



# To Life, 250: A Choral Celebration of America

## The Synergy of Traditional Jewish Values and American Life as Expressed in American Choral Music

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Dr. Elayne Robinson Grossman  
Conductor and Music Director

Over the past 250 years, American Jews have confronted the challenges and opportunities of immigrating to a new society and modernising into a new world.

They have adjusted by responding with innovation based on tradition, reinterpretation based on resistance, and renewal based on long established laws and concepts. This can be heard musically in today's program: Every song that we sing today has come from a Jewish concept.

### **Amerike di Prekhtike (America the Beautiful)**

Arr. Mark Zuckerman (b. 1948)

Arranger Mark Zuckerman notes on his website<sup>1</sup>:

*Immigrants were eager to adopt the secular holidays of America, especially July Fourth, commemorating their own struggle for freedom as well as their new country's. The Jewish immigrants often translated the American holiday songs into Yiddish, as with Samuel Ward's famous hymn "America the Beautiful" (Amerike di prekhtike).*

Zuckerman is an award-winning, prolific New Jersey composer of opera, chamber music, and choral arrangements. His recent works include *Civilization Cannot Go Back* (from *A Better World*), which Sharim v'Sharot premiered in May 2023, and three Yiddish Hanukkah arrangements which are featured on *Miracle of Miracles*, a new recording by Chicago A Cappelle released in Fall 2023. Zuckerman's Yiddish choral arrangements are widely performed nationally and internationally.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.mazicmusic.com](http://www.mazicmusic.com)

## The Bill of Rights

Jay Gorney (1896–1990)

The Bill of Rights has been a favorite song of Sharim v'Sharot since our 2006 seminar, “American Democracy Inspires Jewish Music & Poetry: A Lecture in Word and Song,” held at Princeton University.

Composer Jay Gorney (born Abraham Jacob Gornetsky) came to America with his family shortly after witnessing the Bialystok pogrom as a child. After serving in the U.S. Army during World War I, Gorney abandoned his law career to compose for theater; he is perhaps best known for *Brother Can You Spare a Dime?* Gorney wrote *The Bill of Rights* to help his father study for his citizenship exam. It appeared in *Meet the People: A Musical Revue*, which premiered in New York City on December 25, 1940, and was recorded by Paul Robeson. When Gorney was summoned to the House Un-American Activities Committee in May 1953, he stood and answered the Committee's questions by singing this very song, before turning and walking out of the chamber!

When we talk of the US Constitution, we think of it as “the law of the land.” But from where does that phrase originate? In Exodus 12:49 we are taught that there shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger that dwells among you. To live a Jewish life is to live a life of social responsibility. In diaspora, Jews learned to be responsible to the civil law, as long as civil law did not reject Jewish practices. The phrase “Dina d'malkhuta dina” stems from the prophet Jeremiah's letter to the Babylonian exiles. “Seek the peace of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in the peace thereof you shall have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7). In other words, the principle that “the law of the Government [in civil cases] is law” (or “the law of the land is the law”) is a tenet of Jewish religious law.

Following the Magna Carta of 1215, the phrase “law of the land” has been used in various state constitutions, eventually being used in the Supremacy Clause of the United States Constitution, 1789.

Jews arrived in America before the Revolutionary war and fought alongside George Washington. Seeking the first promise of the Bill of Rights, freedom of religion, Jews came from various countries to “pray the way they like”. To this day, American Jews pray the prayers of their forebearers, singing a new song in their daily prayers.

## Nachon Libi

Josh Ehrlich (b. 1985)

*Nachon Libi* was commissioned for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sharim v'Sharot: People of Song, in honor of the 100th anniversary of Fred Safir's birth by his wife Lucille and daughter Francine.

Fred Safir was the only child of two Orthodox Jewish parents (Helle and Jules Safir). Born “Manfred Safir” in Berlin in 1924, he fled Nazi Germany with his parents in 1933, at 9 years of age. They lost all of their wealth and possessions, fleeing to France with only what

they could carry. Most of his extended family perished in the Holocaust. After many years there and a bar mitzvah in Paris, they were forced to escape again to Portugal, where they were able to get a visa to Brazil. After WWII, now as a young man, he and his parents were finally able to arrive in the US. He moved around from Brooklyn, to CA and Queens before settling on Long Island with his wife, Lucille and three children (Francine, Joel and Howard). Despite his traumatic upbringing, he remained a very warm, loving, positive, funny, family man, with a love of Judaism and Jewish music. For this we honor him with a composition by Josh Ehrlich that reflects his positive nature about life, love and music, despite all of his family's life's challenges.

