This will not be a scholarly article. It is autobiographical and anecdotal – a snapshot of my experiences as a camper and counsellor at Camp Yavneh over the course of nine summers from 1958 to 1966, inclusive. This narrative is colored; these are the impressions of a tween- and teen-ager, remembered some sixty years later. And yet, this coloration may actually be what matters. What impressions were so strong on a young boy that they have stuck over the course of six decades?

Yavneh was (and still is) a co-ed Jewish summer camp in Northwood, NH, founded in 1944, administered through Boston's Hebrew College. This is the mission statement that appears on the camp's website:

> Camp Yavneh is committed to providing a *Klal Yisrael* educational experience in a camp environment where all aspects of life reflect Jewish values. A place for Jewish learning and a fulfilling camp experience for Jewish children.

In my years at Yavneh the camp was totally Hebrew-speaking and Zionist-oriented. It was like an immersive summer-long *ulpan*. But it was not a burden; my friends and I couldn't get enough of it! July and August were the best part of the year.

My last summer at Yavneh was 1966. Two years later I traveled to Israel for the first time. As soon as I landed I was awe-struck. Wow! Israel was just like Camp Yavneh! Slowly it dawned on me that I had it backwards. The people who ran Camp Yavneh intended to make the Yavneh experience a taste of the Israel experience. They intended to transform our identities, and they succeeded

One of the most important projects of the early Zionist pioneers was the creation of the "New Jew" in the land of Israel. The new Jew was everything the stereotypical Eastern European Diaspora Jew was not. Max Nordau had introduced the idea of the "muscular Jew" in 1898 at the Second Zionist Congress. The new Jews were strong, tall, tan, healthy, good-looking. The new Jews, both men and women, were farmers working the land. They were brave fighters.

The educators at Camp Yavneh were working to cement our identity as Jews and our relationship with Israel, what some have called, "Israeli-ness." We campers would become "new Jews." And the leaders of the *yishuv*, as well as the educators at Camp Yavneh, realized that a crucial element in creating the Israeli cultural experience was music.

In 1949 the Israeli educator Menashe Ravina wrote, "Singing in public is one of the best means to unify the masses and to inculcate the new melos being created in our country. Singing in public also has a great value of teaching the Hebrew language to the new immigrants."[1]

There was a body of song known retrospectively as שירי ארץ ישראל, Songs of the Land of Israel, often abbreviated as S.L.I. It was a canon created to be in synchrony with the culture of the *yishuv*. The lyrics of these songs exalted the farmer and the soldier. Situated in the geography of

[1] Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 28.

Erets Yisrael, these were songs of celebration, strength, vitality, dancing—communal songs, emphasizing the "we" over the "me." And the songs themselves not only reflected the culture of the *yishuv*, they served to *create* an invented national identity.

Many of the songwriters also strived for a musical idiom that would be vigorous and free of the baggage of the European ghetto. Their songs were joyous, with fast tempos and dance rhythms. In order to make them sound like authentic "folk songs," they favored "exotic" modes, rather than the scales of European concert music. The ambitus (range) of these songs was narrow, ensuring that they could be sung comfortably by all.

Professor Benedict Anderson coined the term "unisonality" in reference to the ability of music to bring a large group of people together.[2] Think of what happens when thousands of people sing the national anthem at the start of a ball game. Through the act of singing the same words and the same melody at the same time (more or less), individuals, who are in many ways quite different from one another, merge into one voice. This merger, according to Anderson, helps to create an "imagined sense of shared identity," in many cases, creating a shared national identity.

The transmission of the songs within the *yishuv* was accomplished partially through circulation in print and on recordings, but most powerfully through communal sing-alongs, at first in rural settings and in schools and youth group gatherings, and then moving to large urban gatherings. Group singing at Yavneh was based on that model.

In his book, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino asserts that there are two kinds of music, participatory and presentational. He wrote, "In participatory music-making, one's primary attention is on the activity, on the doing, and on the other participants, rather than on [performance,] an end-product that *results* from the activity.[3] … Participatory music is more about the social relations being realized through the performance, social synchrony."[4]

Throughout the 20th century there was an initiative by the Zionist pioneers (and especially the Jewish National Fund [JNF] and the Histadrut) to spread the values of labor Zionism, not only throughout the land of Israel, but to the Diaspora, as well. In part, this was done to encourage *aliyah*. In part, this was done to foster what has been called "Identity Zionism," and in part to create enthusiastic Diaspora support of the Zionist endeavor in the land of Israel.[5] To these ends, the JNF and the Histadrut published song books of *Shirey Erets Yisrael*, and sent them to Diaspora Jews.

---

[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 132.
[3] Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.), 28.
[4] Turino, 35.
[5] Jardena Gartler-Jaffe, "With Song and Hard Work: *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* and the Social Imaginary," *University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought* 6 (2017), 131-152.

Figure 1. *Z'mirot* songbook Cover, World Zionist Organization, 1956.

Figure 1 shows the cover of an Israeli songbook from 1956. It was published by the World Zionist Organization's Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora.
The title proclaims, "Songs for the people (nation), for the youth, and for schools. Summer camps."

