn their names and get to know what interests them. When you let them become acquainted with you, some of the mystery of the program dissolves.”⁵⁶ While this may seem obvious, it is worth stating, go where the children are. Find opportunities to speak to them in religious school, talk to parents as they are picking children up from various activities. Barbara Bar-Nissim describes her very personal and effective approach to recruiting as follows:

“You sit in the congregation, or you walk down the isle during a service, and you hear a kid singing. Or you go to music class in the religious school and you sort of sit down next to a kid or two in an empty chair and you just sit. And you lean over and you whisper to the kid, “You have a great voice.” It’s really true, you can find them in the congregation. And that’s how the personal thing happens. And then I would call the mother and all of it was honest because that’s exactly what happened – ‘I was sitting in the music class and I heard your kid singing,’ and that’s true.”⁵⁷

Wherever you find children and parents together, it is an opportunity, not for salesmanship, but for engagement. Alternatively, send a letter or email home to parents several weeks before the first scheduled rehearsal. In the content of the communication, ask for details about potential members, what grade they are in, and if they have experience singing in choirs playing another instrument. Don’t hesitate to ask if anyone

⁵⁶ Lamble, 16

⁵⁷ Barbara Bar-Nissim, phone conversation with author, New York, NY, January 1, 2015.

else in the family plays piano; you may need a list of potential accompanists. Finally, be certain to ask if parents are interested in helping as volunteers.⁵⁸

Use as many different outlets to publicize the choir as possible. Sunday school classrooms and teachers are a great resource since they are in contact with children and families. There is a strong educational component to the choir program so this is natural synergy.⁵⁹ Include announcements in adult education classes to reach parents and ask clergy to make announcements at services to reach additional families. The best recruits will be the children themselves.

“There have to be kids who are kind of the ring leaders,”⁶⁰ recommends Cantor Richard Cohn. Ask kids who are already involved to make announcements in their classes or do something creative to share their enthusiasm with their friends and classmates. The larger the cross section of promoters, the better and work carefully not to leave anyone out. The choir will suffer the most if it is ever perceived as specialized, elitist, or isolated from mainstream synagogue life.⁶¹

Informational brochures are especially effective at getting information to prospective singers and their families. Especially when the brochure is attractive with pictures and illustrations, this will help communicate goals of the program, appropriate time commitments, and benefits of participation. Be certain to include contact information for joining the choir.⁶² A more contemporary option is to dedicate a page on the synagogue

⁵⁸ Lamble, 8, McRae, 7

⁵⁹ McRae, 8

⁶⁰ Richard Cohn, phone conversation with author, New York, NY, January 7, 2015.

⁶¹ McRae, 8

⁶² Ibid, 9

website to the youth choir program. Links to the page can be shared via the regular newsletter or as a special announcement.

Consider having a “kickoff event” that conveys the sense of fun and engagement that the choristers will experience as they learn and sing together.⁶³ A well-planned and organized event communicates to parents that the choir will not just be a casual sing-along or throwing music together and it gives the director a chance to emphasize the broader educational and social scope of the program. This deeper understanding on the part of the parents will lead to deeper support and commitment from the families. As the choir program develops, younger siblings will also begin to anticipate their own entry into the program.⁶⁴

There are three additional advantages to having a choir kickoff each year. First, by taking the kickoff event seriously, it sends a message that the synagogue is willing to invest resources in the choir program and that many people view it as an important part of the community. Second, the kickoff event will have especially high energy and it is a great chance to recruit parent volunteers to call upon throughout the year. Third, the event can also be a great time to hear new incoming members sing and get to know them individually while there are activities going on to occupy other singers as they wait to be heard.⁶⁵

Mitchell and Staats recommend an even more active approach to recruitment by creating a brand for the choir. “Children like to identify with a team.”⁶⁶ Come up with a

⁶³ Ibid, 9

⁶⁴ Ibid, 9

⁶⁵ Ibid, 9

⁶⁶ Mitchell & Staats, 19

catchy name that isn't too corny or too bland. "Tzipporei Shalom" is much more interesting to put on a t-shirt than "Temple Shalom Youth Choir." Similarly, choosing choir colors and a logo can help with visual recognition and children will love it. Colors and the logo can be used not only for clothing but also for use in publicity as well as for choir party decorations and other events.⁶⁷ Cantor Ronit Hanan and her co-director Adina Avery Grossman describe how successful their branding has been:

"We get t-shirts at the beginning of every year and we have a logo of little birdies on a branch that somebody designed for us. Those kinds of things are great. Adina, my co-director of Tzipporei Shalom is a cantor's kid, and a singer herself, but her business is branding, she is a corporate brander. So she looks at everything as, "How can we brand this?" We give out trophies at the end of every year, t-shirts at the beginning of the year. We've got a great logo and the t-shirts are colorful. So there are all those things too that create a little bit of hoopla and excitement."⁶⁸

Finally, don't be afraid to be persistent in encouraging kids to sing in the program. Rabbi Cantor Arlene Bernstein jokes about one playful interaction she had with a member of her youth choir: "I push them to come and try it out. And that is the pay off, you know, of harassing them. And finally one kid said, 'You're not going to give up, are you?' And I said, 'Nope.' And he said, 'Okay, see you Sunday!'"⁶⁹

Don not interpret an initial lag in membership as a failure in any way. Membership will start small at first but will gain momentum after only a few years. "It'll be a trial run and it's going to be singing here there and the other thing and it has to be word of mouth.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 19

⁶⁸ Ronit Hanan, phone conversation with author, New York, NY, January 6, 2015.

⁶⁹ Arlene Bernstein, phone conversation with author, New York, NY, January 6, 2015.

It can't fall apart because you only have six kids in your choir in the first year. The next year you'll have nine. You don't get discouraged and it's word of mouth."⁷⁰

Especially once the choir has had a presence in the synagogue for a year or two, word of mouth will help tremendously. Cantor Hanan relates her experience:

"We bring them up to sing for the entire congregation. That in itself is a recruitment tool, probably three, four times a year... [Other kids] they see a group up there that is so appreciated and so enthusiastically received that kids get into first grade and they know they can join Tzipporei Shalom, and they do. But yea, we've been pretty consistent since those first two years when we were six and then maybe ten. But in the last, I think say, eight to ten years we've been between twenty-five and forty kids every year, depending on the demographic."⁷¹

Getting to Know Your Singers

Once there is any interest at all in the choir program, it will be time to start getting to know the individual choir members. In terms of a general synagogue youth choir program, entrance to the choir should be strictly based on interest. If at a later stage there becomes enough interest to include an advanced, audition based high school ensemble, that is an alternative possibility.

The word audition is highly charged for people and ultimately is not the right term for meeting with young singers in this context. This brief one on one meeting is a chance to get to know the individual members of the choir, not to eliminate anyone. The choir is a part of the synagogue's educational mission and therefore everyone has the opportunity to join and sing.⁷² Start your individual get-to-know-you meetings over the summer if

⁷⁰ Bar-Nissim, 2015

⁷¹ Hanan, 2015

⁷² McRae, 14

possible to avoid taking time. If students are too timid to sing for you privately, invite as a last resort to submit an audio recording. Alternatively, invite them to join you at a later date when the choir program is functioning at a high level and parents and students know it by reputation.⁷³

Take the opportunity during this meeting to get to know the student a little bit. No more than twenty minutes will be needed; a few minutes talking to the parent, ten minutes just with the child, and then a few minutes together again. A lot can be learned in these short meeting that may be useful information down the road. Nastal advises, “Keep the child talking about *anything*, especially music, while you observe, observe, observe.”⁷⁴

But what exactly should you be observing? In addition to practical information like contact details and previous musical training, you should gather vocal data like range and quality (in terms of light, breathy, focused, etc), independence and musicianship skills such as melodic and rhythmic memory, beat competence, intonation, accuracy in singing intervals, and maintaining tonality.⁷⁵

Start by singing through a few familiar songs to get the singer comfortable. Next, vocalize them up and down to determine their comfortable range, do a small amount of sight singing based on their ability and background, and then finally sing a song that they like or have chosen in advance.⁷⁶ To gain an accurate assessment of vocal quality, all singing should be done a cappella, without the aid of a piano or other instrument.

⁷³ Lamble, 9

⁷⁴ Nastal, 27

⁷⁵ McRae, 15

⁷⁶ Lamble, 10

Observe and record what kind of tone is being produced, if the sound is supported with the breath, and if the pitches stay in tune. To assess the singer's beat competence, exchange a few clapping exercises progressing from simple rhythmic gestures to more challenging or longer patterns.⁷⁷ To test pitch matching, invite the child to sing a pitch and you will match it. After a few of these exchanges, reverse the roles.⁷⁸

A few vocal exercises will give you a sense of range. "Sing a 'ho-ha' (1-5-1, do-sol-do) pattern up the scale by half-steps to determine range."⁷⁹ Once you have a sense of the singer's range, it is possible to determine voice part. Note that vocal part decisions or classifications into voice "types" are best based upon where the transitions in the voice lie, not necessarily which voices have higher or lower notes. The easiest way to hear the natural breaks or transitions in a voice is from moving from low notes to high notes, but try both directions.⁸⁰

The following is advice from Lamble on how to interpret these registers and what may be done to help certain types of young singers that you may encounter. If the voice contains even transitions without large breaks, generally speaking lighter voices may be sopranos while those with warmer voices may be altos. Those girls who are unable to transition into head voice at all should sing alto until they strengthen and gain comfort in their head voices. Girls who belt too high in chest register should experiment with

⁷⁷ Nastal, 26

⁷⁸ Ibid, 26

⁷⁹ Ibid, 29

⁸⁰ Lamble, 10

singing in both alto and soprano and learning to blend with the ensemble until they gain comfort using both head and chest registers.⁸¹

Boys whose voices change can be encouraged to sing the generic bass part if possible and may experiment with tenor as their range extends comfortably. Unchanged voices may be grouped as tenors if they are to be added to a mixed chorus, although most of their vocal lines will have to be adapted to meet their range. You must not force an unchanged voice to sing notes not in their comfortable range.⁸² It may be more appropriate to write a “high tenor” or “low bass” part for unchanged or changing voices, even if they only have one or two notes in their ranges. This is far preferable to asking the young boys to sing notes that are not yet accessible to them.⁸³

This early one-on-one interaction is not only an important chance to meet individually and hear each child sing by themselves. This time spent together serves to underline the importance of commitment to the choir. The act of setting aside time for each singer communicates the importance of each and every child, and that each of them contributes their voice equally to the choir program.⁸⁴

This meeting is an opportunity for the director to get to know the singer and to begin to form a mentoring relationship that will foster musical and Jewish growth over time. It communicates that each child has spiritual and artistic potential worth developing and that the synagogue is invested in that process. Furthermore, placing a singer properly in

⁸¹ Ibid, 10

⁸² Ibid, 10

⁸³ Ibid, 49

⁸⁴ McRae, 14

the correct voice part requires a knowledge of their individual voice, their general musicianship, and their other strengths.

This is also a chance to discover any vocal or musical problems that a child might have at the beginning. McRae writes, “Abnormalities in quality or possible physical impairments may show up here (perhaps for the first time), as well as minor deficiencies that the interested director will want to remedy.”⁸⁵ These observations are much more difficult to make within a large group and the private nature of this first meeting prevents any embarrassment within a larger group. Finally, by meeting with each child individually, the director can gain a sense of the entire groups strengths, deficiencies, and capabilities, enabling the selection and planning of worthwhile repertoire, technical exercises, and appropriate warm-ups.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid, 14

⁸⁶ Ibid, 14

CHAPTER FOUR

Building a Synagogue Youth Choir: Rehearsals and Repertoire

Setting Up the Rehearsal Space

Once you have thought through the goals and philosophies of the choir, recruited members, and set the service schedule, it is time to get ready for rehearsals. It is important to set up a productive rehearsal space, find an amenable time to rehearse during the week, plan your rehearsal techniques, and establish goals for discipline. A good rehearsal space and proper advanced setup can make or break your rehearsals. Smaller choirs will require smaller rehearsal spaces and naturally, a larger choir will require a larger space to rehearse. Younger children will also likely need comparatively more room since they will be doing more physically active motions with their music in order to keep them engaged.⁸⁷ A rehearsal room must be “bright, clean, child-centered, well ventilated, and spacious.”⁸⁸ Fresh flowers or other plants can help to add necessary life to an otherwise dull music room.

Young singers, age six to seven need room on a carpet to sit at least six inches away from one another to avoid crowding and restlessness. They should also have room to comfortably stand and move around a little bit. It would be useful at this stage to acclimate the children to sitting at least part of the time in their chairs. Bartle writes, “I

⁸⁷ McRae, 13

⁸⁸ Jean Ashworth Bartle, *Sound Advice: Becoming a Better Children's Choir Conductor*, Reprint ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

always had the children sit on chairs for about eight minutes out of the thirty so they could get used to sitting in a seating plan.”⁸⁹

A large percentage of discipline problems will arise from issues of personal space. This can be easily prevented by spacing children out at a distance of an arm’s length. Even if tempted, the children should not be able to touch each other. This may require using a different rehearsal space but it makes a big difference.⁹⁰ “Placing names on the seats and changing them weekly is another way of finding a combination of personalities and voices that works well together. This doesn’t cause as much attention or distraction as having to separate children during rehearsals. It also works well as a way to help a shy, quiet child find a friend.”⁹¹ The literature also recommends that older children sit behind younger children so that the younger singers can hear their sound quality and musicianship to emulate. As well, the director will find it useful to prepare folders and music before the first rehearsal for each chorister. You can add or subtract material later as needed but you will save time and energy if everyone has all the choral music, sight singing exercises, and warm-ups they need in advance of the first few rehearsals.⁹²

Rehearsal Times and Attendance

Scheduling a time for rehearsals that works with everyone’s schedules is one of the most difficult and potentially discouraging hurdles to overcome at the inauguration of a

⁸⁹ Ibid, 6

⁹⁰ Nastal, 39

⁹¹ Mitchell & Staats, 40

⁹² Lamble, 14

children or youth choir program.⁹³ Hopefully, having this knowledge in advance will help alleviate any sense of discouragement. Attempt to find times that will work well with the local school schedule and the synagogue education and religious school schedule.

Cantor Ronit Hanan explains how finding a time for rehearsals on Shabbat mornings works uniquely well in her synagogue:

“Our Tzipporei Shalom gets people, gets kids dragging their parents out of the house in the morning to get to *shul* on time! They’ve got to get to choir practice so, ‘Come on, wake up! You’ve got to get me there on time!’ We still meet on Shabbat mornings at ten in the morning even though I am now an ordained cantor. But we have a very unique synagogue where I don’t actually *daven* every week...

[But if someone says] ‘We have a lot of people who are coming on Sunday mornings for religious school,’ - that’s when you have your choir. If you have a lot of people who are coming on Friday nights for Kabbalat Shabbat, you can figure out a half hour when you can meet the kids on a Friday night then. Any time that you’ve got them in the building, you know, is a good time to kind of, see if you can get them together to sing.”⁹⁴

Many synagogues opt to hold rehearsals after religious school is dismissed, as opposed to integrating it into the curriculum. Cantor Richard Cohn explains:

“It’s interesting, when you try to have the youth choir meet during [religious] school. Unless there is a dedicated elective period, parents are very ... at first they are enthusiastic because the kids are getting their choir experience without having to have supplemental time, but then they get squeamish because the kids are missing instructional time in other areas and are being pulled out from that. We’ve gone back to an after religious school model immediately following Sunday morning religious school where some parents provide a snack for the kids and they stay and work with Cantor Niren on whatever is coming up.”⁹⁵

⁹³ McRae, 19

⁹⁴ Hanan, 2015

⁹⁵ Cohn, 2015

Not everyone will be able to make even the most ideal time work with their schedule. Do the best that you can with the greatest percentage possible.

Once you do find a time that works, it is important to always begin and end rehearsal exactly on time. That means starting even if there is only one chorister in the room to begin. Starting rehearsals five minutes late sends the message that time is not of great importance and eventually singers will figure that they can get away with arriving ten minutes late, and so on.⁹⁶ This is especially true the shorter your rehearsals are.

Many synagogues have only thirty minutes to rehearse and that time can very quickly diminish to twenty minutes or less of actual productive singing.⁹⁷ The published literature and one successful youth choir director all agree however that from the time that children reach seven years old, they are capable of sitting through an hour-long rehearsal under the condition that it is run thoughtfully.⁹⁸ The pace of the rehearsal must move constantly and it is a good idea to always have something upbeat in your back pocket in case you feel the pace lagging or that you are losing their attention.⁹⁹ Children love to talk and they will sincerely want to talk with their director. Another way to increase productivity and to avoid any conversation related to pets or birthdays during rehearsal time, the director will find it helpful to arrive at rehearsal a little early “to listen to the adventures and mishaps that many children want to tell.”¹⁰⁰

But it will not matter how productive your rehearsals are if attendance is low or not taken seriously, especially where services or concerts are concerned. Establish your

⁹⁶ Nastal, 38

⁹⁷ Hanan, 2015

⁹⁸ Carter-Cox, 2015

⁹⁹ Nastal, 46, Mitchell & Staats, 39

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell & Staats, 36

yearly rehearsal and performance calendar early. Have it drawn up and on the synagogue calendar even before your first rehearsal.¹⁰¹ If there is any doubt about a concert, service, or rehearsal date, add it to the calendar. Commitments on a calendar more generally respected and it is much easier to remove something than to add it later. Insist from the beginning of the season that attendance at performances and important services is mandatory.