Composer Cantor Josh Ehrlich chose Psalm 108 for the Safir commission and imbued it with joyous energy reminiscent of Fred's wholehearted love of life and music. Upon learning that Fred's father, Jules, was a violinist who played under the baton of Maestro Leonard Bernstein, Ehrlich selected a text in which the psalmist's song calls upon the harp and lyre and "awakes the dawn!" (Ps. 108:3). *Nachon Libi* will be performed in June 2026 at the Cantor's Assembly Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

*My heart is firm with God. I will sing and chant a hymn with all my soul.  
Awake the harp the lyre; I will wake the dawn.  
I will praise you among the people, God, and I will chant a hymn to you among the nations.  
Your loving kindness is greater than the sky and your truth reaches the heavens.*

—Nachon Libi, Psalm 108:2–5

### **The Lady with the Lamp**

Max Helfman (1901–1963)

*The Lady with the Lamp*, by the Polish-born Jewish American composer Max Helfman, is a beautiful expression of immigrants' hopes for freedom and opportunity. Helfman used text by the noted poet Emma Lazarus (1849–1887), who wrote the 1883 poem *The New Colossus* to raise funds for a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, a gift from France. Lazarus repurposed the Statue's meaning, and it came to symbolize the United States of America as The Mother of Exiles, welcoming the downtrodden fleeing persecution and poverty. The pedestal was engraved and installed in 1903.

### **The Ballad of the Triangle Factory Fire — Bread and Roses**

Moishe Rosenfeld (b. 1949) and  
Zalmen Mlotek (b. 1951)

These songs are from the 1982 production *The Golden Land*, which has been performed over the years in Yiddish and in English, using contemporary popular songs to tell the story of Yiddish immigration to the United States from the Pale of Settlement (ca. 1900) through

the difficulties of sweatshop factories, the stock market crash of 1929, the Holocaust, and various historic immigrations to America.

Zalman Mlotek and Moshe Rosenfeld later expanded the production to a full musical for a 2017, July 4th opening at the National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene's seasonal production at the Museum of Jewish Heritage.

The two songs presented today are about the labor movement. They demonstrate how America shaped its Jewish immigrants, and how in return its Jewish immigrants helped to shape America. The first song tells of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire on Saturday, March 25, 1911 in New York City. It was one of the deadliest industrial disasters in which 146 workers died in the West Village due to unsafe and cruel conditions, including locking windows and doors. Workers were chained to their sewing machine stations to prevent them from taking unauthorized breaks. 123 women and 23 men, aged 14 to 23, immigrants of various nationalities, died by smoke inhalation or by jumping or falling to their deaths. Many Sharim v'Sharot singers have a family connection to the Triangle Factory fire, and the site is now a New York City and National Landmark.

The fire marked a major change in the labor rights movement which demanded safety standards and increased the growth of Unionism in various industries. Frances Perkins, who later became US Secretary of Labor, wrote after witnessing the fire: "There was a stricken conscience of public guilt... Moved by this sense of stricken guilt, we banded ourselves together to find a way by law to prevent this kind of disaster."

The New York State Legislature passed 36 new laws, including safety regulations and sanitation codes, child labor laws, and restricted work hours<sup>2</sup>.

These rules are in line with Jewish laws of labor, which require that employees, children, "strangers among us, and even our beasts of burden" must have the right to rest on the Sabbath,<sup>3</sup> and that workers must be paid fairly and in a timely fashion: "You shall not abuse [take advantage of] a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day before sunset, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it."<sup>4</sup>

The 1912 Bread and Roses Strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, was of pivotal significance in America. After a penniless young girl literally lost her scalp due to an industrial machinery accident, the factory owners refused to pay for hospital care. Union solidarity and collective actions amongst largely immigrant workers began on January 11 and lasted two months through a bitterly cold winter. The strike, named after a poem written in 1911 by James Oppenheim, became a general worldwide symbol of the labor movement and now remains a metaphor for economic and social justice. The song was