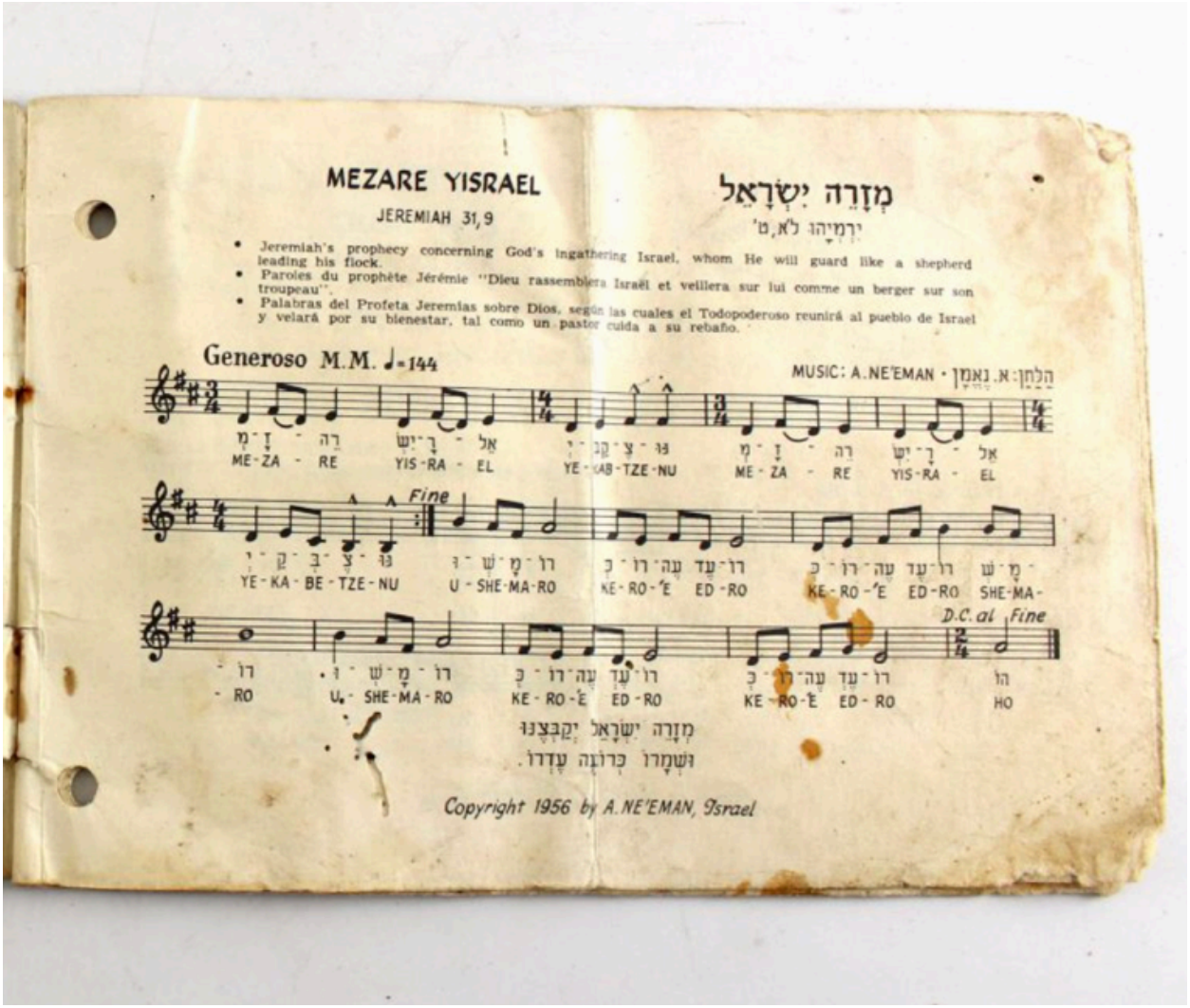


Figure 2. *Z'mirot* songbook sample page, World Zionist Organization, 1956.

Figure 2 shows one of the pages from that book, the song "Mezare Yisrael." The lyrics have been transliterated to make them available to those Diaspora Jews who could not decipher the underlying Hebrew letters. At the top is a translation of the text into English, French and Spanish. The lyrics reveal a familiar theme: the transformation and secularization of the words of the prophet Jeremiah into a song about *aliyah* to Israel.

מְזָרֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל יְקַבְּצֶנּוּ וּשְׁמָרוֹ כְּרֹעֶה עֶדְרוֹ׃

He [God] who scattered Israel will gather them back, and will guard them as a shepherd [guards] his flock. (Jeremiah 31:10)

The composer is Amitai Ne'eman (1926-2005), one of Israel's first songwriters. The song was composed in 1952 for a dance at a workshop for music teachers. The music is easy to learn. It is highly repetitive and the range does not exceed one octave. The tempo is upbeat, with straightforward rhythms. Rather than using the scales of European classical music, this song is in

a mode (Aeolian), more characteristic of folk music. The changing meters are coordinated with the steps of the dance.

The Jewish National Fund also created postcards with songs printed on them.

Figure 3. Postcard—*recto*, Jewish National Fund, ND.