To help facilitate attendance standards, send home a list of all required performance and service dates at the beginning of the year. Ask families to review the calendar and return a signed agreement that the child will be at all required events. The same letter can also be helpful in enlisting parental support for supervision, ushering, or other support roles.¹⁰² An attendance chart will become an invaluable asset for setting the tone of attendance at rehearsals. Absent choristers should receive phone calls home after each rehearsal to check in. Parents will realize that their children have a commitment and that absence are not only noticed but frowned upon. Strict attendance is mandatory on baseball teams and dance practice. Choir is a serious commitment!¹⁰³

Be clear from the beginning on what constitutes an excused absence and insist that you be notified in advance.¹⁰⁴ When setting dates for the year, choristers' schedules work best from late August until public schools go on holiday recess. Begin rehearsals again in January until the first part of May. After that, children have a great deal of end-of-the-year commitments that will conflict with regular rehearsals.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Lamble, 13

¹⁰² Ibid, 13

¹⁰³ Nastal, 38

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 41

¹⁰⁵ Mitchell & Staats, 39

Rehearsal Management and Discipline

One of the most salient pieces of advice both from the literature and from speaking with experienced choir directors, is that if you treat young singers like professionals, they will rise to the occasion, no matter the age.¹⁰⁶ Part of treating choristers like professionals is expecting professional behavior from them. Vivian Lazar, director of the Zamir Chorale's teen chapter, HaZamir explains:

“If you demand a lot of children, you’ll get a lot from them ... We treat our kids like professionals. When you leave the rehearsal you can be fourteen but as long as you’re sitting here, you’re an adult. And they sit here like this [very still] for three hours at a time ... For me it was about discipline, because the discipline in the arts is the same discipline that you apply to anything. My feeling is that if you love music and you discipline yourself there, you can also discipline yourself as a scientist or an accountant.”¹⁰⁷

Children will undoubtedly see how far boundaries can be pushed, it should be expected and anticipated. When it is called for, consistency is the most important element of discipline when working with a children's choir. The boundaries must be clear and deal with troublesome behavior immediately while maintaining positivity and redirecting the behavior.¹⁰⁸ Above all, and sown into the nature of the program itself, the choir must be a supportive environment even for children who appear to enjoy trying other people's patience. “Approach every child, every time, with a clean slate.” It is extremely important not to appear to hold a grudge or to prejudge any situation or singer.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Carter-Cox 2015, et al.

¹⁰⁷ Lazar, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Nastal, 38-39

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 39

In the unlikely and rare event that an individual repeatedly refuses to behave in choir however, Jacobs recommends that that chorister should be denied the opportunity to sing in the next service or concert and the rest of the choir should be instructed why they are not participating. Jacobs goes on however to insist that a job well done also should be rewarded and acknowledged.¹¹⁰ If, on the other hand, discipline is a problem not only for individual members but for the group at large, look inward. The great challenge of a director is to make rehearsal interesting! If the choir's minds are engaged, discipline will follow.¹¹¹ Barbara Bar-Nissim describes her approach very succinctly, "My disciplinary technique for the choir as never have a down moment."¹¹²

Jacobs sums it up best when she writes, "Boys and girls like to feel that they are doing something worth while. You gain their allegiance by expecting the best they have to give. Give them every opportunity to perform publicly, but insist that they do no less than their best at every performance. Make membership a privilege. Never become a policeman. Suggest rigid standards of conduct, and encourage the children to maintain them."¹¹³

Additional Rehearsal Techniques

There are several additional recommendations made by the literature and by individual directors that deserve the attention of any would-be youth choir director. Although the focus of this thesis is mainly related to older singers, some advice can be

¹¹⁰ Ruth Krehbiel Jacobs, *The Successful Children's Choir*, 7th ed. (Chicago: FitzSimons, 1953), 19-20.

¹¹¹ Nastal, 40

¹¹² Bar-Nissim, 2015

¹¹³ Jacobs, 22

shared on working with the youngest choristers. Teaching six and seven year olds can be immensely rewarding and potentially has the most impact on a young singer's musical life. Children in this age range are completely uninhibited with regard to singing by themselves or trying to match pitch and the self-confidence that can be built at this age is unparalleled in other ages.

Young children learn best through imitation and so the instructor should use this to his or her advantage and model the best choral sound possible. Demonstrate in a voice that is "bright, pure, light, free of excessive vibrato, and capable of singing in the keys of E flat, E, and F major."¹¹⁴ As much as possible, men should demonstrate using their falsetto at least until young children have developed a healthy understanding of their own head registers. As alternatives, a male conductor can either call on the assistance of a soprano with the appropriate vocal qualities or enlist the help of a few young singers who are "born" with the desired sound to demonstrate.¹¹⁵ In working with first grade children, the instructor's speaking voice should be as quiet as possible while still allowing children to hear. The children will match the energy in the teacher's voice and a loud voice will quickly escalate to an unsustainable volume. The speaking voice should also convey authority, kindness, enthusiasm, and a sense of expectation.¹¹⁶

Every choir, every team of sorts will have a member or two who struggles despite sincere interest and energy. If a few such "lost sheep" are having difficulty keeping up with the rest of the group musically for instance, they might benefit from a few private or small-group sessions. If time is unavailable to the director, investigate if there are parent

¹¹⁴ Bartle, 5

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 5

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 5

volunteers able to spend a session or two with these singers.¹¹⁷ As previously mentioned, one hour rehearsals are not a problem as long as the pacing of the rehearsal is well planned. Even so, it is always recommended to have one song in reserve in case something does not go as planned. As a general rule, rehearsing three songs per week helps keep rehearsals moving and will ensure that the choir has a variety of music in its repertoire at any given point.¹¹⁸

It has been mentioned previously in passing but the following point bears stating explicitly as it appears in every instructional book: involve parents in the organization and maintenance of the choir. The task is far too large to be run by one person alone. Delegation can be difficult at first but immediately rewarding. Parents help not only with public relations but with transportation, recruitment, snacks, rehearsals or sectionals, social activities, and of course fundraising. No one person, certainly no one Jewish-professional has the time to adequately organize all of these details. Above all, parents will help the choir director avoid burn-out. A useful time to plant the seeds of parental involvement is in the initial intake or yearly one-on-one meeting. Make note not only of the chorister's particular talents but the parents' as well.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Nastal, 61

¹¹⁸ Mitchell & Staats, 40

¹¹⁹ Nastal, 78-9

Repertoire and Vocal Considerations

Each and every choir director and piece of literature on youth choirs agreed on one piece of advice: “The bedrock of a choir program is solid, suitable repertoire.”¹²⁰ Amongst the many challenges of recruitment, scheduling, and running rehearsals, the choir director – especially the Synagogue youth choir director will need to use all of his or her skills in finding or arranging youth choir repertoire of quality. If the program is to succeed and grow, it will be essential to introduce the choir, and thereby introduce the congregation, to contemporary and relevant repertoire of the highest quality that still speaks to modern aesthetic taste.

Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman suggests investigating Israeli choral repertoire. “There is plenty of stuff out there and there are a lot of women’s choirs in Israel. So as a result there is a lot of repertoire for you know, treble voices. So there’s no reason that [even] elementary choirs shouldn’t be doing good music.”¹²¹

Whenever possible, select repertoire that deals with themes immediately relevant to the singers. Young children will identify especially with texts that strengthen their relationship with their home life, with their life within the synagogue, and that encourage healthy relationships with other people. In addition, children are drawn to the creation of the world and nature as a loving act, and to our responsibility towards God’s creations. Children especially enjoy singing about biblical characters as children.¹²²

The following advice may be helpful as guidelines in evaluating what repertoire is out there. Cast the net far and wide and do not limit yourself to specifically Jewish

¹²⁰ Ibid, 37

¹²¹ Marsha Bryan Edelman, phone conversation with author, New York, NY, December 30, 2014.

¹²² McRae, 51

repertoire. There is a rich variety of children's music available from the Christian church tradition that is immediately usable in synagogue worship. Music drawn from psalm texts, stories taken directly from the *tanach*, as well as folksongs are all worthy of investigation.

With regard to evaluating the text of a non-liturgical song, careful consideration should be given to the vocabulary used in the music. It is not necessary that the children understand each and every word; the larger meaning of the song must be comprehensible. This is perhaps especially true when a large portion of the sung repertoire is in Hebrew. Extra care should be taken to explain the underlying concepts and themes in a given prayer text. When selecting repertoire, keep in mind the various ages and stages of the choristers. The ability to relate to abstract concepts does not develop until around the age of eleven years and especially for young singers, concrete concepts are much more easily grasped.¹²³

Musically, the primary rule of thumb is that arrangements should be of a high quality and should avoid trite musical ideas. Strive to find music with a melodic and rhythmic freshness that fits generally into the comfortable singing range of the choir and that especially for younger groups, consists of easy intervals and repeated phrases. A common characteristic of many successful arrangements is an attention to natural accents on words, with intuitive rhythms and simple syncopations. Where possible, phrases should be singable in one breath and the music should fit appropriately with the mood of the text. As a general rule of thumb, folk melodies sit well with young voices and are

¹²³ Ibid, 50

often favorites for children. Choose music of quality that the choir will want to return to again and again.¹²⁴

For additional help in the selection process, David Nastal suggests a five point evaluation system when selecting repertoire for youth choirs. His list has been adapted here for use with synagogue youth choirs.¹²⁵

1. **Craftsmanship** – The range should be well suited to the vocal range of the choir. For young choirs, an octave to an octave and a third will be reasonable. Be certain that the music is well written and is not merely cute. Not one will appreciate boring music – not the choir and certainly not the congregation listening.
2. **Text** – is the text of the song treated with integrity? Especially in Hebrew settings, great care must be taken that proper stress is given to the text underlay. There is no sense in teaching children to pronounce Hebrew incorrectly. When dealing with English texts, avoid any gender-specific language wherever possible.
3. **Flexibility** – The most useful repertoire will be re-usable in a variety of settings. If the choir is investing resources in learning a piece of music, it will be most productive if that music can be used in multiple instances. Also with regard to flexibility, does the music selection add flexibility to the repertoire of the choir? Exposing the singers to a wide variety of Jewish music should be a priority for any director.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 51

¹²⁵ Nastal, 69-70

4. **Imagination** – Not only should a composition show evidence of imagination from the composer but look for repertoire that sparks your own imagination. Perhaps a piece of music lends itself to accompaniment by additional instruments, perhaps the use of sign language, or other performance enhancements.
5. **Prayer** – Perhaps the most important consideration of all is, if a particular piece of music will help the congregation to pray. For the youth choir to truly be a part of the congregation, to act as *sh'liach tzibur*, it must draw them into prayer and not distract.

CHAPTER FIVE

Building a Synagogue Youth Choir: Jewish, Musical, and Spiritual Education

The genuine desire to educate must be the driving force behind every important decision made with regard to the development of the youth choir. There are a plethora of activities that children can engage in if the goal is merely to pass time or socialize together. As stated earlier however, children are excited to be a part of something worthwhile, and what could be nobler than inspiring them to engage in their own Jewish education? Synagogue youth choirs are uniquely positioned to educate their members in the areas of Judaism, music, and spirituality, and it is important for a director to monitor that progress in each singer.

Just as a coach must know the strengths and particular skills of each player on their team, a director should take interest in each member of the choir. Taking such interest in each individual member demonstrates the director's respect for and commitment to individuals and to the growth of the choir program as a whole.¹²⁶ Balance is the key to success here. "Acknowledge the children's accomplishment with enthusiasm, give them praise when it is due and corrective criticism when it is necessary. Reach for excellence; set a high standard. No one travels anywhere without a little expectation and a lot of prodding."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Nastal, 52

¹²⁷ Ibid, 55

Jewish Education: God, Torah, and Israel

First, a look at what makes a synagogue youth choir different from a school choir, Judaism. Within Judaism, the choir can help educate about liturgy, holidays, Hebrew language, philosophy, and culture. Helping its members gain experience in the practice of prayer is perhaps one of the most valuable functions of a youth choir. With the proper planning and intention, the choir program can help members experience ongoing prayer within a community, even as a community unto itself. They may continue to discover new and personal meaning as the spoken and sung words of the liturgy gradually become their own and they feel comfortable expressing their emotions through these experiences. *T'filah* then is not something shrouded in history, “it is not in the heavens” as we read in *Parshat Nitzavim*. “When consistent attention is given to their preparation for worship, then the children’s understanding of the liturgies make authentic worship possible. This communicates a seriousness that elevates the choir to a position of dignity and worth and lays to rest their image as only a cute adornment to an otherwise drab ceremony.”¹²⁸

Working with a youth choir will provide learning opportunities for both the singers and the director in a myriad of ways. For some students the spiritual development will come more easily than the musical development, for some, the music will come first and the spirituality will need nurturing. Rabbi Cantor Arlene Bernstein offers the advice,

“For the ones that are divas, who want to be singing and they want a solo, you know what? There is no harm in that. Talk to them about what it means to inspire other people and what it means when children sing. That it’s twice as much joy ... I’ve used a lot of Heschel in my teaching. Like

¹²⁸ McRae, 33

what Heschel says about music, what Heschel says about the cantor...
except the part about the beard!¹²⁹

If learning itself is a slowly unfolding process, then surely the same follows for gaining familiarity and comfort in our prayer services. Firsthand participation in *t'filah* is indispensable for children. If they learn that sitting in services is a passive experience in which they have little interest or influence, they will undoubtedly grow bored and disinterested. It is not necessary that children understand each and every word before the service can convey meaning. In fact, the emotive nature of our services is often better transmitted through music than through the actual words themselves.¹³⁰

We can and must educate our young choir members in the words of our tradition but we can also rely on the emotive nature of music to convey that emotional message on a far more immediate level. Barbara Bar-Nissim, a lifelong educator relates, “You can cut out half of Hebrew school just having your kids sing in a Friday night service once a month. They learn the liturgy, they sing their way though it because if you use some of the liturgy, then they know it.”¹³¹

Singing with the choir will also be a great way to instill a love of Israel and the modern Hebrew language in children. Rabbi Cantor Bernstein recently led a family trip seventy-five people to Israel, including many choir members. She reflects:

I think a highlight was taking the children to Israel and watching them see the value of the Hebrew language and being on the streets of Jerusalem. We taught them this song from the Miami Boys Choir - whatever it was. I don't remember the tune now, but they started singing impromptu in the

¹²⁹ Bernstein, 2015

¹³⁰ Ibid, 33

¹³¹ Bar-Nissim, 2015

Cardo in Jerusalem and kids and adults came out of the woodwork and started singing with them! That was very, very powerful.¹³²

When the musical materials and intellectual concepts presented to the youth choir are age appropriate, a truly artistic experience is possible. This choral experience then becomes an indispensable element of a synagogue's mission as it fosters the intellectual and ultimately the spiritual growth of the children involved.¹³³ In the interest of familiarizing and helping children gain comfort with the concept of personal prayer, each rehearsal can open or conclude with a prayer. The prayers may even be composed by the choir members at the beginning of the season and collected for use throughout the year.¹³⁴

Take time in rehearsals to share your love, knowledge, and passion of liturgy with the choir. Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman offers the following advice:

“It doesn't make any sense to me that there should be a choir or any music experience that doesn't take the opportunity to go beyond the music. It's like a violinist not knowing any theory - it doesn't make any sense. And certainly when it comes to synagogue music it is all vocal music, so it all has texts. So why would you not be teaching the origins of the text, and where is it in the service, and what's going on, and what does it mean? And what inspired this composer to write this song in this way and - what do you feel about it? There are a million different ways to sing “Oseh Shalom.” Why do we want this one and not some other one? So you know, as an educational vehicle it is ideal ... if it's done right.”¹³⁵

Vivian Lazar, director of HaZamir shared some of her thoughts on the education of singers in that program:

“Our repertoire comes with educational notes, translations, historical, cultural information, biographical information. So there's a very big educational component to HaZamir which the kids don't realize ... We never use the word educational when we are talking to the kids but they

¹³² Bernstein, 2015

¹³³ McRae, 51

¹³⁴ Nastal, 49

¹³⁵ Edelman, 2014

are getting a very big education.”¹³⁶

HaZamir prides itself on the many ways in which it transmits a rich Jewish education to its singers. The program certainly deserves an entire thesis unto itself, but for more information, detailed interviews with Vivian Lazar and Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman are included in the appendices to this thesis and there is much to be learned there.

One advantage to working within a synagogue of course is access to many other colleagues. Invite guests to come and speak briefly at rehearsals to keep things interesting. A visit from senior clergy always helps imbue the choir with a positive sense of self-esteem. “Having a guest at rehearsal is a great motivator and, in the eyes of a child, the presence of the [senior clergy] is like a visit from the President.”¹³⁷ Visits from guest clergy before important holidays can help build anticipation and increase knowledge of what holidays and festivals are really all about. This is perhaps one of the most vital roles the choir can play, in laying the foundation for the future of synagogue life.

What ultimately separates the synagogue youth choir from a school choir is the responsibility it has on the spiritual development of its singers.¹³⁸ Just as the synagogue community recognizes important moments in the lives of its members, the choir will become the immediate community for its singers. Just as the larger congregation shares the joys and sorrows of life, the choir too can induct the children or teens into the comforts of the Jewish community both in times of celebration and in times of sadness.

¹³⁶ Lazar, 2014

¹³⁷ Nastal, 53

¹³⁸ Ibid, 54

Perhaps a choir member is celebrating the birth of a new baby brother or sister – invite parents to bring the new sibling to rehearsal and have the choir sing a setting of *Baruch Haba*. Perhaps a member of a chorister’s family is not well; a *Mi Shebeirach* from the choir could be a moment that young singer never forgets. Of course, in such sensitive moments, it will be especially important to connect personally with him or her for a larger discussion about what they are going through. Take time to share sensitive moments with the choir. Help them understand the difference between *r’fuat haguf* and *r’fuat hanefesh*. These are important words and important concepts in our tradition and the choir is precisely the place to address them as they come up in the lives of choir members.

“I think just celebrating Shabbat - the fact that a child wants to be in the synagogue and pray is, you know, the great enhancement to the community. And [the children] know what that does for other people and how it lifts their spirit. If they are singing a *Mi Shebeirach*, that there are people out there naming that name, that prayer scientifically and religiously helps. And if it doesn’t help physically it helps them emotionally and they understand that they have a very important place in the synagogue. It’s not just a place for adults, it’s for them too.”¹³⁹

C. Michael Hawn challenges us to reflect on how we, the synagogue leadership, view our own worship services. It is not easy to initiate or even accept that we need to incorporate change. “Our attitudes toward children in worship may be indicative of a more pervasive narrow-mindedness in other areas. Dealing with children in worship may be the first step toward dealing with a the larger problem of exclusiveness in worship.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Bernstein, 2015

¹⁴⁰ C. Michael Hawn, “Guiding Children in Worship,” *Choristers Guild Letters* (February 1986): 121, accessed December 22, 2014, <http://www.worshiplibrary.com/blog/engaging-children-in-worship/>.