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<sup>2</sup> <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2011/03/triangle-fire-100-years-ago-triggered-new-laws>

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:10, Exodus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:14

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 24:14-15

recently performed on January 1, 2026 at the inauguration of New York's Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

### **You'll Never Walk Alone**

Richard Rodgers (1902–1979) and  
Oscar Hammerstein (1895–1960)

*You'll Never Walk Alone* concludes Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway musical and film *Carousel*, which is based on the darker version of Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár's Hungarian-language drama *Liliom*, which premiered in Budapest in 1909. *Carousel* was adapted in 1944 to present a much brighter future for its working class lovers, carnival barker Billy Bigelow and millworker Julie Jordan, who both lose their jobs due to their relationship. In the end the couple is given a second chance at a happy life and the musical ends on a hopeful note with two of the most memorable songs of the twentieth century: *If I Loved You*, and *You'll Never Walk Alone*.

Perhaps happy endings are the hope of American life, and perhaps it is the preamble of the US Constitution that makes it so: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

It is also the teaching of the Great Rabbi Nachman of Bretslav (1776–1810): It is a great mitzvah (good deed) to always be happy, to find joy in life, and to make every effort to determinedly work to avoid gloom and depression, even during hard times.

## Our Mission

Sharim v'Sharot was founded in 2000 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We are an independent choir that sings in four-part (or more) harmony. The choir's mission is to promote the performance, preservation, and study of Jewish music, and to educate the public about Jewish music. Our name comes from Ecclesiastes 2:8, and is Hebrew for "People of Song." The choir is a member of the New Jersey Choral Consortium, the Guild for Early Music, and Chorus America. Currently, we rehearse in Lawrenceville, NJ with members from various counties in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Our repertoire includes Jewish music of many eras and countries, from medieval chants to the Italian Renaissance of Salamone Rossi's madrigals, through 19th century liturgical music of Germany, France, and Austria, 20th and 21st century Israeli and American concert works, Broadway, show tunes from the Yiddish theater, Ashkenazi and Sefardic folk music, and modern popular styles. We sing in Hebrew, Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish, French, Italian, and English. We've performed in concert halls, at synagogue celebrations, interfaith services, Jewish community events, Yom HaShoah commemorations, Yiddish clubs, nursing homes, retirement communities, and choral festivals in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. We have held Community Choral Festivals and Young People Jewish Song Writing Contests.

Sharim v'Sharot is deeply committed to the pursuit of equity, diversity, inclusion, and access. All concerts are given in accessible locations. We especially encourage auditions and participation by qualified singers of underrepresented minorities and other individuals who belong to groups that have been historically underrepresented or marginalized within Jewish arts communities.

Sharim v'Sharot is honored to have received grants in 2026 from The Presser Foundation and the Mercer County Local Arts Program and the Jewish Federation of Princeton Mercer Bucks.



Come join us to learn about the variety of Jewish music throughout the centuries and spread the word about Jewish music. You don't have to be Jewish to sing with us. For audition and concert information, or to receive emails about our Concerts, Choral Festival and Folk-Fest Sing-Along and other events, please visit [sharimvsharot.org](http://sharimvsharot.org) or write to [info@sharimvsharot.org](mailto:info@sharimvsharot.org).

## About the Conductor and Music Director

**Dr. Elayne Robinson Grossman** has been Music Director of Sharim v'Sharot Foundation and Conductor of Sharim v'Sharot: People of Song since its inception in 2000. She received a Doctorate of Education and Master of Arts degrees, both with an emphasis on Music and Choral Conducting, and both from New York University. Her Bachelor of Science degree in Voice was earned at Brooklyn College. From 1977-1998, she served as Conductor and Musical Director of the Rottenberg Chorale and Chamber Singers, now called Nashir: The Rottenberg Chorale, at the Elaine Kaufman Cultural Center in New York City. She has often conducted the New York University Alumni Chorale as well as the National Cantors' Choir during several CAJE conferences. For four years she served as Musical Director of Mak'helat Beth Sholom in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Dr. Grossman continues to be in demand as a conductor, voice teacher, vocal coach, and Scholar-in-Residence, having been interviewed in newspapers and on radio stations. A noted choral arranger who studied with Alice Parker z"l at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, Dr. Grossman's arrangements are performed in schools and congregations throughout the country. Dr. Grossman transcribed and edited 51 recorded songs (Altaras Recordings) of Ladino folk singer and composer Flory Jagoda. Thirty nine appear in The Flory Jagoda Songbook: Memories of Sarajevo (Tara Publications, 1993). Her analysis contained in the Songbook will appear in a social studies textbook published by the New York City Department of Education titled *Hidden Voices: Jewish Americans in United States History*.