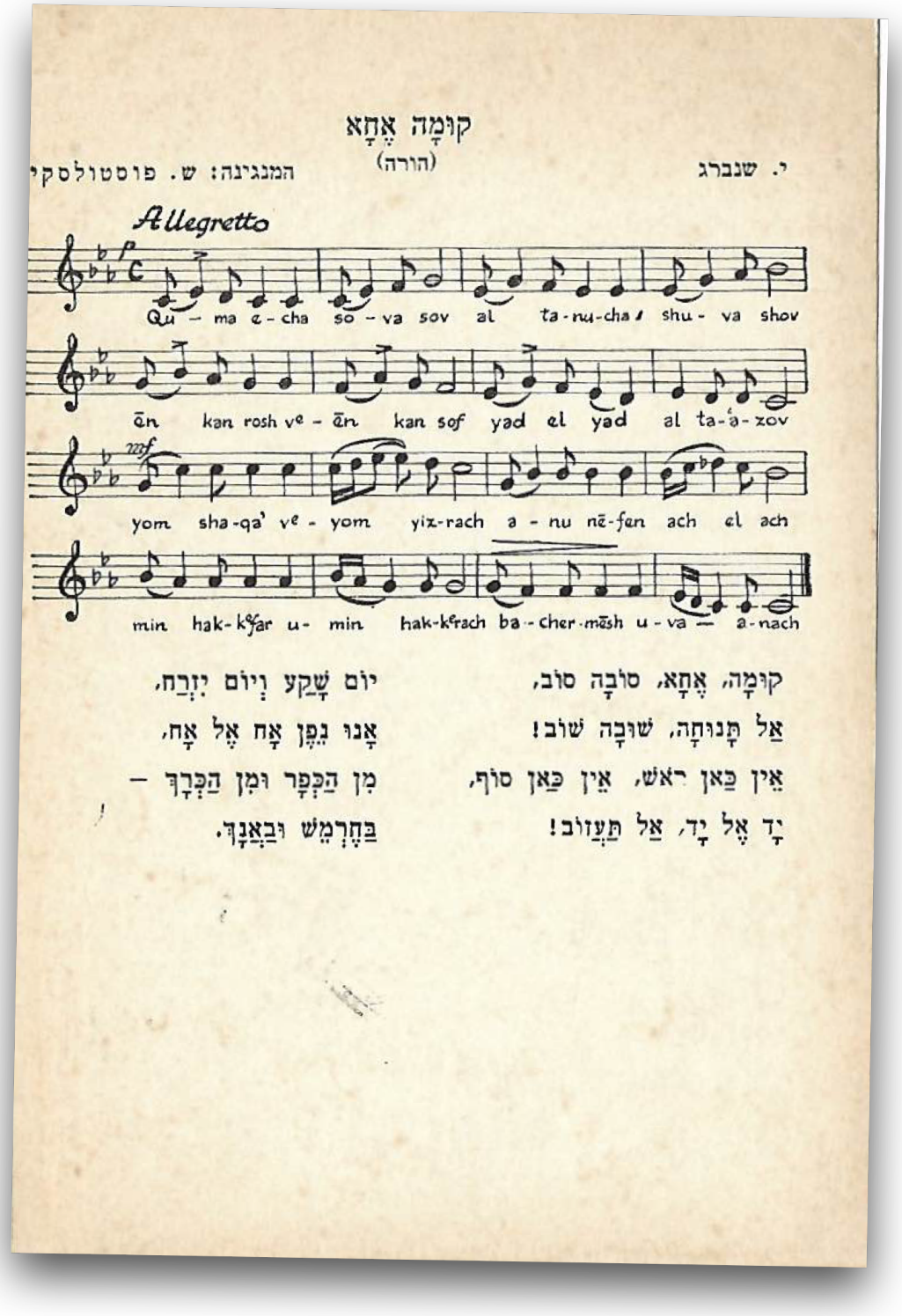


Figure 4. Postcard—*verso*, Jewish National Fund, ND.

Figures 3 and 4 show one of the postcards issued by the JNF. There is no date, but it precedes the founding of the State of Israel. Notice that in this case the lyrics under the notes are shown only in Roman characters.

The song is a joyous hora, "Kuma Ekha," composed in 1926/27. Yitzhak Shenhar's lyrics emphasize the importance of construction and the values of hard work and solidarity. The tune is by Shalom Postolski (1894-1949) and its catchy hora rhythm pervades nearly every measure. The mode is Aeolian, with a lowered second degree in m. 12.

קוּמָה אֶחָא, סֹבָּה סֹב,
אַל תָּנוּחָה, שׁוּבָה שׁוֹב,
אֵין כָּאן רֹאשׁ וְאֵין כָּאן סוֹף,
יָד אֶל יָד - אַל תַּעֲזֹב!

יוֹם שָׁקַע וְיוֹם יִזְרַח,
אָנוּ נֶפֶן אָח אֶל אָח,
מִן הַכְּפָר וּמִן הַכְּרַךְ,
בַּחֶרְמֵשׁ וּבָאֲנָךְ.

Arise, brothers, turn and turn,
Don't rest, back and forth.
Here there is no beginning, no end,
Hand in hand. Don't give up!

A day ends and a day begins
We turn to each other, brother to brother,
From the village and from the city,
With the plow and with the builder's plumb.

Figure 5, Cover: Binder, *New Palestinian Folk Songs*, 1926.

These songs were also circulated through anthologies published in America. In 1926 the Bloch Publishing Company issued a song collection edited by Abraham Wolf Binder called, "New Palestinian Folk Songs." The title was also printed in Hebrew, שירי חלוצים, Songs of the Pioneers. See figure 5.

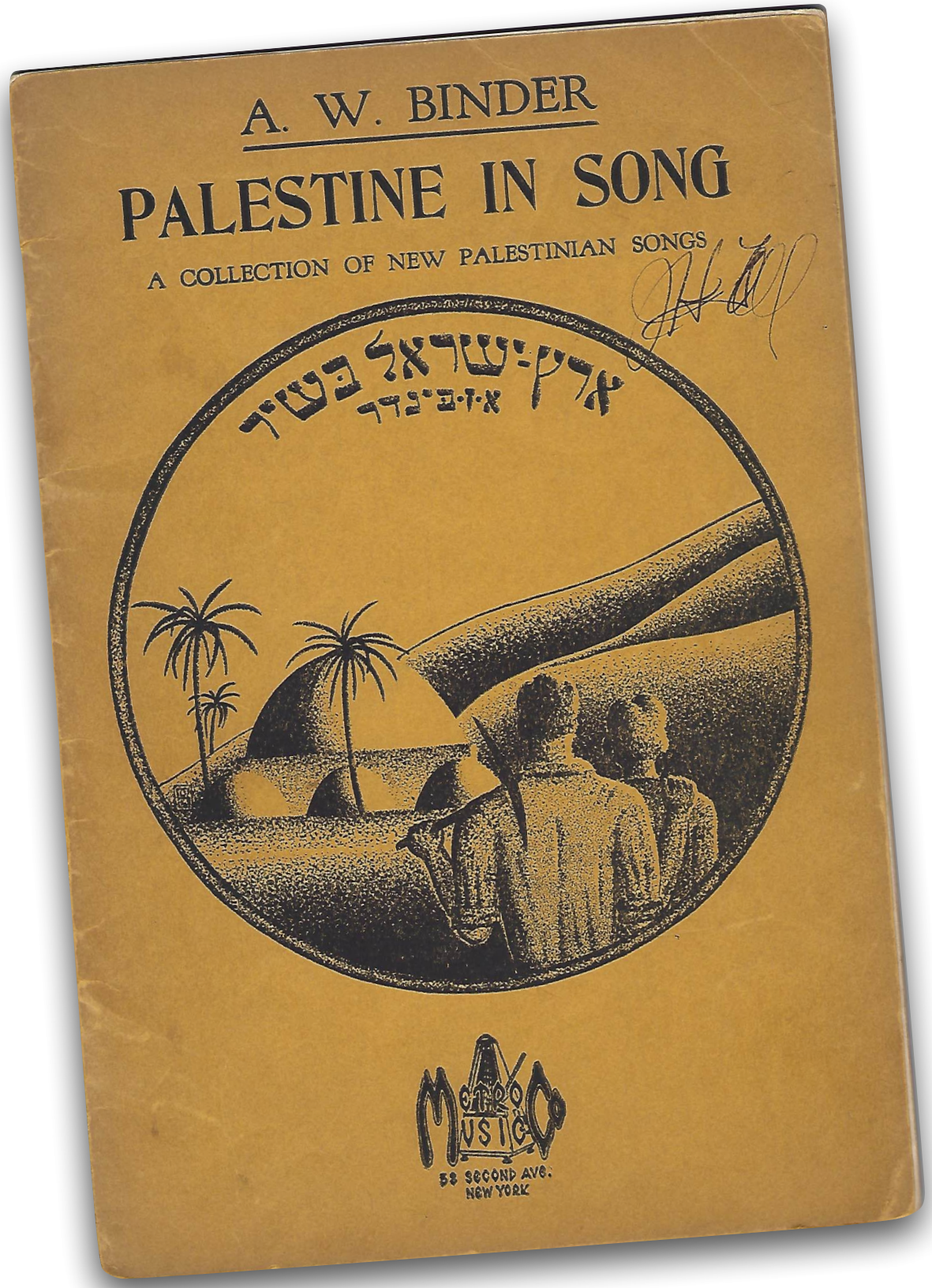

A. W. BINDER
PALESTINE IN SONG
A COLLECTION OF NEW PALESTINIAN SONGS
ארץ־ישראל בשיר
א.ו.ב.־נדר
Metro Music Co.
58 SECOND AVE.
NEW YORK

Figure 6, Cover: Binder, *Palestine in Song*, 1936.