Vocal Education and Choral Sound

In fact, the exquisite sound that a children's choir can produce when using their true singing voices is something that can be deeply inspirational and add tremendous beauty to worship services. That beautiful, pure sound is something that must be carefully cultivated, however. Most children are unaccustomed to using their singing voices and they will default to singing in their speaking registers. In order to instill in the choir a productive model for their choral sound, the director must have for himself or herself a resolute model of choral sound in mind.

This “aural image” is indispensable if the choir is to have any true direction in developing a beautiful choral sound. Listen to excellent recordings, share them with the choir, and attend concerts of high musical quality when available.¹⁴¹ When working with first grade aged children, a first goal should be the ability to use the singing voice as distinct from the speaking voice and to match pitch. For a variety of reasons, some children will find this more or less challenging. Barbara Bar-Nissim found success with one particular strategy, “ And so I would always tell kids, “Now, sing like angels” and it worked. It was just incredible how it changed the way they sang the phrase. So they were singing in their ‘angel voice.’ We were so blown away, it was such a powerful moment of music. It really worked.”¹⁴²

For other ways to help with this discovery, try exploring sounds with the children in different parts of their voice. Play with moving the voice higher and lower. A useful exercise is to sing questions and answers to one another using intervals of a minor third

¹⁴¹ Nastal, 58

¹⁴² Bar-Nissim 2015

between B flat and G. “What day is today? Monday.” Or “What’s the Rabbi’s name? Rabbi Cohen.” After a few weeks try asking individual children so that they can experiment singing solo and not just in the group.¹⁴³

A note about chest voice – David Nastal notes “Children often sing easily in the chest voice, or middle range; it’s comfortable, requires a minimum of work and is usually near the pitch of their speaking voice. Hooting or fire engine exercises allow children to experiment freely and uninhibitedly with their upper range.”¹⁴⁴ This is the range most critical for the development of a versatile children’s choir, one with a beautiful, clear sound. Make warm-ups fun for younger children. Establish a connection with breath support, critical for good intonation, by having children pant like a dog.¹⁴⁵

Unison singing can be an excellent first step in developing a quality choral sound. Discrepancies in vowel shape and pitch will be imminently more noticeable when singing in unison, and therefore easier to diagnose and fix. Invite the choir to use their own ears to match pitches and vowels. Active listening will lay the groundwork for good musicianship. If the choir can sing well in unison, they have a great foundation for then singing in harmony and in parts.¹⁴⁶ After singing in unison, the next most logical step is to work on rounds. Rounds are easily taught and rehearsed at first in unison. At the same time, these fun musical pieces will lay further groundwork as the choristers gain confidence in singing independently from one another. After singing in rounds, try introducing singing in thirds into the choir’s warm-up routine.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Bartle, 7-8

¹⁴⁴ Nastal, 60

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 60

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 62

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 62

The Importance of Musical Skills Education

Personal communication with directors of Jewish youth choirs revealed that music education, nearly across the board, is not something that is addressed as a regular part of synagogue choral programs. The literature on youth choirs however is unambiguous with statements like, “Teaching by rote is the easy way out; it’s like going to a fast food restaurant – quick, but not healthy in the long run.”¹⁴⁸ It may take longer but as our tradition teaches us, it is the long-short way that takes us where we need to go.¹⁴⁹

Certain rudimentary knowledge will be a prerequisite for sight-singing and musicianship building with the choir. That knowledge includes familiarity with clef signs, note types (quarter, half, etc.), key signatures, and time signatures. Work first on understanding the mechanics of a measure and how the time signature informs counting each bar. Do not be concerned with minute details in any way at this early stage. Focus on the basics.¹⁵⁰ All of this information is easily addressed as part of a regular rehearsal routine, as each of these elements present themselves repeatedly in a season’s repertoire.

Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman puts it quite simply, “Ninety percent of reading music is, the dot goes up, the dot goes down, and the special relationships; that they are further apart from one another that means each note lasts longer, sixteenth notes get crammed together because they go by so quickly. You can teach that aspect of reading music in thirty seconds. The rest of it is fine tuning.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 46

¹⁴⁹ Talmud, Eruvin 53b

¹⁵⁰ Lamble, 41

¹⁵¹ Edelman, 2014

For an easy exercise to use with a youth choir, avoid defaulting to only major keys in the choir's warm-ups. Explain the difference between a major and a minor third. Experiment with warming up in the Jewish modes. Teach the *ahavah rabbah* and *magein avot* modes alongside major and minor modes. Remember that children learn very quickly, more quickly than adults do. Barbara Bar-Nissim explains, "They [the choristers] don't know that there is something that's simpler. They don't know anything. They are just doing what you are teaching them and if you are teaching well then they are learning it!" As the choristers progress, many youth choirs find a rewards program helpful in publically recognizing members who are progressing through musical achievement. "Tangible awards for intangible advances provides child and parent with a healthy pride and sense of achievement."¹⁵²

Once members of the choir possess a basic understanding of simple music theory, sight singing is vastly preferable to rote learning by repetition. The eventual payoff is not needing to spend as much time learning notes, which frees up time to be spent on topics of Jewish education or more musical aspects of a performance. Ultimately, the final results will be more accurate and sound better when each singer can read their own music.¹⁵³ An alternative opinion offered by Ann Carter-Cox is that even from the earliest of ages, children should have the experience of holding music in their hands. Even though they will not be reading per se, they can follow as notes move up and down and

¹⁵² Nastal, 55

¹⁵³ Lamble, 41

even that early experience of engaging with music will very quickly help them learn to read.¹⁵⁴

An easy way to incorporate sight singing is to write out each rehearsal's warm-up exercises so that the choir can read what they are singing.¹⁵⁵ Consider writing the exercises out on a chalkboard or overhead display so that the choir is unencumbered by binders as they warm up. Sight singing must be incorporated in every rehearsal. At least by the high school level you can divide the approach into three levels. In the first level, read from one of the many available sight singing books that will work with the solfeggio system. The exercises should move slowly, be conjunct, and very tonal. At the intermediate level, expand from unison exercises to different voicings (SA, TTB, SATB, SAB, etc.). Find examples either from the wide array of choral repertoire in print or find a method book. The exercises should again be mostly conjunct and tonal. The advanced stage should rely on reading four part hymn-like textures on solfeggio each rehearsal. In addition, pick passages from the current performance repertoire and work on that with solfeggio. Not only does this give choristers practice, it eliminates note-learning problems.¹⁵⁶

For an excellent sight singing resource, Ann Carter-Cox recommends¹⁵⁷ Melodia: A Comprehensive Course In Sight-Singing by Samuel W. Cole and Leo R. Lewis.¹⁵⁸ Lamble recommends the movable do system with accidentals changing note names accordingly, so that *sol* can be *si* or *se* depending on whether it is modified by a sharp or

¹⁵⁴ Carter-Cox, 2015

¹⁵⁵ Nastal, 64

¹⁵⁶ Lamble, 38-39

¹⁵⁷ Carter-Cox, 2015

¹⁵⁸ This excellent compendium of sight singing exercises has entered the public domain and may be downloaded free of charge from any number of online libraries.

flat. If these exercises are truly to lead to the ability to read music at sight, they must be done with unwavering consistency and the material must progress incrementally, each exercise building on the concepts of the previous one and not advancing prematurely.¹⁵⁹

Nastal agrees that the teaching of sight singing is not optional. Not only will the choir grow as musicians but they will grow intellectually. It is not by chance that the philosophers of ancient Greece considered music to be one of the sciences. Engaging the minds of each singer has additional benefits. “Teaching by rote or spoon-feeding singers is the quick fix, but it stunts the developing skills of choristers and turns their minds off – and makes room for discipline problems!”¹⁶⁰

The bottom line in any area of education with a youth choir, whether Jewish, musical, or spiritual is, be intentional. Nastal offers the excellent advice, “Don’t leave it to chance, or it will sound chancy.”¹⁶¹

Setting the Tone for Services and Concerts

The most public activity of any youth choir of course is singing in services or in concerts. These moments, where weeks and months culminate in sharing the choir’s hard work with the community, are important not just because they represent everyone’s collective hard work but because they lend integrity to the choir’s reputation and weigh heavily its chances for future growth. Singing publically can be nerve-wracking even for professionals and children may find the experience a challenge. If nothing else, energy

¹⁵⁹ Lamble, 40

¹⁶⁰ Nastal, 63

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 64

will be running high and several experts have offered advice on how to manage and prepare for such moments.

The short period of time right before a service or concert is of the utmost importance. Taking a few minutes to focus the choir both mentally and physically can make the difference between a successful performance, based on hours of careful preparation, and an unfocussed and poor performance. Leadership from within the choir can come from older choir members, with the conductor present at this important time. High energy can be expected and is a positive thing when it is properly funneled into the choir's singing however it must not be entirely expended in the few minutes leading up to the actual service or performance.

Although energy may be running high, it is vitally important that the conductor, or whoever is chaperoning the group, not try to control the choir by yelling. The result on their children's self confidence and self-esteem could have a negative effect on the upcoming performance. Rather, follow-up conversations can certainly include a discussion of pre-concert behavior.¹⁶²

"Because the children are usually excited the mornings they sing, it is helpful if they come about twenty minutes early. This gives them adequate time to line up and review the songs and order of service. A designated room or area helps to contain excitement and noise."¹⁶³ In addition, right before the choir sings, they should be reminded of any important details related to the upcoming service or performance.¹⁶⁴ This is also the time

¹⁶² Bartle, 39

¹⁶³ Mitchell & Staats, 61

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 62

to remind them of their sacred task, of their responsibility to the congregation, of how hard they have worked, and of how wonderful they are.

For a performance well done, Jacobs offers excellent advice. “When their behavior is exemplary, they should be given full credit. They should know that they have done a difficult thing well, and that you are proud of them. Let them feel that you consider them a very superior group. Pride in one performance will make the next much easier.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Jacobs, 20

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview with Barbara Bar Nissim

What were your own choral experiences like? Were you involved in a youth or teen choir growing up?

I sang in school choir in elementary school and we had an elementary school teacher who it turned out that I've met over the years who sang, knew him. His name was David Yardeini. He made *aliyah* to Israel I heard. I was a little kid and I was a second alto and it was my favorite activity of the week. This was in a yeshiva - Yeshiva of Flatbush. And one day he decided to have auditions and he chose another girl over me. And I went home and it was the only time I ever made a fuss about anything at school. I said, "It's breaking my heart." I still remember it was on Thursdays. "Thursday is my favorite day, just because she sings better, why should I not have the opportunity?" I could not understand that reasoning. So my mother went to school and got me reinstated.

We used to have a *Zimriyah* every year and I started in fifth grade with writing music, little songs. So I would write the song for our class and we would sing it and we would win! So that was how I started with choral music. It was on a very elementary school level but he was a very good teacher and I learned most of the pioneer songs and we sang in two-part harmony, sometimes three. We weren't a unison choir.

So when I was starting my children's choir, I never thought for one second about having a unison choir and the first time I ever went to a kids choir concert thing where we all, people who had Jewish children's choirs, came and first they had a choir from this place and then that place, they were all unison! Except for one that sang a round. And I had arranged the music that we used so we always had two parts, very occasionally three. You know, once I did a Craig Tubman, thing [sings *Shir HaMa'alot*]. But those are easier because they are just, they're not really singing harmony as much as they are singing one part against another.

I was a little kid but I never had a good voice, which is why I got THROWN out. They chose Rita over me! Haha. Yea I was writing from the time I was eight. I have always, I have never written a big piece. I wrote, I was the principal of a religious school for many, many years and I wrote songs for occasions. One of my songs got to be - do you know Leon Sher? Whenever he sees me, he always starts singing the first line of one of the songs I wrote. I have two songs published through Project Manginot. But the really best songs are not published anywhere. But I never wrote any big pieces. I always think about it, but I have this conviction that you need to be a better pianist than I am to think on a larger scale.

Did you ever take formal music lessons?

My mother would take me into the city where I had just plain music class and then I started piano at age eight. I've never really been good at it, I have to say. Mostly because I didn't practice. I got to be a good sight reader because I would come to my lesson completely unprepared. I suppose that had something to do with it. I remember I always composed in A-minor, looking back it cracks me up. I think I still have my notebook somewhere. C and A-minor were about as far as I went but it was always a

simple, lovely melody with a simple Hebrew text or some meaningful English text. As I like to say, it was an extraordinarily minor talent but fun to do.

I did not continue in the Yeshiva High School but I had started taking oboe lessons, I had fallen in love with the oboe so I played with the band and orchestra and did not sing in the choir but in the summers for a couple of summers I went to music camp and one of the electives was choir. And I still have my choir book, somehow I managed to get a copy from the camp - it was up in that Adirondacks. I loved that choir. I remember we sang, "The Heavens are Telling" from the *Creation* by Haydn. Yea! It was a music camp so there were a lot of people with perfect pitch, they could read! Some went on to the philharmonic - I don't even know what happened to half the people. It was called Camp Music Trail. It was run by Lofer and Paula Epstein. They lived in the upper west side along with all the other escapees from Europe or whatever and they were very strict. They ran the place like a concentration camp! It was a German attitude and it taught me all my programming skills, basically. I learned from that camp by watching them program. It is a skill and I would always say to people - you would not believe but no class I ever took would help me learn how to program better than the camp I went to.

What were some of the programing concepts you learned there?

Well, I know about having the activity be something you're involved in. It's participatory and something on the level. You know every year I go to the Jewish choral festival in the Catskills. I'm singing in a choir now and our choir gets to perform and every year... have you ever been to an ACC convention? It's, my husband is a cantor so it's the same kind of, well you're used to this but the first chord that starts our choral festival is the first chord of the "Halleluia" [sings Lewandowsky's "Halleluia"] and we sing that every year. For the beginning of the choral festivals that phrase starting with that chord and you hear six hundred voices from all over the country, and they are singing that D-major chord and they can sing! It's mind blowing, really! I can't recommend it highly enough, it's such an experience, it's so inspirational.

What motivated you to start (or sustain) your synagogue youth choir?

Well the thing is, I didn't. My husband the cantor was running it and I was newly divorced and became the accompanist of the choir and I am a very controlling kind of perfectionist and my husband isn't. And I drove him CRAZY and I kept saying "Would you, just give me this one piece? Can I just have this one piece, let's see what I can do with it." And we went from a unison choir and we started to singing a lot of Debbie Friedman music before it was published. I would learn the music and write it down. You know, dictation, in my head. I would learn the song and then would just write it down. I remember we sang, "Not By Might and Not By Power" and the first harmony we had was just at the end. I wrote an arrangement in three parts and the kids loved it. That's how it started... I edged my husband out of the picture. He wasn't too happy about it!

About when was that, would you say?

Well we got married in '78 so the choir had been going on in the '70s before me. And at one point I had a 40 voice choir and we sang for the governor. We took a bus and I think we drove to Trenton. And that was interesting. And we sang for one or two ACC

conventions that were local. So it was a very good choir. The choir is still going but there is a different cantor. My husband is retired - Eureka Timmon is the cantor there.

I don't know, I worked for twenty-one years at temple Emanu-El in Livingston NJ. They had a choir. Every cantor that comes in has to run the kids choir. So I know there are a lot of places I know of in NJ specifically who have had choirs longstanding. The kids graduate, new kids come in. That's why they have choir meets where the different temples get together and they all bring their choirs to some meeting place and each temple choir gets to sing. They always have them in NJ.

What were your strategies for recruiting members? What were some of the challenges?

It's not that hard to put a choir together, really. One of the things I recommend highly is pizza. This is one of the reasons I think it was such a popular activity because, well you know, it depends on how you do it. At some Hebrew schools, there are sessions different days of the week. This was a choice, I had to choose because kids went either Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday. I had to choose and I chose Tuesday night, which was very bad for the kids who came Monday/Wednesday. Their parents had to drive them back. But the other kids, the bulk of the kids and my own children, were on Tuesday.

So we brought pizza or whatever and they ate first, which was a good social thing, and it bought down nerves, you know after sitting all day. And then we had a half an hour rehearsal. And by the way, I never ever, ever warmed up a kids choir. Ever. I was always laughing in my office listening when I was a principal to all the cantors with their warm-ups with these eight or nine year olds. This is how I felt, it was a waste of energy and time because we didn't care about their vocal growth as much as having a blend and learning the music. So you know, I didn't pretend we were a choir like that. Funny enough, Matti doesn't warm up his choir either. I guess the expectation is that you've warmed up at home. And I always hated warm-ups.

How was your choir program structured?

So it was mostly second grade through bar mitzvah. But if you had a younger sibling who was in kindergarten and could basically sit still and you would sit next to that kid, I would take a kindergartener.

Wow, so potentially kindergarten through seventh grade, all in the same choir?

Yea. I had two sections, soprano and alto and I auditioned with "Happy Birthday," a song that everybody knew. And I put all the non-singers in the alto section of course. I'm an alto but I knew that if they were in the alto section I could help them sing and I don't think I ever had a kid who didn't come out singing by the end. So the school bell rang I think at 6 and then we ate until 6:15 so maybe it [the rehearsal] was 6:15 to a quarter to 7.

What was the choir's relationship to synagogue?

They sang every family service which was once a month. And they sang in events here and there. And in my synagogue, where I was the principal, one year I did the choir

with the cantor, he was new, and I said I would mentor him because my favorite activity of anything I have done in my life was running a children's choir. By the way, it ruined my voice! I never had a great voice to begin with but when you are singing in your chest voice, when you have two hundred kids in a room - not my choir but my school kids. It's getting better now, my head voice is expanding because I try not to sing in my chest voice at all. I never had a vocal lesson. I think just the last couple of years with Matti ... and also not screaming at hundreds of children. Haha. Which is, by the way a danger when you are running a kids program.

How did you approach discipline in your choir program?

The year that I was mentoring with David I had this one little girl who was the *nudnik* from hell, along with her bother who was more of a *nudnik*. She was this little tiny thing and she would come up, the whole thing raising her hand and complaining, she was in third grade. "The transliteration is wrong" or whatever. Then after a month of me going nuts I told her she has to come with a pad of paper and a pencil and she was going to be the choir secretary and she was to write down every single mistake that came to her attention and let me tell you haha, it was such a success! She was such a busy girl! It put her in control. And I'm that kind of person too, I want to fix the world and I gave her an opportunity and I would take her paper and sometimes I would reprint the song if she found a mistake. She couldn't help herself, she was just a pain in the neck.

