
SHIR DELIGHT

Chanukah Concert



Shirah on stage at the JCC Tenafly.

Shirah in pews at Ahavat Shalom

Special from L.A.

This out-of-town reviewer was fortunate to be in Northern New Jersey the day of “Lights!”, Shirah’s winter concert – a concert in which my own mother happened to be singing. Thus readers should take note of my considerable bias.

What follows is what our current President might call “Fake Reviews”. Before the concert even began, I was invited to attend the pre-concert warm-up and rehearsal. While the choir sounded in excellent form, the songs felt undeveloped, suffering from abrupt transitions. This, I soon learned, was because the choir only had time to practice the beginnings and endings of song. Which reminded me of a Maurice Chevalier quote: “You must start well and you must end well. What is in the middle is not so important, because no one is listening then.”

When it came time for the actual concert, however, I found myself listening to beginnings, endings and middles (though not in that order.) Highlights included three settings of “Haneirot Hallalu”, each with its own spelling, and a spirited rendition of “Chai”. Music Director Marsha Edelman’s introductions were witty and insightful, and accompanist Glenn Gordon accompanied appropriately. The strength of the musicianship was exceeded only by the strength of Shirah’s spirit.

I can only hope my mother enjoyed the hours she sat through my high school choir concerts as much as the hour I spent with Shirah. And speaking of ending well, the post-concert reception featured delicious jelly donuts in honor of Chanukkah. A sweet end to a sweet afternoon.





IN THE GREEN ROOM

Thanks to Judy K for the nosh

Chanukah Concert

Hallelujah! They did it! Shirah gave an outstanding performance according to the audience, the critics and the choir members. After a brief excellent run-through before the concert there was some concern that a good dress rehearsal could presage a bad performance. This, of course, did not happen. Instead, enthusiasm reigned in the green room and accompanied the choir onto the stage where they looked up, didn't breathe, smiled and turned pages silently.

- Glenn was in excellent form.
- Marsha was happy.
- The chair-sitting altos were in good voice. No one commented that they were too loud or too soft.

An audience member asked if the choir travels all over the world singing, like those college a cappella groups. The management has decided to discuss the feasibility of this idea. The commitment to such an endeavor would be overwhelming and keeping concert wear clean could be difficult.





Shirah is a wonderful community choir who

believe they are at least as good as Zamir (if only they had their voices, their numbers). Under Mati's direction they even sang the same music and and struggled to cope with the same bad copies from ancient Israel.

Under Marsha's direction they have taken on a lot of new material, no longer in style Zamir, but finding their own level (down or up) and style.

What truly makes Shirah unique is its potpourri of members. Some don't ever look up, some can't find the place, some never stop commenting, some are raucus, some are late. Some like to shush everyone, others like to rattle stuff. Some sing beautifully and some just sing. They are a community of characters who come together weekly to prepare for their triumphant performances.



Tales of Glenn

A fairly recent addition to the Shirah community is the popular accompanist, Glenn. His Hebrew skills, compared to his piano and vocal skills, are very light. Therefore, when Marsha directed him to start at "*u-mul*" he, instead, found one of the measures of oohs. Makes sense. Then there was the time Glenn did not have p.26 which was why he couldn't find the place. Shortly after that there was a new piece given out and Glenn exclaimed in horror, "I only have 2 pages!" "There are only 2 pages," said Marsha. As for markings, everyone knows the challenges of figuring out who decreed what, when and why and which to ignore. Glenn, encountering one of these obstacles muttered to himself, "It must have been a Mati thing." To which Marsha replied, "He didn't do this piece!"

Marshisms

•Oh no, you're sounding like a choir.

At your tempo 8 days of Chanukah will be over.

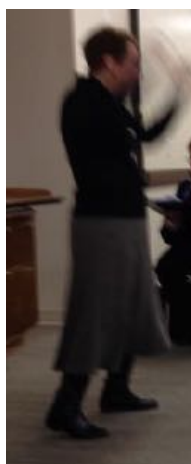
This is a pop song!

- Who's got the tunes the dwarfs?
- Sopranos screech excitedly.
- You can't say ear, say ir.
- If the middle of this piece turned into Hungarian I wouldn't be surprised.
- You passed the written test but a truck crashed into you on the road.
- Whack an alto, not a note!

- There's a difference between a decrescendo and a disappearado.
- Jews celebrate and modulate.
- There's no breath there. Why? Because you want to breathe there.
- Guys, that's the scariest entrance I've heard in a long time.
- You came in at the wrong place with the wrong words. No one would believe this!
- Some people make miracles, you make mush.

WO WO WO

This is one of Marsha's favorite battle cries brought on by her having to explain the same thing yet again after she has already explained it yet again. It's generally delivered in an impressive forte especially when compared to good good good good good. It is unlike NO NO NO NO NO in that it is not so threatening. This semester one of Marsha's oft heard phrases was there's something about these candles.



Dear Dr. Plotznik,

Last week I had a traumatic realization. On Sunday my choir gave a concert. At one point the conductor asked the audience to learn a repetitive phrase, "ya ba bim bom bim bom", and a few more bim boms, to sing along with the choir. As soon as the conductor raised her arms for them to sing they did so with great enthusiasm and musicality. On Tuesday the choir gave a shorter program after a lunch gathering of senior citizens. Again the conductor taught the phrase, raised her arms for the audience to sing and there was -dead silence. An enormous wave of grief engulfed me. It occurred to me then that I might age out of the choir. What if the conductor raised her arms and I couldn't "bim bom"? There has been a lot of talk about trying to get younger people to join the choir and meanwhile I keep getting older. Not sure how to cope.



Aging in NJ

Dear Aging in NJ,

The scenario you describe is fairly common, as is the frightening (and INCORRECT) conclusion you have reached. So thank you for your letter, which gives me the opportunity to alleviate much unnecessary suffering.

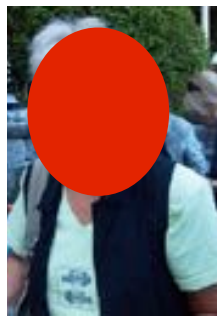
First, it is good to get old. Have you forgotten that the alternative is to be dead? Usually that is worse, at least for some people.

Next, you make an absurd and totally unfounded assumption about senior citizens who do not sing "Bim Bom" when commanded to do so. Do you really think that 40 people are all unable to emit a silly sound when a conductor waves her arms? Could there possibly be another reason for the silence?

Don't you know any senior citizens personally? How many of them really like to be TOLD WHAT TO DO? Most people who live long and healthy lives have learned to think for themselves, and resent being ordered around. So it is absurd to think that their age somehow stopped them from Bim Bombing! Most likely they simply REFUSED due to a healthy dose of independence (ok, ok, maybe so it could be crotchety stubbornness).

Conclusion...if you want to continue singing as you get older, you can show your independent spirit in one of two ways-- choose to sing, or choose to refuse.

(And maybe a psychiatric consult to deal with your somewhat strange catastrophic thinking wouldn't be such a bad idea.)



Dr Plotznik