In 1936 the second edition was published by Metro Music entitled, *Palestine in Song: A Collection of New Palestinian Songs* (ארץ ישראל בשיר). See figure 6. In the preface, Binder wrote,

> The most distinguishing features of the modern Palestine songs are … to be found … in the rhythms, tonalities, and texts. … rhythmic features which are buoyant, moving, enthusiastic. … a welcome new characteristic in the Jewish folk song as compared with the monotonous and imitated rhythms of most of the songs of the Galuth [exile]. … tonalities are in almost all cases bright, in contrast to the depressing minors of the old ghetto song. …The texts … are full of enthusiasm and idealism, and no longer speak of wanting to do, but of actual doing.[6]

Binder's anthology presented a corpus of song that was the musical equivalent of the "new Jew" that the Zionists were promoting. Look at the covers of the two books (figures 5 and 6). The iconic mages images that they chose include strong erect men and women working hard on the land, making the desert bloom, farmers and construction workers, rolling hills, pyramids and palm trees.

[6] Abraham W. Binder, *Palestine in Song* (Metro Music, 1936), iii.

9. Yofim Hallelos

(Beautiful Canaan Nights)

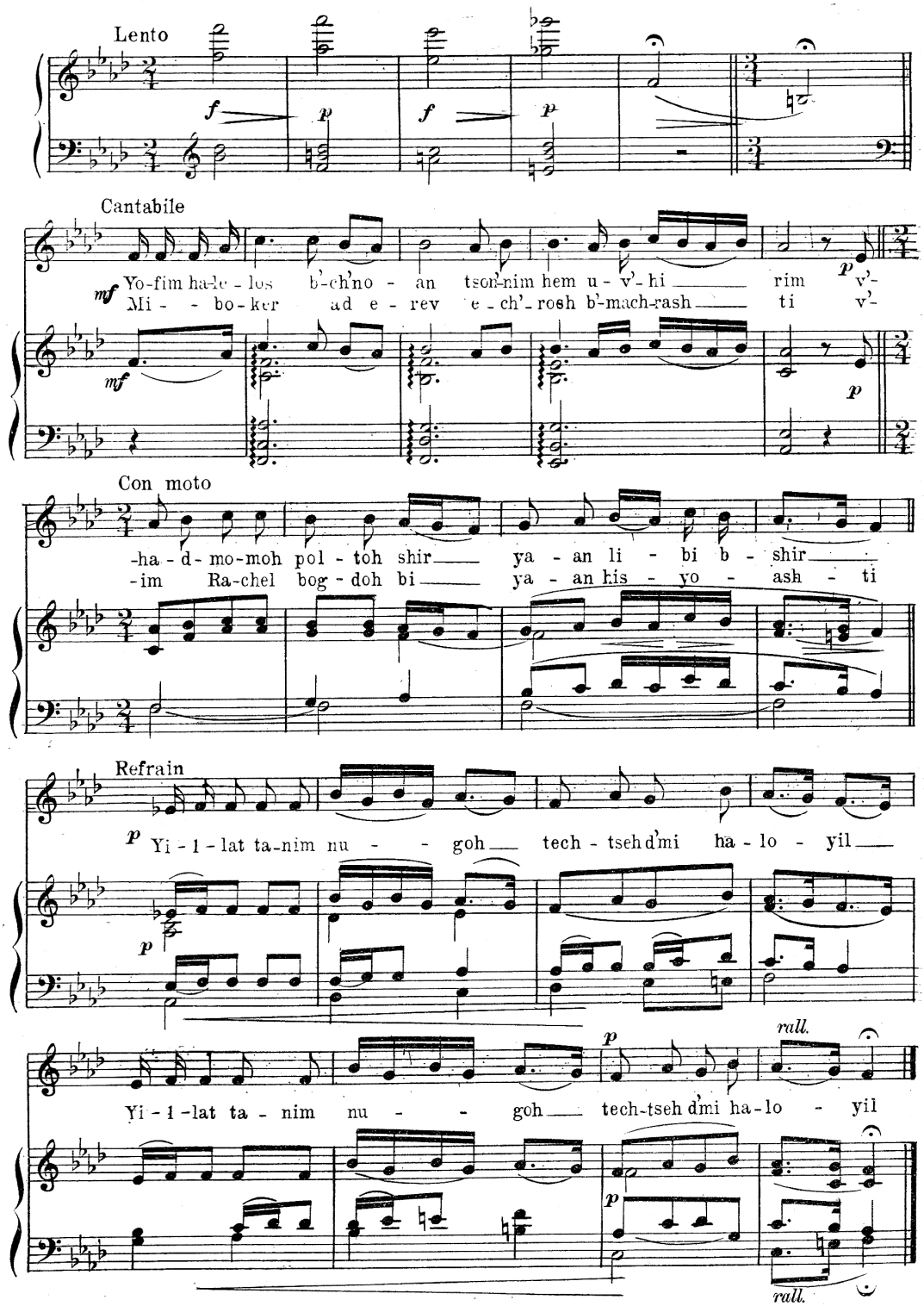
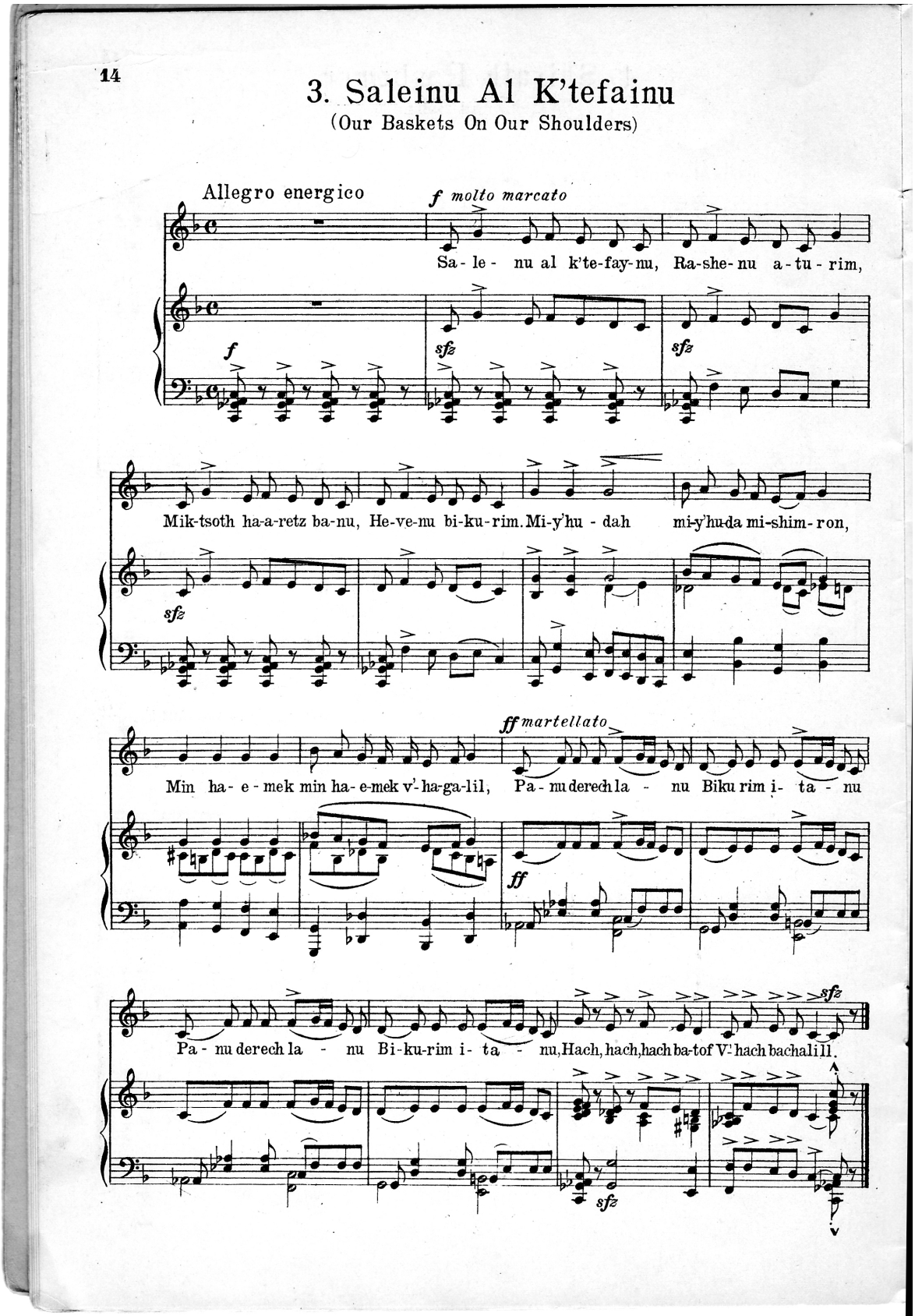