My disciplinary technique for the choir as never have a down moment. I always had a particular pattern of the way I had rehearsal. So that I always started with a song they knew. As the president of the temple said, if Barbara sits down and plays the intro to some piece, all the kids who have been in the choir over the years, in their sleep, could start singing right on the dot. Because, I always use the same into and it was usually the end of the end, or the end of the first line, or whatever so they could get right into it. And they would just start singing, even though they were running around, they would all be in their seats singing and then I would teach a new song – but not more than eight bars probably. And I always went over old stuff. I loved new songs and didn't use them for a long time until they were ready and then the first performance was always awful ... AWFUL! But after that, it's like once you get through that first concert, it's much better.

Did you use sheet music with your singers?

No, everything was off book. Up at the choral festival there is a conductor named Eleanor who is from Washington and she is incredible. Inspirational woman. She gave me a hint by the way she taught up in her choir up at the festival. I learned a method from her that changed the way I taught kids in particular in *t'filah* and I got more out of that and I regretted I no longer had a choir because her method was so fantastic. She just taught you the words and the rhythm without any music. Especially if it was tricky, syncopated. She would just say the words. For example take something from the liturgy... what's an example? Maybe the Bona Shur "Kedusha." So that teaches itself in a second once you've got the rhythm in your head. And they use it at Zamir also. Very often when the choir is not making progress with something they will just have you do the words and the rhythm. Then you have already learned the hardest part of the music, the words and the rhythm. And it works for adults too. It is so obvious and

probably every choir conductor has done it in order to fix a particular place but when you think about it as a technique with kids ... every rabbi and most people read a prayer with a pause. Like when you read the *kaddish*, people pause in the same place. "Aleinu... v'al kol yisrael..." in the same way. So it's the same thing teaching a prayer to kids that they are going to chant. So that was worth every penny that the temple paid to send me to the festival. Really!

How did you find or choose repertoire for your group?

I don't even know how I knew this music but I don't know if you've ever heard of Bieber? He wrote church music and let's see ... [the trees will clap their hands]. Do you know that one? That was one that was in two parts. I think, I don't think I arranged it. And there was another one that I used that was also church music because they had more music arranged for youth choir. A lot of the music that I had from Israel was written in Hebrew and it was very difficult.

It's like Lewandowski in general. I love singing it because I become convinced in some part that I am singing a hymn in church. I love church music. I mean that was the choral music that I listen to, is choral church music of course. I mean over and over - all the opera choruses and the usual, so we, this is a problem I think and this is what Matti's mission is, to commission new music. Do you know Natasha Hirschhorn? I predicted she would be a rising star. A friend was just telling me that their group with Eleanor sang one of her pieces and it was absolutely beautiful. She's very talented and she had a music company called, I can't remember - Shalsholet I think? She has as a result of it, a lot of new music.

Do you think a similar program could be duplicated in any community? What would a synagogue need in order to be successful?

Absolutely possible anywhere on this Earth. You have to come up with a gimmick when you first begin if there's not a history of it. Whatever it is, you're going to name it. You'll have a competition to name the choir and it'll be a trial run and it's going to be singing here there and the other thing and it has to be word of mouth. It can't fall apart because you only have six kids in your choir in the first year. The next year you'll have nine. You don't get discouraged and it's word of mouth. But one of the things I found is the best and this I just happened upon. You sit in the congregation, or you walk down the aisle during a service, and you hear a kid singing. Or you go to music class in the religious school and you sort of sit down next to a kid or two in an empty chair and you just sit. And you lean over and you whisper to the kid, "You have a great voice." It's really true, you can find them in the congregation. And that's how the personal thing happens. And then I would call the mother and all of it was honest because that's exactly what happened - I was sitting in the music class and I heard your kid singing and that's, true.

Especially with the lonely kind of kids, you often get. You'll notice in a lot of temple choirs that a lot of the boys in choir are the kids who are a little out of step. Because it's an activity, just in the same way that so many of the *madrichim* in Hebrew school are the nerdy kids or the ones who don't really have friends. It's on top of that, you're doing a mitzvah, is the way I felt about it. Having the kids be in an inclusive situation.

There are so many factors of what being in a choir ... there are so many studies on breath and blood pressure and identity and unity and last night I went to a party where there were about eight people from my choir and there is just something about it that is so bonding. And who else can you talk to about "section D" [in whatever piece of music that you're working on] that nobody got? We were making fun of the lyrics and etc, etc. So kids too, and they feel so proud. The parents and the grandparents come to see them in the temple choir.

In what ways do you think the choir program taught or transmitted Jewish values?

You can cut out half of Hebrew school just having your kids sing in a Friday night service once a month. They learn the liturgy, they sing their way though it because if you use some of the liturgy then they know it. And every time there was anything special in the religious schools, this is when I was the principal, I would call the kids up from the choir even if I wasn't doing [the choir at the time]. If the cantor was doing it and the cantor wasn't even there and I would say, "Who here is in the temple choir?" And a bunch of kids would raise their hands and I would say, "Come up here on the bimah and help me do this song." So that was an extra. Then everybody would say, "What is this temple choir? I never heard about it?" The new kids would say, looking at these other children standing on the bimah. And before you know it, mothers were calling. So, it's not that hard.

Did you ever work with really little kids?

I used to have bunch of little kids, I called them the "Pip-Squeek Choir." They were the part of the choir that were the pip-squeaks. And it's amazing how a kindergarten kid can learn to sing in harmony, I'm not kidding. It's so weird. You just teach the part as if it's the song. I always started with the alto part, with the harmony. I would teach them eight measures. Then I would teach the sopranos eight measures. I'd go back, I wouldn't put it together. Every week I just went back and forth until they really had their part memorized and then I'd put it together, it was unbelievable.

Did the choir address, or how did you as a director find ways to address musical skills training such as sight reading and music theory within your rehearsals?

I taught them how to get their notes from another note. I'd give them little hints about when they listened to the intro and they hear the first note that the sopranos are going to start where is their note and what they need to do and we would go over it and over it. But we didn't call it musical skills.

What do you think about some of the children's choir repertoire that's out there?

I would play through some of this stuff and even some of the composers, let's say Michael Isaacson, a lot of American composers who wrote works for kids and I would play though them and think, these choir parts are just not good. It's not that the music isn't good, it's that to expect the kids to learn the music in the style in which they are written doesn't make sense to me, who taught music to children for so many years. About the way kids learn music and what's possible to learn. Some of them were so complicated or some of them were only pretend two-parts. Maybe they sang in unison

and then for half a measure there was la-la-la one went up and on went down. Or there would be some counterpoint kind of thing where two notes would meet and I thought, there is a need for somebody to write music for kids choruses with somebody who has a lot of experience teaching music to kids choruses, which might not be a cantor since not all cantors have choirs.

I would take Israeli music that was popular that I liked and I would change the words to English. For example do you know the song, “Od Lo Ahavti Dai?” I took that song and wrote English words to the verses but had the chorus in Hebrew. So that was easy to teach and I was able to write in some sort of part but I also used it in Hebrew school because it was easy to learn “Od Lo Ahavti Dai” and then I wrote the meaning of the song in English in a rhyme.

I had a great song that used every year that I wrote to the “Finjan.” It was a big success because everybody knows, or at least did know the song “Finjan.” So that would become the farewell tradition, “Come Join Us Next Year.” And that was an easy song because most of it was ya-la-la-la. I did that with a lot of popular Israeli music. I used some Naomi Shemer stuff, and Debbie Friedman, and Craig Tubman. I wrote my own arrangements.

I always started with one song, “Mah Yafei Hayom” which I had first heard in Florida at Beth Am and wrote my own arrangement of it in two parts, and I used it every single service like “Mah Tov.” It fits with everything in the prayer book. It was kind of challenging at first but a lot of it is in close thirds. One of the most incredible moments of my life, this was so powerful. It was when we were using a song from Fiddler on the Roof with a lot of “la la las.” [Sings “Sabbath Prayer”] That’s great because the lines are easy to teach because they are just running, it’s the same melody. It’s not really in two parts. And so I would always tell kids, “Now, sing like angels” and it worked. It was just incredible how it changed the way they sang the phrase. So they were singing in their angel voice. We were so blown away, it was such a powerful moment of music. It really worked.

What is your philosophy about challenging the kids in your choir?

They don’t know that there is something that’s simpler. They don’t know anything. They are just doing what you are teaching them and if you are teaching well then they are learning it!

APPENDIX B

Interview with Rabbi Cantor Arlene Bernstein

What is the choral program at your synagogue like?

This is my 18th year here and some of my ideas I got from my first pulpit in Long Island and I was there for four years. But it's a whole different culture here so that part is interesting. Depending on the culture of the community, a choir is sought after, or I'm seeking after them, so it just depends. On Long Island, music was very, very important and they had a choir of twenty-five people who sang for the High Holidays and special events. That was run by the organist and they were all congregants. That was something that they loved and then I started what I liked to call the "Intergenerational Choir."

I created a youth choir from age ... well actually there was a little five year old in it so from age five to eighteen. And with instruments. I have a background in music education, instrumental music education. We gave a concert for a little girl who had a Jewish genetic disease. We had chamber music and kids accompanying the choir and that's sort of how it all started. I used the older teenagers who also, everyone played an instrument then so it was easy for me to start that up with the singing because it was special for the synagogue. So they sang once a month.

Then, when I came here, it was an extremely different culture. It's very hard to get the adults to sing, so it's been a struggle. What I do have is a lot of intergenerational events and services. So Hanukkah is from ages five to seventy-five. And we have what is called a "Tizmoret" so that it's strings and brass and saxophone and whoever can play well. It's a combination group of teenagers and adults. So the *Tizmoret* is the accompaniment for family services once a month and for the youth and teen choir, and what we do is we give them a lunch at 11:30 [am] when religious school ends. We can't compete with religious school, so on Sunday we feed them so they eat for about twenty-five minutes and we rotate the lunches. Then we rehearse with the little kids until 12:30 and keep the teenagers starting from bar mitzvah preparation onward, basically ages twelve to eighteen, and then we do special pieces with them.

So we do two, three, and four part harmony with the teenagers and depending on who we have at the time. Then we work with the instrumentalists that are around. So like this year we have teenagers - a violin, a viola, guitar, saxophone, and trombone! It's hilarious. And then we have adults that play and we have a violin, guitar, piano, and cello and electric bass. So we have five adults that are always, you know also helping and they also play once a month - they are the "Chai Band." That's a different service. What we have managed to do is incorporate as many people as possible for Martin Luther King weekend, Hanukkah, and the installation of a new rabbi. Or whatever we can do.

Like little kids on their own, they like to sing basically, so they just show up. Teenagers now, so we have sixty-five singing children right now, it's really crazy. That's sixty-five children on our roster and thirty-five of them are teenagers. They were initially into this show choir kind of thing and not into singing for services the way that I'd envisioned. So part of that was my wanting to do fusion music, like *hazzanut* and the regular reform liturgy. So I said to the kids, "Who wants a solo?" So they all raised their hands! So I taught the whole choir an Avery introduction to *V'shamru* and some other, I

forgot who is the composer, an introduction to *Haskiveinu* that goes into the [Craig] Taubman and things like that. So when the children got up there and sang, people were weeping.

And I just listed to them sing for their b'nei mitzvah. Then if they haven't joined already of their own volition, then I tell them I'm desperate for a good man or a good woman or a good soprano or whatever and I have conned them into it in a way. I'll ask them who their friends are. So like, "Your friend is in choir, you should come - it's so much fun!" It's developed into its own community. I took seventy-five people, that would be like twenty something singing children and their parents and grandparents to Israel and that was very solidifying. For those people, they're often together, they are a huge part of the choir. They are kind of a cultural group as well. That was a very nice thing. It was ten days and they sang a concert and we worked with Ethiopian kids, we did a lot of things. It was fun.

In this congregation, I've been here for 18 years. So when I first came to it there was someone who was doing a group called "Show Biz" that was very popular but it was like concertizing. And then the children who sang for the High Holidays were hand picked teenagers. And we don't do that any more. It's like, if you want to be in the choir, you are in. But not so much for the Tizmoret, you have to be able to play in tune. So Tizmoret is more selective but usually they self selective. Kids don't come and play unless they are playing well and they know they can't start until they are twelve. Most of the kids are in High school or maybe in the 8th grade when they come to play. So like for this Hanukkah we had four college students come back and play. And one of them is going to be a professional flutist and another a professional oboist. Those kinds of things, trying to keep them connected and find places for them to play in college and you know other synagogues. So it's sort of a whole community. We have diners together on family Shabbat sometimes.

Do you feel the sense of community in your choir happens on its own, organically? Are there strategies to help that sense of community develop?

Innately [just singing together] does not build a community I have found. It depends on where you go but I had to create community. In other words, feeding the children... a lot of it seems to be around food, but that's okay ... that's what Jews do! We got people together to help feed and the kids on Sunday lunchtime and then that builds a community of moms and like getting them t-shirts and little things and kippot. Finding people who want to participate so that when someone is sick they are on top of it and I actually don't have to say anything. Now they are doing it themselves. If someone got sick and had to have surgery, well people are like kind of in an orthodox system. People were taking food, watching the kids and bringing the kids to Sunday school - that kind of thing. That's been pretty amazing and I send them letters like on the High Holidays. I apologize and send them all a letter and try to be inclusive and sometimes we have meetings for parents and you know. I think that concerts help that communal get-together kind of thing. So professionally its true - all music brings people together but maybe San Diego is a little trickier place. But it's working.

I'm very, very lucky because one of our congregants is a piano player and he loves to write music and he has written some very nice pieces for the synagogue. I have a very

close friend who was in Boston and her family happens to be is in San Diego, she's a violinist. So I gave them an associate membership so that she can play in the group and now they are full members. The cellist is a member, the violinist's husband plays the bass. I mean it's very lucky that on our "Friday Night Chai" night we hire a drummer and a lead guitarist, because we also have a member who is a guitarist in the congregation.

It's like looking for people and finding them and they knew each other and creating an atmosphere where the music really makes the service. It just so happens that the violinist is a professional violinist with a great sound and pitch and the pianist is also very, very good and his wife sings and their children sing and play. So that's just landing in a place and then being able to find - I just lucked out. But even in the next generation I found a pianist who likes to play - he's not as good as the other one but it takes a long time.

I really just wanted to work with professionals but I found a lot more joy in this. It also can be problematic because they are who there are, and everyone has an opinion, and it's like leading a platoon in Israel. It's like everyone is in charge. So look, it's very exciting when the little cellist comes back for Brandeis and she says, "You know, I had to put music in the reform service!" So the benefits of being in one place a long time and building relationships with people and creating a place where they are valued, hopefully makes them go out and do the same thing.

What I've tried to do is, especially for the teenagers and the little kids who are not afraid, is to create student cantors. So on the family night service I do the Bar'chu but I don't do much else because I have all these teenagers that are unbelievable singers. And I try to teach them that we are praying here and no one is performing but it's one of the fortes. They really know a little bit of *nusach*, and their Hebrew is good, and their English is terrible when we sing in English. It's very cute. We use Ladino, and Yiddish, Hebrew, English, everything.

What was your musical life like growing up? Did you sing in a youth or teen choir?

I sang in the school choir but I don't have so many memories of that. And I was a clarinet player until university and I switched to bassoon. But in my synagogue I sang and conducted our children's choir in a conservative *shul*. That was outside of Washington DC, in Maryland. And the funny thing is that I only remember the conducting part from a photo I have, which is really hilarious. Apparently that's what I did.

And then instrumental music became my passion and not choral music. I played for choirs in Boston endlessly. So all of that music, the instrumental background, the playing in churches all the time, and then cantorial school is really what started me with Jewish choral music. When I grew up, being a cantor or a rabbi or anything was just - when I was a child, it wasn't a thing that Conservative Jews did and my upbringing is kind of Conservadox, and it wasn't really an option, and I never ever thought about it. Shlomo Carlebach was like the predecessor to Debbie Friedman so when I was a child he was singing and that was an inspiration to me, but I was never going to sing publicly. While I was in Boston after grad school I played and sang for the *Hamakor* Israeli folk-dance group and that's what pushed me toward cantorial school.

What were your strategies for recruiting members? What were some of the challenges?

I do a lot of recruiting through the bar mitzvah lessons and then I also tell them to tell their friends and some of them just join as a unit. They have a friend who can also sing and they join together. Its like they just need one friend. So we do a lot of mixers even in choir because I know that the little kids don't know the big kids and what I want from the teenagers is to mentor the little kids. We have them pick partners and they feel like they are doing a big mitzvah by singing in a little kid's head or pointing out the words when they can't read the music.

You know, it is tricky. I'm thinking one day it might fall apart. Because I really started with a handful of teenagers. And then there were - they graduated, then I had nine kids and it just started very small and then it kind of blew up and now it's just crazy. I really think that because what happens is you find one kid who is a major soloist or has five friends or a group of them who are singing and you say, "You have to come, you have to do this." For the ones that are divas who want to be singing and they want a solo, you know what? There is no harm in that. Talk to them about what it means to inspire other people and what it means when children sing. That it's twice as much joy.

And all of that stuff feeds into them feeling like they are making a difference and they raise money for sick kids or what ever it is that we can do that way they think they are making a mitzvah. We took a bunch of kids to an old age home. Well, they are like the happiest people - "When can we do that again?!"

I think the basis is that a melody, a *niggun* is a highest form of prayer. I've used a lot of Heschel in my teaching. Like what Heschel says about music, what Heschel says about the cantor... except the part about the beard! So that every time they come on - we are doing an experiment where they are wearing kippot. I bought them al kippot. For me it was a terrible thing to try and wear a tallit and all that stuff when I started. So I said "Lets just do an experiment and teach them what is a kippah." All the teenagers when they come - this is the other thing - they come to sing for each other for the b'nei mitzvahs. So it's not just High Holidays and once a month Friday night. If one of our choir kids is have having a bar mitzvah, they invite them to the service and sometimes they do several of the songs together as an ensemble.

In what ways do you think the choir program teaches or transmits Jewish values?

I think just celebrating Shabbat - the fact that a child wants to be in the synagogue and pray is, you know, the great enhancement to the community. And they know what that does for other people and how it lifts their spirit. If they are singing a *Mi Shebeirach*, that there are people out there naming that name, that prayer scientifically and religiously helps. And if it doesn't help physically it helps them emotionally and they understand that they have a very important place in the synagogue. It's not just a place for adults, it's for them too.