Dr. Grossman enjoyed teaching children at Abrams Hebrew Academy in Yardley, PA as the band director, teaching wind and brass instruments for 22 years. She previously served as the school's coordinator of *Jewish Music Alive and In Person: Interdisciplinary Programs*. With her husband of 42 years, Rabbi Emeritus of Adath Israel Congregation, Daniel T. Grossman z"l, she has composed, produced, and performed a collection of recorded and published Jewish songs used throughout the country, *Help Us Bake A Challah and Other Songs for Jewish Children*, re-released under the title *Penny in the Pushka*. In addition, they performed *Siman Tov*, a Jewish cultural experience using sign language for hearing and non-hearing audiences. Elayne now teaches voice, piano, woodwinds, and music theory at the Allegra School of Music and Arts in Hillsborough, New Jersey.

## About the Assistant Director

**Daniel Hyman** holds music degrees from Indiana University, Sarah Lawrence College, Queens College/CUNY, and the School For Strings Suzuki violin pedagogy program. He teaches at Brooklyn College/CUNY Prep Center for the Performing Arts, Hunterdon Academy of the Arts in Flemington, and Touro College, where he designed and gave the

course *Jewish Music*. He sings in Sharim v'Sharot, with Monmouth Civic Chorus, and with Cantus Novus in his home town of Yardley, PA. He has recorded numerous classical and contemporary chamber works with pianist/composer Leonard Lehrman, accessible on YouTube. He also premiered Kermit Moore's song cycle *Tetelestai* at NYU's Tenri Cultural Center.

For Long Island Masterworks chorus Daniel coached diction and sang section bass and baritone solos. While teaching at Queens College/CUNY he sang in QC Vocal Ensemble and studied conducting with James John, Maurice Peress and Richard Sang. For the Port (Washington NY) Jewish Center he was a solo baritone and violinist, and choir director. He greatly enjoyed teaching music at the British International School in Kyiv and his cantorial singing at Atikva Tsentr, and also taught strings, choir, and classroom music in the NYC public schools. He loves puzzles and has appeared on NPR's Weekend Edition Sunday puzzle. He is an avid cook, and is learning to keep houseplants alive, gradually.

## About the Pianist

Pianist Gavin Laur has performed across the United States and abroad, at venues including Jaani Kirik in St. Petersburg, Russia, Castle Prösels in Völs am Schlern, Italy, and the Musical Instrument Museum in Scottsdale, Arizona. He holds a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance (Summa cum Laude) from Arizona State University as well as a Master of Arts in Liberal Arts from St. John's College Annapolis. Currently based in Philadelphia, he maintains a large studio of private piano students in and around the city.

## About the Rehearsal Pianist

**Bill Beitmann** began playing piano at the age of 7 under the tutelage of his father. At ages 10-17 he continued private lessons with a piano teacher. Bill recalls playing piano in public as early as in 5th grade where he would play patriotic songs during the morning "Pledge of Allegiance." In middle school, Bill learned to play percussion instruments in the band (the piano was definitely not a marching band instrument!), and in high school he learned to play the sousaphone. Yet, Bill continued playing the piano for his high school stage band, chorus and orchestra. He also accompanied musical productions during his high school and college years.

Bill has been accompanying Sharim v'Sharot for many years and also plays the keyboard in the Cardinal Dougherty Alumni Band. He has performed at the North American Jewish Choral Festival with choirs and assisted by playing the piano at workshops. He lends his pianistic skills at various services and programs as part of the "Mazel Tones" at Adath Israel Congregation, Lawrenceville, NJ, and has accompanied singers and instrumentalists at Beth El Synagogue, East Windsor, NJ, as well as at area churches.

When not at the piano keyboard, he had been seen on the computer keyboard at his day job with the State of New Jersey from which he recently retired. Bill welcomes the opportunity to do more accompanying in the future.