



## ZAMIR: Jewish Voices Return to Poland

*This program release was issued by WGBH-Boston*

### PROGRAM RELEASE

In 1899, in the city of Lodz, Poland, a Jewish choral ensemble was formed to embody the richness and passion of the Jewish culture of Eastern Europe. For four decades, HaZamir (Hebrew for "nightingale") flourished until the Holocaust nearly silenced it forever.

One hundred years later, during the summer of 1999, the spirit of HaZamir was rekindled when the forty-two-member Zamir Chorale of Boston made a commemorative tour of Eastern Europe to perform in the very places where the HaZamir movement began. **Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland** is an uplifting one-hour PBS Pledge special airing in August (check local listings), which documents this compelling journey and captures the Chorale's emotional journey to the once vibrant capitals of Jewish and Yiddish culture.

Far more than a concert film, **Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland** is an illuminating expedition into the history of Jewish culture before the Holocaust. Viewers follow this group of American Jews on a musical and personal pilgrimage through Warsaw, Lodz, Krakow, Prague, and Vienna, as well as Auschwitz and Terezin, sharing moments of joy, sadness, and discovery. Full-length performances by the choir, taped in old-world churches, Jewish cemeteries, and town halls are blended with travelogue, interviews, and archival footage to chronicle this modern day journey, as well as the historic journey of HaZamir. Presented in three acts, the story is told by the founder and artistic director of Zamir Chorale, Joshua Jacobson, and through the first-person testimonies of Chorale members.

Zamir Chorale's music, both joyous and contemplative, reflects an ever-evolving Jewish musical tradition that goes back hundreds of years, a universal language that builds bridges of understanding among Jews and non-Jews, between past and present. But what gives the music and film such poignancy is the evocative archival footage, photos and interviews with survivors. For Jews and non-Jews both, this film's powerful mix of music and spiritual journeys provides an eye-opening account of Jewish life that will greatly enrich cultural understanding.

**Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland** is a production of WGBH Boston, in partnership with Spy Pond Productions and PBS. Producer: Eric Stange. Directors: Rob Cooper and Eric Stange. Co-Producer: Pam Cooper. Associate

Producer: Joan Kaufman. Executive Producers for WGBH: Denise Dilanni and Laurie Donnelly. Funding for **Zamir** is provided by PBS and public television viewers. A CD from the concert tour will be available.

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# **ZAMIR: Jewish Voices Return to Poland**

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

### **Act One: "Going Back"**

Viewers are transported back to a time when "the streets of Lodz rang out with the sound of Jewish voices raised in song." The act begins with the sound of "Hava Nagila," joyfully and spontaneously sung in the courtyard of the building where the original HaZamir Chorale rehearsed sixty years ago. Woven throughout the program's opening half-hour are personal testimonies from survivors of the Holocaust who sang with the Lodz HaZamir in the 1930s, and archival footage and photos that vividly bring the period to life.

### **Act Two: "Facing the Holocaust"**

The singers confront the legacy of the Holocaust head-on in services held by the Chorale at Auschwitz and Birkenau, and demonstrate the resilience of the human spirit and the transforming power of music. The program's second act includes the harrowing story of "Tsen Brider," a choral piece composed in the camps, and one of the most evocative pieces of music to come out of the Holocaust.

### **Act Three: "Sharing our Spirit"**

The final act captures the sense of spirit and camaraderie that was shared among the members of the chorale and their audiences. It builds to a final crescendo in the thrilling "Tikvateinu" which proudly proclaims "as long as there is one Jew left on earth, we will survive as a people." At the end of their spiritual journey, the power of Zamir Chorale's voices have brought us through the dark places into illumination and hope as they celebrate this lost but vibrant culture.

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Zamir is in residence at **Hebrew College**.