We have a very big High School program so we have over one hundred children once a week for High School and we also have a big *Madrichim* program where students are teacher's aids in classes and I think that also adds to who they are and who they think they are. When we have good singers that sing solos, kids want to do that and kids look up to them. The other thing we did was we made a CD. It was a lot of fun and it built a

tremendous community because the parents had to come and hang out and had to bring them to rehearsals and the studio. Just being in the studio, you know, is very uplifting and then we gave the synagogue a gift. We gave every family a CD.

Does the choir address, or how do you as a director find ways to address musical skills training such as sight reading and music theory within your rehearsals?

I don't and that's unfortunate. I build VOCAL SKILLS but not music theory. But they are good sight readers actually, and they don't really even know it, how that's happening.

Did you use sheet music with your singers?

Yes. When we have time. And also, we encourage the instrumentalists to harmonize and improvise on their instruments. Sometime we write out parts but some times they just make it up. And of course some of them are talented that way, and some not and they make mistakes. But it doesn't really matter and they build that. And we do a lot of harmony, as much as we can with the kids, so singing parts, and that changes from year to year. Last year we lost five very strong kids and we lost one who held the bass section down himself. So, now the bass section... not so much. But, we have a humongous tenor section, and they are hilarious - they are a group of kids who like to be together, and happen to be musical, and they grew up together. It's like a small team. When they go I might have to retire.

Does your choir program have an attendance policy?

I struggle with attendance all the time. A lot of our kids are in the JCC "J-Company" program and so many, many talented kids want to be on stage, not just on the bimah. So a lot of their plays and musicals take away from our rehearsals and I just say, you know what, we are a busy group with a lot of talented people. These people, all of our eleventh graders just came back from Israel and they are exhausted. These people are traveling, those people are in the play, and they get the idea that it's okay if they miss, and it's okay if they come and not that many kids are there. They are somewhere else and they will be back.

How did you approach discipline in your choir program?

When there are issues I tell the parents they need to come with them to see if they can even sit there and pay attention. And sometimes that happens. And, sometimes they come and they sit and they are happy, and the kid doesn't sing a thing, and in about two years they are singing. So I don't care if they just come and just look cute - that's also entertainment for the congregation. They just love to see them there.

We could have sixty-five children singing and probably fifty-five of them are actually singing. But it doesn't matter, what happens is they get comfortable, they know the tunes, they hear the words, and we have a few kids who can't read off the page but they look at the music and the mentors help them watch the music move up and down. It's like Suzuki training. I just want them to be around music so that they see the value. And it's very hard to resist when that many children are up there.

They get to an age when they get embarrassed and don't want to sing and the divas all

of a sudden have an excuse, “I have a cough. I have a cold. I don’t want to sing tonight.” And I say, “Okay.” Because what happens is, they come around full circle most often. They drop in and out sometimes and I’m fine with that. I say, “Do what you need to do, it’s no problem. Come back any time.” And that “Come back any time,” has brought back a lot of kids.

The few discipline problems we’ve have had, you know one from someone on the autistic spectrum, that was very, very hard. But the parents sometimes were on it sometimes not. And you know, I just give them the eye. And I don’t say anything publicly that will embarrass them. I don’t ever remember asking anyone to leave. I just say to them, “We all need to sing.” If they don’t sing I just let it go because I want them to feel good about the music. Some of them are there because the parents are pushing them, but I would say 95% are there because they really want to be there. I also push them, but I push them to come and try it out. And that is the pay off, you know, of harassing them. And finally one kid said, “You’re not going to give up, are you?” And I said, Nope.” And he said, “Okay, see you Sunday!”

What have been some of the rewards of working with the young singers in your choirs?

I think a highlight was taking the children to Israel and watching them see the value of the Hebrew language and being on the streets of Jerusalem. We taught them this song from the Miami Boys Choir - whatever it was. I don’t remember the tune now, but they started singing impromptu in the *Cardo* in Jerusalem and kids and adults came out of the woodwork and started singing with them! That was very, very powerful. Seeing them learn parts that are very hard and like, come together with adults and teens, and children together to do beautiful music, seeing the value that everything...

I guess one of the highlights is that we had our cantor emeritus, Sheldon Meril, we had a birthday celebration, a birthday concert for him, he turned ninety last May. And they learned the [Ben] Steinberg “Shalom Rav” so he could sing. We had the teenagers learn it, the little kids sat in front. But the teenagers and the adults sang together and accompanied him and something else. And when he was finished, thirty little kids, amongst all the rest of the congregation got up and gave him a standing ovation and went wild. And they don’t know him at all but we said, “This is a man who was the cantor of the synagogue for twelve years, he’s turning ninety, he sings beautifully.” And even the teenagers who were making fun, stopped making fun.

And everybody joined together to give *kavod*, to honor this man who made music, Jewish music. It was incredible. And it wasn’t just accompanied by voices it was accompanied by strings and instruments, all of our kids played and came together. It was just incredible. That was a real highlight.

I think that so many young people want to be a part of Jewish life and Jewish music is the highlight. Every month and then all summer long they participate. We have our services on the courtyard and whenever they are there, they sing.

APPENDIX C

Interview with Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman

What were your own choral experiences like? Were you involved in a youth or teen choir growing up?

I don't know that I had a formative experience, per se. I went to public school. It was an all girls' school and I sang in the girls' choir. That it meant a lot to me and I was very involved in that. I also sang in my synagogue choir at a time when this was a new development, that my synagogue had a youth choir. It was a teen choir, actually. And this was a new thing. There was a small core of us - the cantor's son, a couple of others, a couple of girls. We were a small and disproportionately talented group. And the cantor was extremely talented vocally and had a wealth of knowledge. He was not musically especially literate. He was sort of one of those older time cantors and so he taught everything by rote. And we improvised a lot of our own harmonies, you know, basically he sort of gave a thumbs up and you know you just jumped up a third or something. So it was not a formal experience at all but I was one of those weird kids who actually liked going to religious school and liked going to services, so this was an enhancement for me.

I committed to Jewish music pretty early on. I was not going to be a music person, per se. My original thought was I would be a journalist and that lasted until I was a junior in high school and then I got turned back on to music. I had always been involved in music but I got more seriously involved in music and I decided to go in that direction. I always thought that I would do something with Jewish music - I never knew really quite what.

I did not want to be a cantor. There were about five minutes where I thought about being a cantor but I never really wanted to be a cantor. I was interested in Jewish choral music. Probably my most formative experience, I was only eighteen so I guess that's still in my youth, but I was in college - was joining the Zamir Chorale. I was hooked from the very first moment. Truthfully, I was from Philadelphia and I came to college in New York because I wanted to sing in Zamir.

How did you get involved with Zamir originally?

There was a music counselor, I went to camp Ramah in the Poconos and there was a music counselor there who was a member of Zamir and it was through him that I found out about it and made my contact. The synagogue was also in Philadelphia.

Where did you receive your music training as a kid?

My mother had taught me piano when I was a child. I did take formal lessons for about a year, but then I sort of continued on my own. I took guitar lessons, I learned sort of folk guitar when I was around eleven or twelve. Once I got to Rama, my personal repertoire focused primarily on Israeli songs, you know, Hebrew songs, Israeli songs - Chassidic Song Festival, and you know the army ensembles and those kind of things. So that was the repertoire that I gravitated towards. I took theory in high school, music theory I mean, as a course in high school and I was a music major in college so I started professionalizing at that point.

Have you ever worked with a synagogue youth choir program?

I actually have not worked with a synagogue youth choir. I have done some occasional conducting of synagogue choirs, usually for a special project kind of thing. I did a couple of High Holy Day gigs where I conducted the choir. But it was not any kind of long term thing and that was with adult choirs.

Do you know anyone who is doing great work with children's choirs in a synagogue setting?

Ronit Hanan at Beth Shalom in Teaneck – she has a youth ensemble called Tzipporei Shalom and that is maybe third grade and up. Elementary age. For a long time - I believe they sing occasionally in the synagogue and for holidays but also in the community. Really proficient. There were groups in the past - David Tilman had a group at Beth Shalom in Philadelphia and then there was Jerome Kopmar and his group in Ohio.

My own feeling about youth choirs in the synagogue is that in principle it's a fabulous idea. It gets kids into the synagogue, it gets their parents into the synagogue. There should be an opportunity for it to be more educational about you know, this piece of liturgy - what do the words mean, why are we singing it, why does the music sound the way it sounds? There is not as much of that going on, as far as I can tell anywhere, as I would like to see.

It doesn't make any sense to me that there should be a choir or any music experience that doesn't take the opportunity to go beyond the music. It's like a violinist not knowing any theory - it doesn't make any sense. And why would a violinist not know that, you know, first there is Bach, and then there is Mozart, and then there is Beethoven? You want to teach these kinds of things. And certainly when it comes to synagogue music it is all vocal music, so it all has texts. So why would you not be teaching the origins of the text, and where is it in the service, and what's going on, and what does it mean? And what inspired this composer to write this song in this way and - what do you feel about it? There are a million different ways to sing "Oseh Shalom." Why do we want this one and not some other one? So you know, as an educational vehicle it is ideal ... if it's done right. It's usually not done right, either because the person who is conducting it doesn't have all the requisite skills and/or because there isn't anywhere near enough time devoted to it.

What are HaZamir rehearsals like? How are they structured?

Now when we have a HaZamir rehearsal, a typical rehearsal lasts for close to two hours. So obviously there is a social component, you know the kids enjoy being together. It's not a rigid environment where no one is having any fun. And within the two hours there is usually a break and some refreshments and the kids do socialize. But you know, even in the context of learning the music, [we investigate] where does this music come from, who wrote it, what do the words mean, look what is going on, why did the composer put a suspension here, and why is this iteration of the text the second time different from the first time? You know, sometimes you know the answer and some times you just have an interpretation. But those are things that enrich the experience.

Now, the HaZamir rehearsals are in a “quote” school context. You know the kids are not getting a grade for it so on the one hand there is more flexibility and on the one hand, you know, if you don’t finish the piece this week you can finish it next week. It’s not like you are racing through a curriculum.

There is a curriculum per se, there is a bunch of repertoire that all of the HaZamir groups have to learn and the goal is to finish it in time for everybody to perform together on this big concert that we do together in March. So there is an end goal but if you start working on this stuff in September - my kids have learned all the music now [in January] and we are working on memorizing. We are working on interpretation but you know, I’m not racing to worry about teaching all the music so there is time to do other things. And I’ve always enhanced my rehearsals with those kinds of things. And when you are first presenting the piece of music it just makes sense to give it as much context as you can - it’s not just a pretty piece of music.

Does HaZamir take any approach to formal music theory education?

No, there is no formal teaching of theory. I mean what is brought out varies from one conductor to the next. Some conductors are more comfortable, you know, saying, “This is a IV chord, look at that. Here they put in a IV-I cadence and there it’s a V-I. And here its IV-V-I, and there its ii-V-I. Why did they choose to be different here?” I will certainly point out when there is maybe, it turns major in the context of a minor piece or minor in the context of a major piece.

To me, there is so much going on in any given piece of music and it’s not about, you know, you’re an alto, you have to learn the alto line. You have to be listening to what’s going on in the other lines. You can’t be unconscious and make music. And if you’re holding a note - if the alto ... I’m an alto so I’m especially sensitive to the alto part ... sometimes the alto is holding the same note for four measures and everybody else is still moving. But the point is, it’s not the same note! A “G” that is harmonizing with an “E” is different from a “G” that is harmonizing with a “B,” which is different from a “G” which is harmonizing with a “D.” You know, so if everything around you is moving - you have to move too! You’re not moving a whole lot but if you are the root of the chord it’s one thing and if you’re the third of the chord its something else. If you’re the fifth of the chord it’s something else. If you’re the sixth or the ninth its something else. So you have to be sensitive to that.

Even if the harmonies are exactly the same the first time and the second time - maybe the first time is more marcato and the second one is more legato. Maybe the first one is piano and the second one is forte. You know, there is no reason to do the same exact thing twice; if you just did it, why are you doing it again? You have to bring something new to the table. So, you know, and there may be not be an absolute answer - there may not be anything in the score but you have to try to bring something out. Not to mention that if there was only one way to sing Beethoven’s 9th symphony, there would be one recording of it and that would be it. You don’t get to change the notes but you change tempo, you change interpretation, you change all kinds of things.

And it matters who is doing the conducting. And you know, Leonard Bernstein made recordings of the same pieces twenty years apart. And you can listen to them and you know, there might be 15 or 20 minutes difference in the amount of time they take, faster

or slower, you know, he is coming from a different place and it's a different interpretation. And it's not that he was wrong the first time and now he's right, it's just that now it's different. You're different so you bring something different.

Are kids in HaZamir able to read music before they join the choir?

They come from all over the place. There are kids ... look. Ninety percent of reading music is, the dot goes up, the dot goes down, and the special relationships; that they are further apart from one another that means each note lasts longer, 16th notes get crammed together because they go by so quickly. You can teach that aspect of reading music in thirty seconds. The rest of it is fine tuning. So even a kid who technically doesn't read music who can't tell you whether a note is an "A" or a "G," they can see that it's the same note or that it's higher or lower. Even if they don't come with any of the ... when they first walk into rehearsal, they would have to literally be blind to not be able to see that after getting through a couple of rehearsals.

There are kids who graduate from HaZamir and they still can't tell you what middle "C" looks like. But, they can find their way around the piece. They know how to look at a piece of music, they understand what repeats signs are. They learn the geography of a piece of music over time. And there are certainly kids who become motivated because of their HaZamir experiences and they go looking for more.

In what ways do you think the HaZamir program teaches or transmits Jewish values?

There is a lot of education that goes on in HaZamir and some of it is formal and a lot of it is informal. When we have our HaZamir festivals, we observe Shabbat together and there are three different services going on. There's a progressive service, a Conservative-Egalitarian services and an Orthodox service with a *mechitza*. And in public spaces everything is completely *shomer* Shabbat. We don't use instruments, we don't use microphones, we don't use pencils on Shabbat. In private spaces, kids are free to do what they want. If they want to go back to their room and play guitar or write a letter or email, that's their prerogative but in our public spaces, we are very traditional.

So kids are exposed to that, they understand that there are people observing Shabbat differently from the way they may be accustomed to it. For some kids, they have never had any kind of Shabbat experience and that includes the Israeli kids who come to us. We have five chapters in Israel and a lot of the kids who come from Israel are not religious at all and have had no experience whatsoever. So it's a wonderful experience for kids to be exposed to Jewish life, to be exposed to the plurality of Jewish life, and the completely tolerant environment.

They are also exposed very strongly to Zionism. I mean we are unequivocally Zionist. We stand with Israel, we support with Israel, we have taken HaZamir trips to Israel, we sing about Israel, we sing in the Hebrew language, and not all the music we sing is liturgical. And the American HaZamir kids have Israeli friends and they understand that when the American kids graduate from twelfth grade, some of them may be going on a gap-year program in Israel or some place else, but a lot of them are just going on to college and their Israeli friends are going into the army.

When they hear in America people talk about the big bad Israeli army and how

terrible Israel is, you know, our kids understand Israel very differently because they have friends who are soldiers. So the Jewish experiences that they have, and the Jewish values that they have, and the connection to Israel that they have is very powerful. Every year HaZamir performs at the holocaust memorial program, you know, the gathering of the survivors at Temple Emanu-El. You know, so these kids are exposed to a whole lot of things. When they sing “Ashrei Hagarfur” they learn about Hanna Senesh and they learn about World War II. Sometimes they sing in Yiddish and they understand, they’ve learned about Jewish history and about the Ashkenazi experience. If they sing something from a Yemenite tradition, they learn that there are Jews who come from different paces, who sound different. But, “Kulanu Yehudim,” you know.

So they learn a TON about Jewish values and Jewish history and Jewish culture and Jewish tradition that they wouldn’t necessarily learn in religious school. And they don’t have a denominational label placed on it. In any given HaZamir chapter, there are kids who are Conservative, and kids who are Reform, and kids who are Orthodox, and kids who don’t go to a synagogue at all. There are kids who grew up in public school, and who grew up singing Christmas carols, and all this stuff, and they are thrilled with the opportunity to sing quality Jewish music. We go beyond “I Had a Little Dreydl.”

What are your strategies for recruiting members? What were some of the challenges?

It’s complicated. There are some communities where kids are dying to be old enough to sing in HaZamir and there are other communities where there are all kinds of logistical problems. Philadelphia happens to be a strange place in that the Jewish community is very decentralized. There are Jews all over the map and there isn’t one neighborhood where there are a lot of Jewish people. If someone lives twenty or fifteen minutes away, it’s a big schlep.

The problem is that rehearsals are on Sunday afternoons and most of the HaZamir kids are also involved in USY, or they are in NFTY, or robotics, or dance class. There are a lot of competing activities for kids. And some parents will say, “It’s enough already - you are already doing too much.” Or some kids feel they can’t make another commitment. Or again, it’s logistics. If you have an eighth and ninth grader, they are entirely dependent upon parents for transportation. There’s no public transportation in Philadelphia, so if your parents are not willing to drive you twenty minutes, a half hour, forty-five minutes, or whatever it is, then you can’t do it. It’s a problem everywhere. In some places, you know, in principal there is no reason there couldn’t be two hundred kids in every chapter. But there aren’t and it’s not because there aren’t two hundred musical kids, it’s because there aren’t two hundred families that want to make this a priority.

If a kid is really on the fence then peer pressure may sometimes work. If they are having a positive social experience then they will usually want to continue. There are some kids who are more hesitant to get involved if they don’t know anybody to begin with. Choral singing is intrinsically communal - you can’t do it by yourself. You’ve got to get your foot in the door. And the other thing is that we sing in four parts and there are kids who like to sing but they never sang alto before, or their voices are changing and they don’t know if they are tenors or bases, they don’t know how to sing anything that isn’t the melody, and it’s hard. It’s, you know, choral singing is different from singing in

the shower, or singing along with everybody in unison, or even extemporaneously creating your own harmonies. You know, you've got to sing the music that's on the page. And some kids don't have experience with that and find it difficult.

What do you do if a student can't read and struggles in rehearsals?