Figure 7, “Yofim Hallelos” in Binder, *New Palestinian Folk Songs*, 1926, p. 11.

Yofim Halelos is the ninth song in volume one (see figure 7). The lyrics, praising the severe beauty of the desert night, were written in 1906 by Itzhak Katzenelson (1886–1944), a Russian poet and dramatist who visited Palestine but never settled there. The melody, based on an Arab teenage love song, was fitted to Katzenelson’s lyrics in 1911. The mode again is Aeolian. The music alternates between a free *taqsim*-like A-section and a faster rhythmic B-section. Binder not only notates the melody, he also provides a carefully crafted piano accompaniment. It is interesting to note that Binder utilized Ashkenazic pronunciation in his transcription.

יָפִים הַלֵּילוֹת בִּכְנַעַן
צוֹנְנִים הֵמָּה וּבְהִירִים
הַדְּמָמָה פֹּה תָּשִׁיר,
יַעַן לָהּ לִבִּי בַּשִּׁירִים

The nights in Canaan are beautiful,
They are chilly and bright.
Here the silence sings,
And my heart responds with songs.



14

3. Saleinu Al K'tefainu

(Our Baskets On Our Shoulders)

Allegro energico

f molto marcato

Sa- le- nu al k'te-fay-nu, Ra-she- nu a- tu- rim,

f *sfz* *sfz*

Mik-tsoth ha-a-retz ba-nu, He-ve-nu bi-ku-rim. Mi-y'hu - dah mi-y'hu-da mi-shim- ron,

sfz

ff martellato

Min ha- e - mek min ha- e-mek v'-ha-ga-lil, Pa - nu derech la - nu Biku rim i- ta - nu

ff

Pa - nu derech la - nu Bi-ku-rim i- ta - nu, Hach, hach, hach ba-tof V'hach bachalill.

sfz *sfz*

Figure 8, “Saleinu Al K’tefainu” in Binder, *Palestine in Song*, 1936, p. 14.

Saleinu (1929) is the third song in volume two. The rhythm is a lively horah. The range is just under an octave and the mode is Mixolydian. The lyrics are by the well-known children’s poet Levin Kipnis (1890-1990) and the melody by the prolific songwriter Yedidyah Admon (1894-1982). This song became especially popular in Israel at agricultural productions associated with the festival of Shavuot. Note that in this volume, Binder has switched to Sephardic pronunciation.

סַלֵּינוּ עַל כְּתֵפֵינוּ,
רָאשֵׁינוּ עֲטוּרִים;
מִקְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ בָּאנוּ,
הֵבֵאנוּ בִּכּוּרִים.

מִיהוּדָה, מִיהוּדָה, מִשֹּׁומְרוֹן,
מִן הָעֵמֶק, מִן הָעֵמֶק וְהַגָּלִיל –
פַּנּוּ דֶּרֶךְ לָנוּ,
בִּכּוּרִים אִתָּנוּ,
הַדְּ, הַדְּ, הַדְּ בַּתֹּף, חַלִּל בָּחָלִיל!

Our baskets on our shoulders,
Our heads wreathed,
We’ve come from all corners of the land
And brought our first fruits.
From Judea and from Samaria,
From the [Jezreel] valley and from the Galilee.
Make way for us,
With our first fruits!
Strike the drum and sound the flute.