It's also dependent on the context. If you have one kid in the middle of eight who's struggling with the part, if you surround them with strong singers, they will probably get it. If it's one on a part or just two on a part and the one that is confident is only 60% confident, and the one who is unconfident is 85% unconfident, then you may have more of a problem. There are some kids who are never going to get it. They are relatively few and far between, but there are some kids, and we do occasionally have to council a kid out of HaZamir. It's painful but, you know, not everyone makes the basketball team. And not everybody makes the dance team, and not everybody makes the robotics team, and not everybody is ready to do this level of choral singing. We're always, we're fighting against the intrinsically egalitarian nature of choral singing and the demand for excellence that HaZamir stands for. It is hard.

The truth of the matter is, your typical thirteen, fourteen year old ... they know already. You know, you don't have too many kids going out for the basketball team who've never played basketball and can't dribble. They don't wake up one morning and think, "Oh, I'll play basketball." They've probably been playing pee-wee something since they were old enough to hold a ball. So when they move from the JV team to the variety team, the transition may be difficult but they understand the rules, and they know what they are going after, and they also know that freshman don't usually make it to the starting five.

But in choral singing, there are usually opportunities somewhere along the way for a person to say, "You know, I'm pretty good at this." Or, "Maybe I should spend my time someplace else." So, it's pretty rare that we find a kid who truly can't match pitch. Obviously there are kids who are going to get it the first time and kids who are going to get it the eighth time. But at least they get it after the eighth time and then, fine. Once they get it, they got it. If you have a kid who's working on it after the thirty-eight time and they still don't get it, then you have a problem.

And we have a HaZamir chamber choir too. More select, more demanding, and you have to be vocally at a higher level and it's going to be pretty difficult for you if you're not musically literate.

What have been some of the rewards of working with the young singers in your choirs?

I love turning kids on to Jewish life and Jewish music. When you have a kid who came in as a weak singer and they are now leading the section. When you have a kid who dropped out of Hebrew school because they didn't have time, or enjoy it, or it wasn't a family priority, but they are loving singing this music. When you have kids who are the only Jew in their class but they have a community because of HaZamir, I mean that is nothing but gratifying.

I have kids who have literally changed their lives, changed their priorities, changed their social groups because of their experiences in HaZamir. And that is ... why does

anybody do anything? You know, there has to be some ... I enjoy what I do. Period. It's gratifying to me but partly it's gratifying because it's sharing. I share my knowledge and I want my students to feel as excited and as in love with the material as I do. So if I've converted my students then I've been successful. That's my gratification. And obviously I don't expect all of my kids to become professional Jewish musicians but if they become knowledgeable congregants, if they become discerning audience members, that's already a big thing.

Is there anything I may have forgotten to ask or anything you'd like to add?

The politics of synagogue life and the role of choirs in the synagogue is a problematic matter. It sometimes gets in the way of more choral singing. I will also say, unfortunately there are a lot of cantors who are not generous and not willing to share the word about HaZamir because they are afraid to "lose" their kids. In fact, the experience has been quite opposite. The kids who are singing in HaZamir are MORE interested in singing with the synagogue and being a part of something positive going on in their synagogue. But it's extremely difficult to convince the cantors of that. So we don't get as much support for HaZamir as we would like and it's very frustrating.

The truth is that there are not as many synagogue choirs as there used to be, so the opportunity for the kids to do both is not as present as we would like it to be, but we have NEVER told a kid, "You have to make a choice." And we would always encourage the kids, I mean our kids DO. They go back to their public school and they take what they learned in HaZamir and they try to make their public school choirs better. And they try to alert their public school teachers that there is more to Jewish music than "I Had a Little Dreydl." You know, there is great repertoire out there and I have frequently been in touch with school music teachers who get interested in a piece of music because a kid says, "We did this in HaZamir and can we do it in our choir?" So my kids are converting the public schools!

There is plenty of stuff out there and there are a lot of women's choirs in Israel. So as a result there is a lot of repertoire for you know, treble voices. So there's no reason that elementary choirs shouldn't be doing good music. And in terms of four-part music, I can understand public schools not necessarily doing liturgical music, although it doesn't keep them from doing Christian liturgical music. And I especially understand the hesitation to making a commitment to a piece of Israeli music with a lot of unfamiliar Hebrew text, but there is music that has limited text, or the soloist will sing the text and the choir will sing the chorus, which repeats. There are ways to get around it. Look, we hesitate evening HaZamir! We don't want to burden our kids with too much text.

APPENDIX D

Interview with Vivian Lazar

How did HaZamir get started? What are the inspirations?

Matti started HaZamir to give Jewish kids the opportunity to sing high-level music that wasn't Christian music. Many people didn't know that there is high level Jewish music, including "Chichester Psalms," Aaron Copland, Schubert wrote a "Tov L'hodot," things that people just don't know. So he started HaZamir with one chapter in Manhattan and now we are at twenty-six with five new chapters on the horizon for next year: Boca Raton, Miami, Seattle, Atlanta, Ofakim in Israel, possibly Yeruham in Israel and if I can raise the money, there are two other chapters that want to start - Bat Yam, Holon, with wonderful conductors in Israel. In Israel you have the opposite problem. Because everyone speaks English, every conductor who can conduct well gets the text and some of these young people are fantastic. Really fantastic musicians and conductors. There aren't enough choirs for them to conduct.

Israel used to have a great choral culture. Now it's called *Lehakat Vocale* - it's not quite a cappella but it's like singing together in two parts and three parts, kind of poppy with piano accompaniment, it's not high level music. It's sometimes done very well. And there are a couple of really good choirs but it used to be that every corner of every kibbutz had a serious choir with a serious conductor and there are a lot of women's choirs. Not for religious reasons but because of the culture in Israel - only boy-sissies sing. Which HaZamir has changed tremendously. Three years ago when we went to the ministry of education that's what they said to us. They said, "You have boys in your choir?" We said, "Yea we have soldiers in our choir!" These are kids who are big brawny boys who are going into the army. They said, "Really?! Then you have to take them around the country and have them perform." So there is interest. HaZamir is exploding, we can't keep up with the demand in Israel.

So HaZamir was created by Matti. He was brought up on Mozart and Brahms and he was conducting symphonies and operas. He was a pianist, a child prodigy. And somewhere in his late teens he saw this void in the Jewish world and he is a passionate Jew and a passionate Zionist and he kind of made a right turn and ended up here. We are in our twenty-second season now. 1993 I think. I was not involved at that point. I'm in my tenth year and when I came in, I came from a teaching background and I saw the potential to professionalize HaZamir in an organizational way and not just a musical way, and so I did. It changes lives because it's not just about the music, it's about, you know, a choir is a community. You can not choral sing by yourself. You need everybody around you but you also have to make your contribution. That's what a community is - an acknowledgement of the individual and an appreciation of the benefit to the larger group.

We grew up on both Jewish and Christian music. We did have Jewish choral music - it wasn't anything like this. There was a man named Seymour Silbermintz. He is long gone, not long but he is gone maybe fifteen years and he went from Jewish day school to Jewish day school, teaching Jewish songs. Usually two-part. But in second and third grade he got us started. I grew up singing all the time. I would get together with my

friends and we'd sit around someone's kitchen table and we would sing. That's what we did. Sometimes it was "Barbara Ann" [sings a few bars] sometimes it was that or sometimes it was these Jewish songs that were pretty and had harmony and we'd make up our own harmony because we were freed to do that. Those of us that took piano read off the score but we couldn't sight read.

So he got us started in the Five Towns but he also taught Matti in Brooklyn and there were kids in the Bronx but this guy was all over. He wasn't really a conductor, he was a music teacher. But he knew the repertoire and he was beloved. And then Zamir Chorale started in 1960. It was the only Hebrew singing choir in North America and people like me stayed at home from college so I could sing in Zamir.

It was many years later but it came out of a camp choir. Camp Masad and it was a Hebrew speaking choir. The councilors used to sing every summer and one summer they came home and said, "Why do we have to stop singing?" So they spoke to their tennis counselor who happened to be Stanley Sperber who is now the conductor of the Academy Choir in Jerusalem, and said "You read music, conduct us!" And that's how Zamir started.

Then Matti took over Zamir in 1972 and really shaped it into this really high level, auditioned choir. It was always auditioned but in the early days I'm told if you didn't make it and you came to rehearsal anyway, you wound up staying. My parents wanted me to go away to college but I said I wanted to stay to sing with Zamir. We have HaZamir kids now who are at Colombia and Barnard so they can sing in Zamir Noded.

That's a real testament to that community building that we are talking about.

So the first thing that Matti did was call HaZamir the All State Jewish High School Choir. Then he changed it later to HaZamir. I know that there was a Ramaz teacher, Carol who brought her Ramaz kids but it was one of the tenants of HaZamir that it has to be open to the entire community. It can't just be for a Conservative *shul* or the Orthodox community, it has to be open to the entire community, geographically and Jewishly. If you consider yourself Jewish, good enough for us.

I think he started it, in 1993 there was a one-day like a performance, not a festival, and then Marsha [Edelman] started a chapter in Philadelphia... I'm not sure of more of the details. You'll have to ask Matti some time. I know that when I took over there were eight chapters, mostly in the New York metro area. The first chapter I built was Pittsburgh and the second chapter was HaZamir Los Angeles and HaZamir Maine which we don't have any more because the Jews kind of left.

I never conducted. I kind of fell into this. I'd been teaching and I decided I didn't want to teach in NYC anymore. I was [teaching] dance in the morning and English in the afternoon. HaZamir was one of the many projects of the foundation and Matti was handling everything, and Marsha was helping him, and I started volunteering and very quickly found myself sitting here [as Director of HaZamir]. It was not what I was looking for, although I said when I left teaching, "Whatever I do next will be in the Jewish world." I had a need.

And this is a lot of hard work. But the rewards are so enormous and what my great rewards now are like this girl [name deleted], who graduated HaZamir almost six years ago, still calls me to say, let's have lunch. And came to New York so she wouldn't have

to come up from Baltimore every week. And when you see HaZamir on stage, I can't even describe what it is. When three hundred kids stand on stage like this [very still] and I say to them, "If a tarantula walks across your face, you don't move." And they don't. They stand still and they blow me away because I say it but I don't think it's going to happen. But it does.

If you demand a lot of children, you'll get a lot from them. And that by the way is the problem with a lot of synagogues. "Let's meet them where they are." Okay, you go right back down that rabbit hole where everyone else is and that's where you are going to live. We treat our kids like professionals. When you leave the rehearsal you can be fourteen but as long as you're sitting here you're an adult. And they sit here like this for three hours at a time.

Our festival rehearsals are incredibly intense. We start Thursday night, we rehearse Thursday night, Friday, parts of Shabbat and Sunday morning we come to Avery Fisher Hall or Carnegie Hall and Matti Lazar doesn't put anybody on stage who doesn't belong there. He wouldn't put HaZamir on stage if they didn't earn it. And they know it. They write their college applications on HaZamir and they get in based on these college applications. Starting with my son. My son was on stage in Carnegie hall with three hundred people and Elie Wiesel conducting. Matti said, "I'm going to get Elie Wiesel to conduct." And he got him to do it.

I didn't know Elie Wiesel was a conductor!

He was a choral conductor right after the war in France.

I can only imagine what that experience would have been.

He has a beautiful voice and it was very musical. It was a moment in history.

How is the HaZamir program structured?

The beauty of HaZamir is that you work within your chapter, some of them have thirty kids, some of them have only four. The beauty is that you work and then you get to sing with three-hundred other people who make your choir. So they meet individually each week based on the repertoire that we choose right here. And our repertoire comes with educational notes, translations, historical, cultural information, biographical information. So there's a very big educational component to HaZamir which the kids don't realize.

We never use the word educational when we are talking to the kids but they are getting a very big education. The Israelis are getting and ever bigger education because they come to us totally secular. They've never heard of kiddush, they've never heard of havdalah, they have no idea what these things are and when we tell them we are taking them to t'filah on Friday night, some of them get really pissed because they are thinking of big streimlach, and beards. And we bring them to the Reform service where there's guitar and sometimes piano and we're sitting in a circle. And we have an Orthodox service and we have an egalitarian service but we bring them to the Reform service and they all walk out crying.

Leon Shur runs the service and he is awesome at it. Awesome at it. He tugs at their heartstrings. Watching him run the service is wonderful. So our Israeli kids come home

and one of them said, "I came home and I introduced my family to kiddush." He said, "We don't do it every week but sometimes before a Friday meal, we make kiddush." It's huge, it's a huge thing. I never thought about something like that.

For me it was about discipline, because the discipline in the arts is the same discipline that you apply to anything. My feeling is that if you love music and you discipline yourself there, you can also discipline yourself as a scientist or an accountant. And we are avowedly Zionist, unapologetic. But we are not religious. We are Jewish.

And core values. And we teach tolerance because everything we do in public spaces is done according to the Orthodox. No instruments on Shabbat except in the Reform service, in the lobby, in the dining room. In rehearsal rooms, no instruments, no computers, no cell phones. And our feeling is, the Orthodox have to accept that Reform and Conservative can be as devout, but the Conservative and Reform kids have to understand that the Orthodox have the right to observe the way that they need to and we can't violate that or they won't be there. And our kids have embraced that. Go into your room and do whatever you want, we don't care. And we have kids with *peiot* who sing in HaZamir. And they have gone on to graduate and gone off to Shana Aleph Yeshiva, you know in Israel. And they have written to say, "Thank you for educating me to the fact that there can be Reform and Conservative Jews who are just as religious as I am. They might not be as observant as I am, but they are just as religious as I am. I never could have known that in the world where I was living."

So now, I'm aware of it and now I articulate it. But the truth is at the time that wasn't a part of the mission. The mission was music at the highest performance standard. And the mission has grown. Besides, now the mission is much larger. Now the mission is music at the highest performance standards, strengthening Jewish identity - which was always part of the mission, creating strong bonds with Israel - which we do by bringing in seventy-six Israelis and having them mingle and live with American kids for a week, facilitating leadership skills - we have a teen leadership program which is an interviewed and funded program where you have two kids of interview stop be accepted, and creating a pluralistic Jewish community, which we have done in HaZamir. And my hope is that it can ripple out into the real world. I don't think it can because people have to own their piece. If you're not specifically Conservative, why would you come to a Conservative *shul* or a Conservative school. I know it's utopian but at least in HaZamir we can have it.

A little sub theme of that is, not only are we feeding into the cantorial schools now, but we are also creating a population of congregants who can listen to good music, who don't have to sing along with everything or who can harmonize when you are singing because they know the music, or Janowski's "Sim Shalom." You know, HaZamir Kfar Saba, which is a flagship group opened for the ACC convention in July in Yaffo. And as they were performing, one of our star sopranos in Kfar Saba started crying. So I went up to her after the concert and I said [name deleted] "Why were you crying?" She said, "All the people in front of me were crying while we were singing and I saw them crying and I just couldn't stop myself from crying."

I think these Reform cantors, first of all, just by coincidence we had four pieces from the Reform repertoire. We had a Lewandowski, a Janowski, a Robbie Solomon, who was in the audience, and I forgot what the fourth piece was. So these kids sang Janowski's "Sim Shalom," Solomon's "Hanerot Halalu," there was a Lewandowski, and these

Reform cantors haven't had a chance to sing this music probably since they left HUC. I was all the way in the back so I didn't see it. Afterwards some of the cantors came over to me and said ... and actually HaZamir Kfar Saba is going to do a concert at HUC in Israel now. So you won't get to see that one but come to Avery Fischer Hall and you'll see a little of everything, you'll see the chamber choir. We have an honor choir which has an even higher standard of performance and repertoire, our alumni perform, and Israel performs as Israel. They do their own thing. It used to just be Kfar Saba but now we have five chapters and they'll all perform together.

What would you say has contributed to the decline in musical interest, at least classical music, in the Jewish community and synagogues?

My experience, and this is anecdotal, the really talented Jewish musicians leave Jewish music and they go on to secular music. And it's very rare to find somebody of Matti's caliber who comes back into it. He was conducting Gilbert and Sullivan, and "Marriage of Figaro," and Brahms, and Beethoven, and he still does guest gigs with the American Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic... not the Philharmonic, players who are part of another symphony, I forget it's name. But he conducts in Carnegie Hall, and Avery Fischer Hall, and around the country. I mean, he's a brilliant conductor but he has devoted his life to Jewish music and he's made a difference.

Working with musical kids is a great way to give back. The fact is, when I look back and I realize how the things that were introduced to me in high school became the things I devoted myself to in college and afterwards, even when I was teaching I was always singing. I was always dancing and I was always singing but singing was the most important thing to me. Music is the center, besides Israel, music is the centerpiece of my life, and my family. But our family is a musical family. We are all musicians of some sort. My son, my daughter, all of us. But my kids grew up on this music and they grew up on Yehezkel Braun, and Leonard Bernstein, and Schubert, and Gil Aldema, and Naomi Shemer. They know that repertoire, so if you introduce it early, it's a wonderful foundation to build on. Then maybe one day you become Steve Cohen or Gerald Cohen. Quality music then transfers into quality everything else. And right now there's not a lot of quality anything going on.

Can you tell me how HaZamir is organized across the US and Israel?

We provide educational notes and everyone is working on the same thing at the same time and the advantage of that is, one of our kids in HaZamir North Jersey is visiting Israel right now. And at this very moment she is in Kfar Saba, visiting that chapter and not missing a rehearsal. Another kid who is in HaZamir Boston just was in Jerusalem with his parents and attended a HaZamir Jerusalem rehearsal. And these kids love seeing each other across cities, across the ocean. It's an international network. I'm going to visit my grandmother in Connecticut, no problem. Because kids hate missing rehearsals because rehearsals are fun! And they know each other from festivals.

We have kids from L.A. who spend two weeks with their friends on the east coast over the summer. And then the east coast kids go back to LA and visit their friends and live together. Kids spend time in Israel in the homes of their Israeli friends. That has been a big benefit of the program also. Musically and socially also. So we have that kind

of very organized structure. Administratively and financially, there are certain requirements and there are maintenance requirements. If you miss three rehearsals, you have to re-audition. And if you don't pass the audition ... now not every conductor observes that but many do. They might give them a week to go home and learn it, but.

HaZamir is an auditioned choir. You have to have some musical background and be able to sing on pitch and hold your own part in a four-part arrangement. If you are in eighth grade, we realize we have a lot to teach you. If you are in eleventh grade and you come to us bare-bones, then you're probably not ready for HaZamir and we might tell you to take a year of voice lessons and come back. Most of the kids at this point who audition for HaZamir belong there. Chamber choir has and even more rigorous auction process. If you audition with a flat "reish," we shut the tape off and you're out. We sing in Hebrew. If you sing in French or Italian, you would approximate the accent. Only in Hebrew do we think we can mash it up and drown it out in the ocean. So, we are pretty strict about that.

The hardest and most frustrating thing about HaZamir is talking about it. When you see it, you realize. You don't see the process but you understand what our goal is. And it's pretty staggering. In a world where anything goes, for these kids to perform at the level at which they do, says everything about them. It also says a lot about what children are capable of doing. The higher you raise the bar, the higher they reach and achieve. So, HaZamir is probably the only program like that in North America.

The advantage by the way is that our HaZamir kids go back to their synagogue communities and recommit to their home choirs. They come back as leaders. We had an outside survey prove this, it's not just me saying it. When [HaZamir conductor X] started he said, "I'll have no problem getting kids. I know all the cantors in the area, they are all friends of mine, and certainly they'll all send me their kids." Not one. And one of the cantors actually said to me with disdain in their voice, "Why would I send me your kids?" And I said, "You are not sending me your kids, you are giving you kids an enrichment and a gift that they will then bring back to you twofold." And they didn't believe it until [HaZamir conductor X] ... he struggled at first. He had left another chapter that had about thirty kids and he started with only four in his new area. He came to me and said, "These are my friends, how could they not trust in me?" Now [HaZamir conductor X's] program has grown and he has some very talented kids.

There is still this resistance - "You're going to take my kids away from me." And that's not our objective at all. Our objective is to give enrichment. Because no one is offering, no matter what you are doing in your synagogue, no one is offering what we are offering. We have the infrastructure and we have the numbers. So whatever kind of ... we have gay children, we have transgender children, we have ADD children, special needs kids with Asperger's who are brilliant singers but who can't navigate social situations.

We are a microcosm of full society, as long as you can manage the music and the program. If you are bouncing off the walls then you don't belong in HaZamir. We have one kid who I think is autistic. His mother always comes with him because he has to room with his mother. He can't really relate to other kids but give him a piece of music and he's a savant. And he can read it! A beautiful voice. We welcome all of that. No synagogue can replicate that. No one little place can replicate that. We support any

choral singing of value. Anywhere. You could be three people singing in a corner and if you are doing it well, we support it.

APPENDIX E

Interview with Cantor Ronit Hanan

What were your own choral experiences like? Were you involved in a youth or teen choir growing up?

HaZamir was created after I was in high school. I'm 55 so although I went back to JTS late in life, I graduated high school in 1977. HaZamir is twenty something years old and it was well after my time. I credit NFTY to brining me back to Judaism because of their accent on the arts at the time. I was, you know, my father was a cantor in a Conservative synagogue for twenty-five years and I grew up in a Conservative synagogue. But I didn't like USY and fiends of mine were going on some NFTY things at the end of the summer and my parents were like, "Do you want go? " And I said, "Sure."

I went out there and they were composing music and singing in four-part harmony and I just fell in love. And I was a dancer also and they had a lot of creative dancing things going on. So I credit the Reform movement with getting me back to my Judaism which is great, and through the arts. My father was the cantor in Temple Israel in White Plains, where Jacky Mendelson is right now. Abe Mizrachi and Jack Mendelson were his successors.

I sang in the *shul* choir. We had junior congregation and I learned how to *daven* a little *musaf* when I was a kid and I too, you know, I was in my school choir. I went to public school although [Solomon] Schechter was also after me. I have a girl friend who is a few years younger than me who was in the first [Solomon] Schechter class in Westchester so I was a public school kid. And here and there, there were choirs in the synagogue but not that much. As I got older, I would sing in the adult choir even as a teen. But there weren't a whole lot, there were music classes in Hebrew school where we would learn some songs but we didn't do that much choral singing really.

I was a soloist. I was into jazz and musical theater and all that kid of stuff so I didn't really get into ... and I knew the choral world because of my father, and Matti [Lazar], and the whole, that whole um, crowd of people. But I wasn't really a choral singer until later in life. Maybe when my father retired in 1982. Abe Mizrachi replaced him and Matti came up to conduct the High Holy Day choir. I had just finished choir I think and so I was like you know, half ringer half congregation in that High Holy Day choir but it was the first time I'd ever worked with Matti, which was a great experience at the time.

Then I joined the Zamir chorale only six or seven years ago. Maybe five? In the adult group. When I moved to Teaneck from Israel, I lived in Israel for a number of years, when I moved back to Teaneck they got wind of what I knew how to do. Somebody asked me if I would be interested in starting a kid's choir. So I took um, Adina Avery Grossman, Cantor Lawrence Avery, I don't know if you know him, but his daughter and I were both congregations at our Teaneck *shul* and we were both, you know, cantors' kids and we both had kids that were in the elementary, the lower elementary school. And so, we started a choir with, you know, six kids, where four of them were our own!

Had you ever conducted a choir before?

Um, at that point? No. I knew a lot of Jewish music and I knew a tiny bit about conducting and that was, you know, that was the extent of it. So really I did not have a lot of conducting. I had a lot of teaching experience; I have done a lot of teaching throughout the years just because I love to teach. And the rest of it is all passion and the fact that the two of us have an incredible repertoire - Israeli music, you know, all the Israeli, and the Jewish, and the liturgical, and everything. We really had an incredible choice of repertoire that we both knew. And I had all the books and the, you know, whatever, lead sheets. I also, having spanned both the NFTY and Orthodox family, I mean Velvel Pasternak, I don't know if you know all his books, is a relative. He is my father's first cousin. So I spanned the complete gamut from NFTY, Orthodox family... so I would go to Chassidish weddings and then be singing Benjie Schiller pieces with NFTY.

You know, it really kind of, we had a nice span and Adina also came with a whole lot and so we just started teaching the kids songs. We would start in unison or maybe we'd introduce a round or a second part once the choir... now our choir is thirty strong in a given year. So and part of its success is that we are, our synagogue has most of its members come on Shabbat morning, not on Friday night. So because I wasn't the cantor in the *shul*, I could leave services on a Shabbat morning and we could have a choir that met before the kids' *t'filot* on Saturday morning. And so we were able to get them at a time when a lot of kids were in the building. And the adults were there in the sanctuary and we could bring the kids up at the end of services a few times a year to sing for the congregation and they loved it.

So that, you know, part of that was replicable and other parts were not replicable but I think the parts that are replicable are the parts, we spent only a half an hour a week with the kids - that's it! And we taught them musical terminology and LOTS of Jewish texts and all of the Hebrew and we would do kind of erratic things. We would sing in Zulu and Uganda and Yiddish and Ladino, and you know, whatever. But we really gave them a good education and we demand a lot of them even though they are little kids. And we tell them, we ask only for a half hour of your attention, that's it. It's not so bad.

What age ranges to do you work with in your synagogue choir?

Adina and I used to have a big *machloket*, a disagreement over what age to start them at. I said start them in second grade when they can read and she said no, get them early and hook them in. So there were times when we had kindergarteners in the group. So now we start them in first grade. Some of the first graders are precocious and they can do it and other, it takes them a little while of getting on stage and picking their nose, and you know. But mostly they are able to rise to the occasion so it's first to sixth or sometimes seventh [grade].

Our kids, the kids in our synagogue, the majority of them go to [Jewish] day school. So by seventh grade they are so busy going to b'nei mitzvah all over the place that they just don't have consistent attendance. We have an occasional seventh grader that will stay but mostly it stops in sixth. What we do is, we try to, you know, we'll do some things, either a chorus of a piece or the melody of a piece that everybody will do, and then we'll take the older kids that have been in for a while and really can do more, and

we'll give them a little more wordy verse. Or, we'll give them a nice harmony, or we'll let them do things in a solo ensemble.

You know, it's not like we have a chamber choir and a regular choir or anything. It's all one big choir but you know one of the perks that we do because their Hebrew is so good is Naomi Shemer's "Aleph Bet" song. All of the kids in Israel do it in like first grade but the verses are extremely wordy. The chorus is not wordy at all and there is all this speaking of the alphabet in Hebrew. So our little kids, our first through third grade kids will be shouting out the *aleph bet* and the older kids will be doing one of the verses because they can really learn them. You know, or things like that.

We do a lot of work with two and three part rounds. And we will, you know, take some of our older kids and strategically place them in a group or have some of them be section leaders so that each one can kind of you know semi-conduct one of the sections. And that makes them feel good. We do give them opportunities to shine. It's not that we have like separate repertoire for them necessarily.

One thing, look, we were invited to sing on, there is a cantor by the name of Nathaniel Hershtick, a like fifteenth-generation cantor, and he actually lives here in Teaneck. Marsha [Edelman's] colleague Vivian Lazar had sent him our way because he had been in touch with her, he had wanted to s kids to record on his next CD one of the pieces he was doing. And she said one of my HaZamir kids could do it be he said "No, no, no, I want young kids to do it." So she sent him my way. And we felt like a recording studio in the city was going to be a little too much for the small kids so we made that a third grade and up venture. Adventure actually, and it was cool. They got to go into the Avatar studios in Manhattan and record each of them with their own headphones and microphone - it was very exciting.

We will punctuate each season with something really special like that. A couple of years ago we brought in someone who recorded them doing, you know, five pieces. We have a little mini-cd, like a sampler of a few pieces. And he came in and he did recording in our *shul* and put down some piano tracks and some other instrumental tracks afterward and did a whole mix and it was lovely. It cost a few thousand dollars but, you know, that was from start to finish really. From recording them, and mixing, and adding all the instrumentation, and all the reproduction. So it really wasn't, it was a pretty low-budget kind of thing. Or, sometimes we'll have a choral concert at the end of the year with them and the HaZamir group, and the adult group that we have, or something like that.

Do a lot of your younger choir members go on to join your HaZamir chapter?

Absolutely. Our Tzipporei Shalom is a feeder choir, a big feeder choir for our HaZamir chapter. I absolutely agree with the HaZamir line, which is - our kids get enrichment through HaZamir and then they come back to their school or *shul* choir and they take that enrichment back with them. I don't think it detracts at all. It's like any other enrichment program.

Look, they get the opportunity in HaZamir to do things they can't do in a local teen choir. You know, they get to be part of a huge network of twenty-one chapters in the states and five chapters in Israel. There are going to be three hundred kids together on the stage of Avery Fischer Hall this year. So we have a chapter, my HaZamir chapter has about thirty kids in it. It's a large chapter by HaZamir standards but there are very small

chapters with five or ten kids. But these kids get to be a part of that, yes, that environment and being part of that smaller choir but then they get to do regional, and national, and international retreats and festivals and that big gala concert. And, you know, it's a whole other level and a whole other experience for them.

Socially, they bond, and Jewishly, it's a trans-denominational thing, which is phenomenal. There is all this mutual tolerance and respect. You get kids who fit this fine and other kids for whom, you know, this is their only Jewish activity. So in that sense, I mean, it's just lovely. Now look, I've had kids in my children's choir whom I have not accepted in HaZamir. That's a little tough.

HaZamir is an auditioned choir and you have to meet the minimum standards whereas my kids choir, my little kids choir is not auditioned. Anybody can come. We try but we do have some tone-deaf kids. But look, regardless I feel, in your email you said something about this being a kind of ... I first of all feel that music can be such an effective on-ramp to other Jewish activities. Look, we have people who have joined our synagogue because of the kids' choir because it's gotten a reputation and if that's what gets them in the door - phenomenal! And remember, I got involved with NFTY because they did a lot of music. So whatever is your entry way into anything Jewish, is you know, 150% legitimate.

So HaZamir is a separate entity. Because I'm at that synagogue we meet at that synagogue but that's not usually the model that they use. They don't like it to be affiliated with any particular denomination and they don't want any Orthodox kid to say "I won't go to a Reform *shul*," or a Reform kid to say, "Oh my goodness..." or whatever. But I keep it very independent. We just use the space. The *shul* has been very nice about letting us use the space for free and it's a whole separate entity.

But at the end of the year we do a couple of things. We will occasionally sing at a nursing home or something and we bring out frail, home-bound seniors from here once a year for a luncheon and we'll perform at that. And at the end of the year we generally will do some kind of a choral concert and often it is with the kids and the HaZamirniks and the adult choir. And that's like HaZamir's way of saying thank you to the synagogue for hosting us all year. We kind of give back that way.

Some HaZamir chapters do not do any local performances because they don't even have a full four parts. I'm lucky. I have, of my thirty kids, I have four tenors and five or six basses, which is incredible! This year we are about thirty in Tzipporei Shalom and thirty in HaZamir. It varies each year but I do find that really, you know ... look, our Tzipporei Shalom gets people, gets kids dragging their parents out of the house in the morning to get to *shul* on time! They've got to get to choir practice so, "Come on, wake up! You've got to get me there on time!"

We still meet on Shabbat mornings at ten in the morning even though I am now an ordained cantor. But we have a very unique synagogue where I don't actually *daven* every week. And even if I did, I'd be able to sneak out of the Torah service and that's when we meet. Sometimes if I *daven schacharit*, I know I have to be out of there by 10:00 and if I *daven musaf* I know I can get there after 10:30 and we meet from 10:00 to 10:30 so it works.

But look, we know a lot of people who have totally different models that also work. "We have a lot of people who are coming on Sunday mornings for religious school,"

- that's when you have your choir. If you have a lot of people who are coming on Friday nights for Kabbalat Shabbat, you can figure out a half hour when you can meet the kids on a Friday night then. Any time that you've got them in the building, you know, is a good time to kind of, see if you can get them together to sing.

Do you think a similar program could be duplicated in any community? What would a synagogue need in order to be successful?

The specific model that we have chosen is maybe specific to our unique synagogue as a fact that neither of us were officiating upstairs, so we could be downstairs with the kids. And in terms of just timing. But I think there are a lot of parts of it that can be duplicated and that's what we expressed in this article in CJ Voices and in various workshops we've done. There are certain things that are definitely replicable. Look, if you have a smaller choir, what we do a lot of times is we bring them up at the end of services and they do three songs. If they are really not so strong on one of the songs and maybe it's a two or three part round, we'll turn around and teach it to the entire congregation. And the kids will be the "leaders" but we have the whole congregation singing this round now instead. And so there are certain, you know, tricks of the trade like that which we have started to employ over time and they're absolutely replicable.

Did you ever experiment with having your choristers read from music?

So one year I had decided, wouldn't it be nice for the kids to have binders? And even if they don't read music we could give them the lyrics, sometimes in Hebrew, sometimes in English, sometimes transliterated or whatever. Well, these little kids got so busy with those stupid binders that they weren't able to look up and see the conductor. So after a couple of months we scratched that idea!

We decided, sometimes when there are a lot of lyrics we will just give out a sheet with the lyrics on it. And occasionally if the parents read music and they ask us to send them the music, we will send them the music for something. More often than not, we are just handing out the lyrics. Sometimes I'll email it during the week and say, "Here they are in case you want to print them out or if the kids want to practice it." But mostly we just drill there and then and if it's something that is very wordy either in Hebrew or in English, we will hand out a lyrics sheet. But then collect it at the end of the day because a) they are going to lose it and b) we don't want them ... we want them "off book."

They never have a sheet of music or lyrics in front of them when they are performing. Kids are sponges also. They memorize so quickly - I'm so jealous of their ability to do that! So they can have a lot of complex lyrics. We did - it was so funny. We have a veteran's Shabbat around Veteran's Day every year and so we put together this melody of armed forces songs, you know from the United States. But you know, who knows the lyrics to "Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder?" But these kids, you know, we had four different songs, we made them into a medley and these kids within two weeks they were totally off the sheets and they had the lyrics down. It was phenomenal!

How do you find repertoire for your kids choir?

We just look and listen to everything. There might be a HaZamir song that's simple enough that we can simplify it a little more for them. I always think a round is your

friend. There is a transcontinental book of rounds and there is a round in every single Velvet Pasternak book or Shireinu. There are so many rounds that are out there and they are great because then you don't have to, it's not like you are learning harmony. You are learning the melody and then signing at different times. So rounds and cannons are wonderful for kids' choirs, I think.

I think that one of the biggest mistakes that children's choir directors make is over-reaching on repertoire. You know, they want the kids to be a choir and so they're having them do these three or four part pieces and they are just not equipped to do that. We start simple, we start unison, and then maybe we add one harmony. We start unison but then maybe teach them an entire three parts of a round but sing it in unison until they have it coming out their ears and then split them up and have them come in at different points to sing it in a round. I mean, adult choirs do it too.

Look, I just took over the adult choir in our synagogue which up until now had been lay led. And the type of singers they get in that choir, I think that they were seriously over reaching. They were doing repertoire that they just were not capable of doing well. And so I said, "Look, first thing we have to do is pull back. We have to master blending well. And staying on pitch, because it's an a cappella choir." You know, there are all these things we have to master and you can't master them when you are working on such complex repertoire. You have to simplify things. So we tend to employ that with the kids too.

We really get them to master simpler things first and then we'll add layers to it later if we feel they are ready for it. But we'll ... while we are there we'll tell them what the Hebrew means, and teach them about staccato, and dynamics, and they have clean entrances, and clean cutoffs, and they know to look at their conductor. You know, all those things that are like raising the bar that you tend to say they were too little to learn, but they do it. They really can.

Would you say the kids gain a sense of Jewish values from the choir? How are those taught or transmitted?

Oh, absolutely. First of all. The sense of community. The sense of, you know, we are one choir, nobody should be standing out. Yes, occasionally we have a soloist or occasionally we have a small ensemble, but you want to be blending with your neighbor. We teach mutual respect and if someone makes a mistake, no one is allowed to laugh at them. Those kind of humanistic, not necessarily Jewish, values.

But we are teaching Jewish text all the time because, you know, a lot of the popular things we sing are from liturgy, or from biblical quotes, or they're just popular Israeli songs. Or we'll teach them about a community from Uganda that's also Jewish but here's how they sing "Hineh Mah Tov," you know? So they're getting an education about Jewish cultures all over the world, about Jewish music. We'll say this is a Yiddish thing from eastern Europe but here's a piece of Ladino for you and you know, there are people who speak that language too. So absolutely, every step in every piece of music is an opportunity for learning.