מוסיקה

בחוג מוסיקה

תכלית בחוג המוסיקה היתה כפולה.
ראשונה, לתת לחוגים אפשרות להתפתח
ולהתענג מהשירה בקבוצה קטנה, ושנית,
ללמד למחנה שירים חדשים. ע"י תקליטים
ומפי מייק למדנו הרבה שירים חדשים, ביניהם, "מחרגל", "זמר נודד", "הרוגים",
"לסרבר", "מי הרמוניקה", "הקסר", "דיגים", ו"סובי מסטרה".

מוסיקה עממית בין-לאומים

בחוג הזה נפגש פעם בשבוע ולמד שירים מהחצי השני של השירון, זאת
אומרת, שירים מכל קצות תבל. למדנו שירים ממקסיקו, איטליה, ארגנטינה,
סבוליביה, ארצות הברית, אנגליה, הרוסית ועברית.

מיכאל אינגאל

החזרה בינגה

ביום ו' בכל שבוע במשך חקיץ התאספה התזמורת לנגן נגונים יפים,
כמה מהם ידועים וכמה חדשים. המנצח על התזמורה הוא הסדרין המוכשר והמפורסם
ומאהוב במחנה, מייק אינגאל. תחת נצוחו המצוין, התזמורת מנגנת דברים כמו
"זולם משרתים" והקטע האחרון של הסימפוניה החמישית של בימהובין.
יש כל מיני כלי זמר בתזמורת, ויש הרבה בחורים ובחורות מכל צרין וצריף
שמשתתפים בה. זה תענוג גדול להאזין לתזמורת חקיץ.

רחל גולדברג

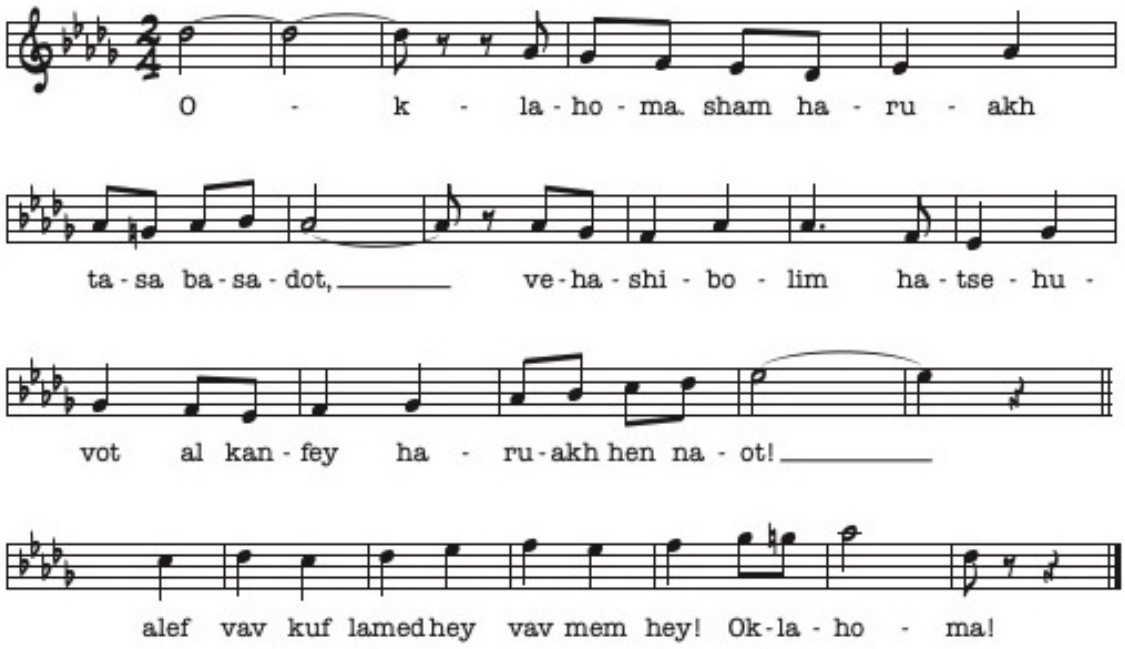
Figure 9, Eshkol yearbook, Camp Yavneh, 1960.

Figure 9 shows a page from the "Eshkol" yearbook of 1960. In it an unnamed camper writes about the experience of music at Yavneh:

> כתות מוסיקה
> תכלית כתות המוסיקה היתה כפולה.
> ראשונה, לתת לחונים אפשרות להתפתח ולהתענג מהשירה בקבוצות קטנות.
> ושנית, לַלַּמֵּד למחנה שירים חדשים.
> ע'י תקליטים ומפי מייק למדנו הרבה שירים חדשים, ביניהם, התרגל, זמר נודד, הדוגית, למדבר, היי הרמוניקה, הקטר, דיגים, וסובי ממטרה.
>
> There was a two-fold purpose to the music classes. First, to make it possible for campers to develop and to get pleasure from singing in small groups. Secondly, to teach new songs to the whole camp. Using recordings as well as directly from the mouth of Mike [the music counselor] we learned many new songs. Among them: "Ha-targil"[?], Zamar Noded (The Song of the Rambler), "Ha-dugit" (The Boat), "La-midbar" (To the Desert), "Hey Harmonika" (A Dance with the Accordion), "Ha-katar" (The Train Engine). "Dayagim" (Fishermen), and "Sovi Mamterah" (The Dance of the Spinning Sprinklers).

These were the Israeli songs we sang at Camp Yavneh, and by singing together, we, as a group, *became* these carefully vetted songs. We created an imagined sense of shared identity, social synchrony, Jewish identity and Israeliness. We sang in the dining hall at our meals, and we had music classes. These songs were joyous, fun, youthful, and sometimes even subversive. We imagined we were rebelling against the songs of our parents' generation and against the songs we were taught in Hebrew School and in synagogue.

In addition, every summer at Yavneh each unit would put on a musical, totally in Hebrew. Most of the shows were translations of popular Broadway musicals. So we knew the tunes and we knew the original lyrics, and we could figure out how the Hebrew matched the English. I still remember these lines from *Oklahoma:*



אוקלהומה. שם הרוח טסה בשדות והשבולים הצהובות על כנפי הרוח הן נעות . . .
א – ו –ק – ל – ה – ו – מ – ה, אוקלהומה!

Figure 10, Two excerpts from "Oklahoma," as sung at Camp Yavneh.