What are your strategies for recruiting members? What are some of the challenges?

Um, listen we bring them up to sing for the entire congregation. That in itself is a recruitment tool, probably three, four times a year. This year it was an incredible - it was more, we were singing every week because there were kids who were either still in Tzipporei Shalom or who had just graduated Tzipporei Shalom who were being bar or bat mitzvah. So the families would ask Tzipporei Shalom to sing at the bar or bat mitzvah at the end of services. One week after another we were trying to come up with new repertoire. Normally, without all of those b'nei mitzvah, we would usually choose three or four dates through the course of the year where we would perform just two or three pieces at the end of services. And often it would be two pieces on our own and then a third piece that we would teach the congregation and then they would sing with us. So they didn't need to master an hour's worth of concert repertoire.

So you think their visibility in services has been the most helpful?

I think, I mean they are visual and auditory and [other kids] they see a group up there that is so appreciated and so enthusiastically received that kids get into first grade and they know they can join Tzipporei Shalom, and they do. You know, not all of them stay. Occasionally we get kids who will self elect out because they are just not, they're not that musical, or they don't want to get up that early, or their parents don't want to get up that early. But yea, we've been pretty consistent since those first two years when we were six and then maybe ten, but in the last, I think say, eight to ten years we've been between twenty-five and forty kids every year, depending on the demographic.

What have been some of the rewards of working with the young singers in your choirs?

There are so many! The little ones or the big ones? Every single part of it is rewarding. I mean it's, for me the reward of educating anybody in anything is when I get to see how much they've learned. I mean yes, it's the product, it's the music, but the reward for me really is when I see how much these kids have mastered on how many different levels. Jewishly, musically, you know everything in terms of ... it builds community in an incredible way. Amongst the kids, they bond. But also, the kids to the adults.

And the HaZamir kids, that's a whole other level of musical excellence that they wouldn't get elsewhere and that being with a group of three hundred kids on the stage of Aver Fischer Hall allows you to do things that you wouldn't be able to do otherwise. And there too, the mutual respect, and admiration, and everything. And the trans-denominational nature of everything is just so, on so many different levels its such a rewarding and enriching experience. Yea.

Is there anything I may have forgotten to ask or anything you'd like to add?

It's really wonderful. Look, sometimes a lot of our kids are in day school so they have choirs there, but for the kids who don't have that, you know, this can be their on-ramp to having a Jewish experience. And it's an incredible on-ramp. Our Tzipporei Shalom has been the highest rated program in our *shul* in like three or four surveys running.

We get t-shirts at the beginning of every year and we have a logo of little birdies on a branch that somebody designed for us. Those kinds of things are great. Adina, my co-director of Tzipporei Shalom is a cantor's kid, and a singer herself, but her business is branding, she is a corporate brander. So she looks at everything as, "How can we brand this?" We give out trophies at the end of every year, t-shirts at the beginning of the year. We've got a great logo and the t-shirts are colorful. So there are all those things too that create a little bit of hoopla and excitement.

APPENDIX F

Interview with Cantor Richard Cohn

Temple Emanu-El of Dallas has a long tradition of choral excellence. What was the program like when you arrived and how have you seen it evolve over the years?

This is my ninth year here. When I first came here, we had a small youth choir that met after religious school on Sundays, so it was supplemental. One of the big issues in youth choirs has been the increasing necessity of having it be supplemental to the curriculum. And where it is supplemental, the challenges of being successful are greater because we are competing for kids' time with other activities and with their parents' need to get them on to the next thing. And I think that the kind of children's choir assumptions that existed here when Simon Sargon was the music director certainly no longer existed by the time I got here.

Now those children would sing in multiple parts, and did, and we were still doing repertoire from printed scores for youth choir but you know we've been through a period of time when that became more difficult and kids who were less familiar with printed music. And you know, we are kind of having to do things now where you get a fresh start and you use pieces with multiple parts to get kids into polyphonic music, but not necessarily children's choir scores per se. And we tend to program them with special guest artists' visits and other kinds of things where the artists are providing the music and we have to teach them repertoire that is chosen for that purpose, rather than building a youth choir program in the old style.

I guess, you know, it's the adaptation of the youth choir culture to the contemporary music environment has not fully taken place, and I wonder what, you know, I'm interested in your thoughts about that as well. But I will say there's a tension between the assumptions of youth education, Jewish camping, and the youth choir as we used to know it. It doesn't mean it can't be done, it just requires someone in the mix who is able to maybe teach multi-part music by ear to the kids and get them excited about it. Or in our case, if we do something with adult choir and they learn an independent part that is for them. They begin to understand their part as being one strain in a bigger texture which is kind of a way of introducing them to choral music as opposed to sing-along music.

What is the youth choir program like, as it exists currently?

They are working with Cantor Leslie Niren, who is their leader right now, and some they meet after [religious] school. We have been unable to forge something ... its interesting when you try to have the youth choir meet during school. Unless there is a dedicated elective period, parents are very ... at first they are enthusiastic because the kids are getting their choir experience without having to have supplemental time, but then they get squeamish because the kids are missing instructional time in other areas and are being pulled out from that.

We've gone back to an after religious school model immediately following Sunday morning religious school where some parents provide a snack for the kids and they stay and work with Cantor Niren on whatever is coming up. But as I was saying before, its very much project based rather than repertoire based. So whatever they have coming up,

that's what they are learning. So when Noah Aronson was here, they were learning some of his "Left Side of the Page" music, which is in parts. I mean, he does have some pieces that are very simple in multi-part texture but the kids weren't necessarily ... we don't have enough kids to right now to necessarily divide them in multiple parts except in certain kinds of rounds and things.

What are the age ranges of the kids involved in the youth choir?

I know she's doing, it's probably about first through fourth grade. There might be a couple of fifth graders. I'm getting petitioned by a kid in the sixth grade who are not in it, for a separate group for middle grades, which is an interesting thing which has arisen and we need to decide what to do about it. Sixth graders feel like singing with the first graders is too pediatric for them. But there's kind of a ring leader of the sixth graders who has approached us about doing something separate with them. So we are working on that, and then what it would look like, what they would be learning that is different.

And a lot of it depends on personality. There have to be kids who are kind of the ring leaders, is my impression. So I was at Cantor Susan Caro's installation as the new cantor in Reston, Virginia in November and she has a similar situation with some high school kids who are self-starters; and because of the initiative of one of those kids they formed an a cappella multi-part high school group. But they, I really think for cantors now a days, identifying the kids who can become the convener, co-convener, is really important. Or developing kids who will be the convener who are popular enough to not be perceived as being outside the social group. So, anyway, Cantor Niren meets with that group which probably, I could tell you how many kids are on the roster at this point, roughly fifteen I'm thinking.

How long are the choir rehearsals?

They are doing about a half hour rehearsal.

Do you feel like that is a sufficient amount of time?

I used to think I could do longer than that. If they are not choral singers, if they haven't been singing in choir at school, they tend to drift elsewhere. Twenty-three on the roster right now for the youth choir. That's been on the ascent and it helps for them to have somebody young working with them.

But in terms of HaZamir, the only kids that I've been successfully able to get into HaZamir have been the kids who are the more advanced musicians, who are going to the arts magnet, or have made choral music one of their areas of specialization. The average kid is less likely to sign up for HaZamir although this year in HaZamir Dallas there are a couple of kids of that sort who are really trying to learn how to read music from scratch, as part of HaZamir, which is not ideal! They have a lot of music to learn by part and it's music of complexity. Anyway, you know, I have tended in my career to identify the kids who are doing more advanced musical work and give them opportunities to participate in mainstream worship of the congregation as collaborators or as specialists.

So are most of those kids getting supplemental music education privately?

Correct. They play an instrument or they, you know. But it has taken different forms, they are not all song leaders per se. I've had really good experience working with high school students who are instrumentalists over my career. You have to develop materials for them but they are willing on a limited basis to do a certain amount of synagogue playing. Often it starts with confirmation and they are willing to continue in some form.

Given the limitations that exist, do you think there's a way for youth choirs to bring kids a Jewish education with more complex religious concepts, liturgy, history, theology, etc?

That's something in which I think HaZamir excels. Matti and Vivian are, I mean you don't need me to tell you what their goals are. But they really want to sustain music of complexity or of, I mean I hate to use that term, but music of the Jewish choral tradition and music being composed today for Jewish choirs that has a point of connection with kids with more sophisticated music interests. And to depend their Jewish spirituality and connection to text.

It's great that you see kids in both the synagogue program and HaZamir. How do you address concerns about the two groups competing for kids' involvement, spreading them too thin?

Well that's the principal that's involved and it has been true that kids in my synagogue who have been in HaZamir have not diminished their participation in the life of the synagogue. So, there is some truth that the cantor's connection, whether he or she is the conductor or associated officially in some way ... you know, and I think something for HaZamir to consider, is how to get these cantors, if they are not the director, to feel empowered in the network so their kids' experience is unified like that.

But we have had challenges with kids in other synagogues getting involved in HaZamir and in fact wanting to decrease their participation in... largely due to the lack of time. They find HaZamir more compelling because of the peer relationships and the overall experience and they want to cut back, and it really makes their cantors crazy. These are kids on whom their cantors rely, not only for musical events but for liturgical things. Especially in Conservative or traditional communities where these are the kids whom they are expecting to *lain* or do other chant-related tasks, and they don't want them getting disconnected from the *shul*.

How did you get involved with HaZamir initially?

I had, for many years, been one of the main conductors at the North American Jewish Choral festival. So I was really familiar with HaZamir through the festival and through Matti and Vivian and it was only a question of my availability and energy. It wasn't a question of having to get used to it. It's the best project going for late middle school and high school Jewish teens who sing in terms of strong musical experience and completely... the other thing that is brilliant about it is, you know, it's integrative in terms of the communities and it brings kids together from different backgrounds on an even platform that's not sectarian. And that connects them in a strong way to Israelis as well. It's completely inspiring work, so for me it was just availability and time

commitment.

In your estimation, should every synagogue follow the model that Temple Emanu-El has established – with a junior choir feeding into the local HaZamir chapter? What are your thoughts on synagogue a cappella groups or other kinds of synagogue teen choirs?

That's really an outstanding question so I'll give you a conditional answer. I think it really depends on the community because I don't think these things need to be in competition with one another. I think that, you know, depending on where one is serving as a cantor, one's options may vary in this regard. I think it's really important for kids to really feel a connection with their own temple community. So in a perfect world, a cantor could engage the in-house kids in musical activities during their instructional time either through an elective or through, you know, dedicated music time within the regular schedule. Then identify the ones who have limitless enthusiasm for music and will do everything and those kids will definitely do the internal activities and HaZamir if they are interested in choral music per se. But I'm not sure I think that one or the other model is better than the other because you really have to go with what you have, and it's really all about the relationship.

The Synagogue cantor has to be the one with the primary relationships and those primary relationships have to be based on what is going on within the synagogue itself. Then, if those can be linked to the communal activity of things like HaZamir, great. But the core relationship is between the cantor and the congregational kids. So it's hard to say that one is better or less good because they are existing in different domains.

If your goal within the synagogue is to get the kids involved in worship for example, at least part of the time, that is not primarily the purpose of HaZamir. Although in HaZamir they might learn a piece that could in theory be done in worship, by far and away most of the time that is not what's happening. Most of the HaZamir repertoire is concert repertoire or is worship repertoire not currently in use in synagogues. So as a cantor you really have to focus on what your goals are. So you know, if it's got a strong component of prayer learning or worship participation, then it has to take an internal form that suits what you are doing in that environment. And the HaZamir experience can be supplemental but cannot replace that.

In my opinion, the kids in our congregation who have been successful in HaZamir have been successful in multiple ways both in the synagogue and in the community. And over a multi-tiered platform, so these kids are not just singers often, as I've said. And so for me, I've felt fortunate that our temple kids who have been in HaZamir have been high context music people. They are an asset to HaZamir and HaZamir benefits them. Kids who have less musical training can succeed in HaZamir and get their musical training in HaZamir but the kinds of things they can do successfully in the synagogue are different from the kids with advanced musical skills.

APPENDIX G

Interview with Ann Carter-Cox

What was it like when you started the youth choir program at Second Congregational Church?

First of all, I started with four middle school girls. The way I did it was I ran it sort of like a youth group for a while with those four kids. Obviously we weren't singing any services but we met, and we would sing and we ate pizza. We went to the theater, basically it was like a youth group for these four kids. Then of course I was also teaching [voice lessons] in the community. And so by the time I got comfortable with what I wanted to do with the program, I knew I didn't want a "come one come all" sing. But I knew I'd have some political problems with having an auditioned group so I said to myself, "How am I going to do that?" So I recruited from my [voice] students. A lot of the beginning of that choir came from my student body. They were not church members necessarily at all.

How do you balance singing obligations with giving them time to learn and build skills?

Yes, that's especially true with young people. That's the way the English cathedral system works. They have a pretty limited repertoire actually because those little kids are generally learning by rote and the little kids are copying the oldest kids. So you have the twelve year olds whose voices are about to change – the six year olds are merely parroting and copying what they older kids are doing. By the time they reach twelve, they can read music. But when they are six they are not reading music. So they have a fairly limited repertoire.

I got so tired as a young singer of people saying, "What do you play?" And instrumentalists who would discount singers as musicians, and I got very tired of it and when I had the opportunity at Second Church I said, "People who go through my program are at least going to have the opportunity to learn how to be musicians."

So you started with only a few girls, how did it grow to a multi-choir system?

It's sort of patterned after the Royal School of Church Music system. So that you bring the youngest ones in as novices and they are able to progress and the program had a staggered overlap of rehearsal times. So that the youngest kids came in at say 3 pm and rehearsed for fort-five minutes and the last fifteen minutes the next oldest group came it. So that the youngest group had the opportunity to sing with the next oldest group. And then that happened all they way, then the middle schoolers came in and had their hour and a half, or whatever it was and then the last half hour, kids from the thigh school came in and the middle schoolers had the opportunity to sing with the oldest kids. What it does is it gives them a goal. They hear what they are after and what happens if they stay. It also helps them learn their music because they are copying what they are hearing from the older kids. So that's how that structure happened.

What was the age break down of each choir?

Well, we had K-2 because they are so young they really, a half hour is enough. They only sang, they didn't sing very often. Maybe twice a year, not much. They got in the habit of getting there [to rehearsals]. They grew accustomed to being in that [rehearsal] room once a week. And so that's where they belonged. Then the next level was 3rd through 5th I think. Then there was 6th-8th grades. And then 9th-12th. There were four groups, roughly like the school break down.

It builds on itself. Because the little kids can't sing much when they start. But when they, they can sit there and sing with the next oldest group and sing something a little more complicated. And then the next group can sing something a little bit more complex. Until the middle schoolers hear what the high school kids are doing and then if they have even the least bit of musical ability they are thinking, "Yea, that's what I want to do. I want to be able to sing Thomas Tallis."

How long were each of the choirs' rehearsals?

I think the tiniest kids were like a half an hour. They couldn't, in fact I think most of that was taken up with whose birthday is it, and getting them to sit down and get their music. That's another thing I always thought was important. It's really important for even those little tiny kids to have music in their hands. They are not reading it, they can't read the words even for the most part, but they must have the tools in their hands.

So the littlest kids were a half hour, then forty-five with the next oldest, and I think the middle schoolers were at least an hour and a quarter by themselves and another fifteen minutes with the high school kids. So I think they were an hour and a half. Middle schoolers are perfectly capable of concentrating for an hour and a half. Then the high school kids were there for another hour and a half. Then of course the Mixed Ensemble [elite auditioned choir] was there after that. But those were kids who would have stayed there until ten at night to sing. They didn't mind. I'm sure that was another hour.

How do you keep the littlest kids engaged?

Games, a lot of musical games. Never give them real music, give them photocopies because they have hot, sweaty hands. I don't think I gave anyone real music until they got to high school. They need to be kept busy. Do things like, march around the room to the rhythm of the music, whatever you can do to keep them occupied. And believe me, that time goes pretty fast. By the time they get in the seat, it's already ten minutes. By the time you check in, you're not getting a lot of music time. But again, with those tiniest kids, you are saying to them and they are learning that on Thursdays they belong in that choir room.

They need a model. They need to participate with the older kids but you can't lump them all together because the oldest kids will be so bored they will quit right away and the younger kids will be so frustrated they will quit right away. They don't learn at the same rate. It just doesn't work.

How do you know when to transition from one choir to multiple?

Don't forget that the whole time you are doing this, the kids are all growing. At what point? I think you have to work with the kids you have. If you have fifteen kids and you have six five year olds, already you're going to have to break that program down to an older group and an older group. Unless you say, "I'm just going to start this program with the six year olds." You are going to have an age span there and you have to break them down by age anyway.

How did theory teaching happen?

Either at kids' voice lessons or I had group theory lessons on a separate day. I'd have level one at 9 am then level two at 10, etc. By the time you got to level four, that's mostly advanced sight reading and theory that most kids aren't interested in, mostly I did that on an individual basis. Most kids burnt out by level three because that got to be pretty technical with major and minor scales, triads, that kind of stuff. If kids got to that point, most said, "That's enough."

Where did you find time to do a separate day of theory teaching?

It was a passion of mine. And it was always free for people. It is a passion of mine to turn young singers into musicians and it is absolutely linked to the negative feedback I got as a kid. People hear you're a singer and violinists look at you like, "Okay, whatever."

How did you recognize the theory levels and years of membership publically? We used to wear ribbons of different colors. Where did that come from?

First of all, we had to have some kind of designation because kids like other people to know what they've done. So people out in the congregation see your red ribbon and they see you've done something. There is an old tradition in the cathedral system that after you've gone through your first year you get your cotta [white robe]. As far as the theory levels, I made that up. I knew we needed a visible sign. So with the kids in the program at the time, I asked them what colors each level should be.

How did you incorporate music theory as part of regular rehearsals?

I always tried. The blackboard was always there. If we were doing something in a key, we did something to reinforce what they were doing in their Saturday classes. So if they were having trouble sight reading they could forget about words for a while and try it on solfeggio. I am a huge believer in solfeggio because it works. It is such an invaluable tool. On Thursday I would say, "Let's solfeg this." And we always used movable "Do."

And I'm a big believer in sight-reading. I mean that's the whole point. If you are going to learn all this, the whole point is to be able to pick up a piece of music and be able to read it.

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