What a great way to learn Hebrew!

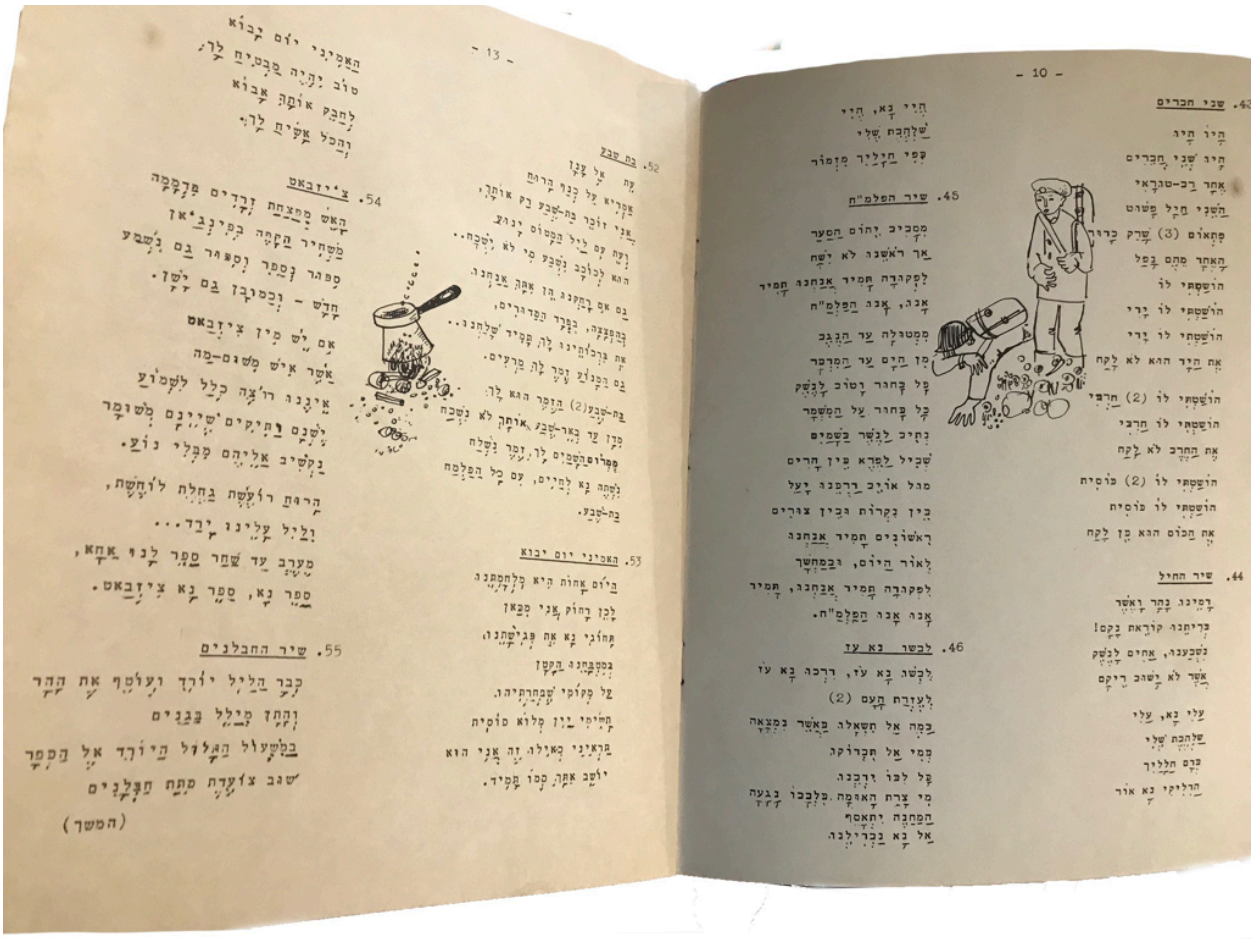


Figure 11, pages 10 and 13 from Camp Yavneh's 1965 *Shiron*

At the end of the summer, every camper received a book called a *shiron,* containing all the songs we had sung, and more (see figure 11). Of course, it displayed lyrics only, no musical notation of either melody or accompaniment, and no identification of composer or lyricist. That information was not only superfluous; it would have detracted from the communal aspect of the songs. These were supposed to be not songs of a person, but songs of a people.

All of this worked on me. I was hooked on Jewish and Israeli songs. I couldn't get enough. Between camp seasons I collected recordings. Elektra issued many Jewish and Israeli titles; I bought all of the recordings of Theodore Bikel, Oranim Zabar, Ge'ula Gil. And somehow I was able to get some Israeli albums, as well: Ron and Nama, Shlishiyat Ha-sarid, the Dudaim, the annual Israeli Hit Parade, etc. I wore out those old LPs and learned all their arrangements by ear. I sang the songs and accompanied myself on the guitar.

Transformation

In 1962, the new camp director, Moshe Avital, brought in new staff, imported from Camp Massad. This was the swerve that changed my life's direction.

Until 1962 I had never shown any interest in singing in choirs. I was perfectly content with using my guitar for harmony. But then came the summer of 1962. The new music counselor, Stanley Sperber, was a charismatic guy. He taught us Israeli songs and led group singing, but he also did something new: he created four-part choirs singing classically oriented music—with Hebrew lyrics, of course.

Figure 12, Camp Yavneh choir directed by Stanley Sperber, 1963.

At first I was disdainful, until I heard what he was doing. Really great music: compositions, not just folksongs. And the harmonies were better than the ones I could do with my guitar.

Stanley Sperber took me under his wing and taught me music theory. He became my friend and my mentor. I was hooked. Fifteen years ago Sperber told the story from his perspective:

> Camp Massad was a Hebrew-speaking summer camp oriented toward Zionist-Orthodox Judaism. It was in the late 1950s that the Massad music counselor, Yonatan Zak, formed a counselors' choir, which rehearsed in the evenings and sang, of course, exclusively in Hebrew. This activity so captivated us, that a handful of New Yorkers decided to continue our choral singing, and in the fall of 1960, the Massad Choral Group, which I conducted, was founded. A few years later, we decided to establish an independent group and called ourselves "the Zamir Chorale." The name was suggested by Moshe Avital, a Massad head counselor who went on to become director of Camp Yavneh, where I served as music counselor and where I first met Joshua Jacobson.[7]

Perhaps I can draw yet another parallel to the development of the *yishuv*. In the 1930s the political upheavals in Europe had changed the impetus for immigration. Many Jewish refugees

[7] *Notes from Zamir*, Spring, 2005. (excerpted) https://zamir.org/about/e-notes/nfz-spring05/

saw in Palestine not an experiment in nationalism but virtually their only chance for survival. These new immigrants were not interested in an idealistic return to the land and communal living; they merely wanted to carry on with their lives as they had before the Nazis came to power. To that end, these men and women from Central Europe settled in the major cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa, building them commercially and culturally into thriving metropolitan areas. With this new population came the formation of competent professional performing ensembles and the opportunity for serious compositions in the Jewish settlement. Similarly, at Camp Yavneh we made the transition from communal singing to include artistic performance. Our repertoire included Israeli contrafactions: classical choral works retrofitted with Hebrew lyrics—kosher choral music.

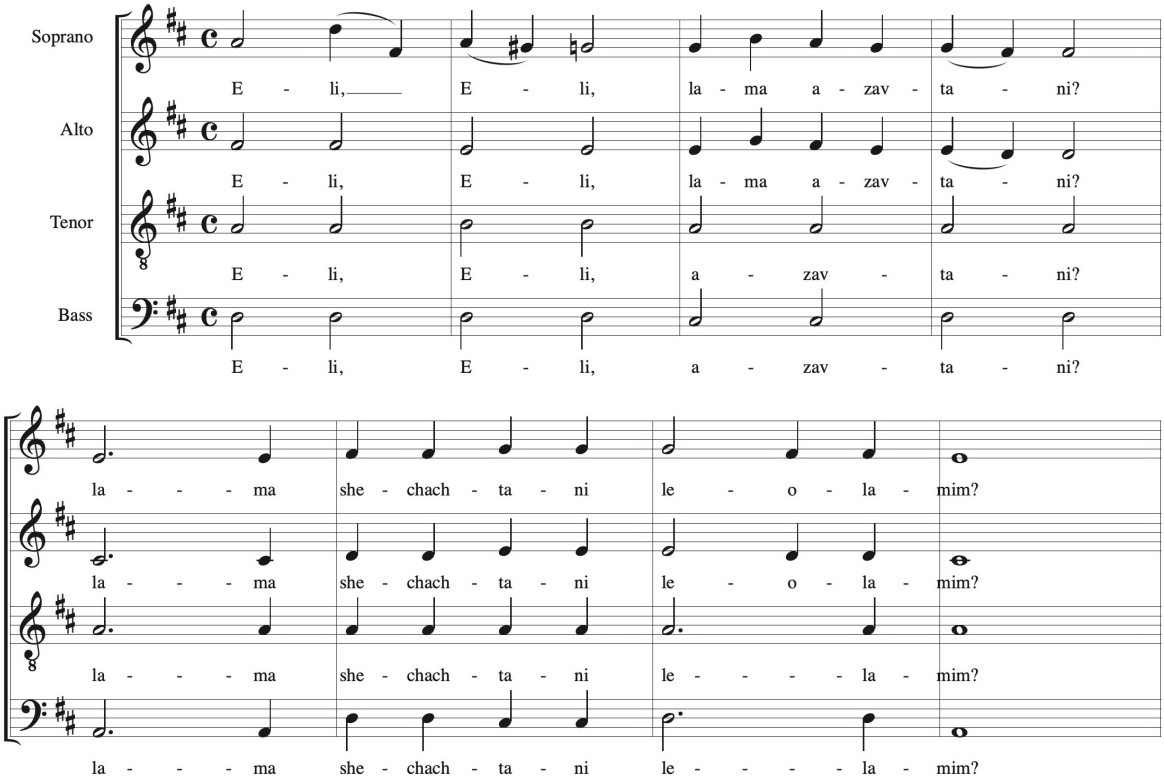


Figure 12, Eli Eli, contrafaction of Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus.*

In 1965 I succeeded Stanley, and served as a music counsellor at Yavneh for two summers. Eventually I decided that conducting Jewish choral music was what I wanted to do, and years later I actually managed to make a career of it. And it all stemmed from Camp Yavneh, from a love of music, a commitment to Jewish peoplehood, and a love of Israeli culture.

My last summer at Camp Yavneh was 1966, just before the titanic changes in Israel. Before the 1967 war. Before Israel became wide open to the world and its cosmopolitan culture. Israel would soon become strongly influenced by America. The Hebrew language would import a foreign lexicon. The hegemony of the Labour party would come to an end. The idealistic culture of the kibbutz would weaken under the force of capitalism. The "Zionist idea" would splinter

into numerous "Zionist ideas." Rock and Roll would make its first appearance in Israeli music. There would be a Hassidic Song Festival. There would be Israeli protest songs and Israeli rap songs, reflecting views of both the extreme right and the extreme left. Songs about the collective "we" yielded to songs about the personalized "me." The repressed Mizrahi culture would emerge, and with it a new brand of popular music.

No, all this would come later, after the snapshot that I have just shared with you. We can't go back to the relative innocence and purity of that age. But it's interesting to look back on it and see what it produced.

Epilogue

Circa 1744 Lord Kinnoull was trying to compliment George Frederic Handel on his new oratorio, *Messiah*, referring to it as, "the noble entertainment which he had lately given the town." The composer responded, "My lord, I should be very sorry if I only *entertained* them: I wish to *make them better*."[8]

[8] James Beattie, letter of May 25, 1780, published in William Forbes *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie, LL.D.* (1806) p. 331.

Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 1983.

Binder, A. W. *New Palestinian Folk Songs: Book I.* New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1926. Third printing, 1935.

Binder, A. W. *Palestine in Song: A Collection of New Palestinian Songs.* New York: Henry Lefkowitch, 1936.

Gartler-Jaffe, Jardena. "With Song and Hard Work: *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* and the Social Imaginary." *University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought* 6 (2017).

Nathan, Hans, ed. *Israeli Folk Music: Songs of the Early Pioneers* (with a foreword and afterward by Philip Bohlman). *Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music*, vol. 4. Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1994.

Shahar, Natan. "The Eretz Israeli Song and the Jewish National Fund." In Ezra Mendelsohn, ed., *Modern Jews and Their Musical Agendas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Schulman, Elias. "Katzenelson, Itzhak." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 12, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 20-21. *Gale eBooks*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587510868/GVRL?u=mlin_m_hebrew&sid=GVRL&xid=fb16e17b. Accessed 19 Jan. 2020.

Turino, Thomas. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.