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THE ARTS

**2003-02-21
 Rockin' for Israel**

Musicians provide Holy Land support for a song.

by Gaby Wenig, Contributing Writer



Shalsheles performs at the Sounds of Solidarity concert on Nov. 9, 2002. Photo by Stan Weiss

It's Saturday night at Temple Bar, a nightclub in Santa Monica, and acoustic musician RebbeSoul (né Bruce Burger), in a white peasant shirt and Bukharin kippah, is looking like a relaxed holy hipster. He and his black cross-wearing Buddhist vocalist groove their way through rocked-up versions of old, Chasidic melodies, including one Hebrew song, "Harachaman," whose lyrics mean "May God bring love between the sons of Isaac and the sons of Israel."

"It's a prayer for peace," RebbeSoul said. "It's a song for Israel."

The song is one part of RebbeSoul's act and is usually accompanied by the singing of "Hatikvah" and — after the show — the distribution of pro-Israel pamphlets. Whereas nightclub gigs seem unlikely places for political rhetoric, Rebbe Soul and a number of other Los Angeles-based musicians are finding that the concert stage provides them with a mini soapbox, where they can espouse their views and galvanize support for Israel from a younger, otherwise disinterested crowd in a way that other political efforts cannot. These musicians, such as Jane's Addiction's Perry Farrell, The Wallflowers' Rami Jaffee, Peter Himmelman, the Moshav Band, the Jukebox Junkies and rapper Etan G, are using their art for a cause, either by singing songs that call for the support of the Holy Land, donating their appearance for concerts where the proceeds go to Israel, or both. While the artists tend to steer clear of erudite analyses of Middle East problems, they allow their music to create a supportive, feel-good milieu that will leave listeners feeling positively about Israel.

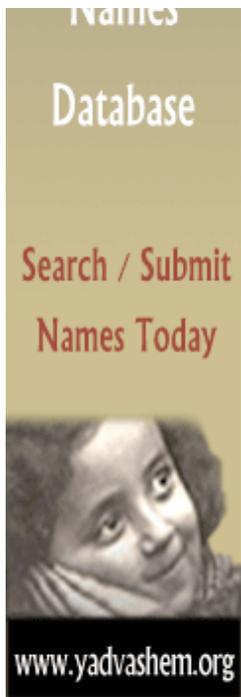
"Music has a way of breaking down doors, and musicians can really educate the next generation," said Stuart Wax, the founder of Midnight Music Management, who organized a Rock for Israel concert last May at The Mint nightclub.

"I remember a few years ago years ago, Metallica played a concert in Russia that was televised on MTV, but the same night Slash from Guns N' Roses was playing 'Hava Nagila' at a concert in Tel Aviv, and it was not mentioned anywhere," he said. "If kids saw that Guns N' Roses are playing in Israel and Perry Farrel was playing in Israel, they could understand that Israel is not the [demonized country] they see on TV."

Wax's Rock for Israel concert raised \$6,000 to build a traveling playground for children in the territories, and all the artists, such as Evan and Jaron, Rami Jaffee and Peter Himmelman, played for free.

For many of the artists, this is not unusual. "Whenever an organization calls up and says we want to do something for Israel, I usually do it for free," said Etan G, otherwise known as the Jewish Rapper, who often

Shoah
 Victims'
 Names



travels to Israel to perform. "I donate my time, and if it is raising money for victims of terror or Hebron, I'm all for it."

Etan G believes that concerts are far more effective way of raising awareness about causes than simply reading about them. "When you receive a letter in the mail saying 'Help Israel,' you might look at it, but when you go to a concert and you see a bunch of bands playing live [for a cause] you get in the moment and think 'Yeah, I really need to give money to terror victims.'"

Another Rock for Israel act, the Moshav Band, a Los Angeles-based group made up of three Israeli ex-pats from Moshav Modiin, the settlement founded by the late Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, have spent the past few years playing gigs in college campuses in order to raise awareness of Israel and Judaism. Many of the concerts were performed as part of an Edgar Bronfman sponsored effort called the Wake Up Tour. The band, which produces a hybrid Jewish rock-folk-reggae sound, traveled to small campuses where the Jewish community would not have had money to fly out a band, and would perform concerts there for free.

"Our new album, 'Return Again,' is completely dedicated to this cause [Israel]," said Yehuda Solomon, the lead singer of the Moshav Band. "When we tour, when we see that the crowd is loving the music and getting into it, we start speaking about Israel a little bit. We try to explain to people how important it is to go to Israel, and how important it is to have Israel as a home. We don't get up there and speak about politics at all, but through the music you can try to explain about Israel."

Outside of Los Angeles, many organizations are using music in their fundraising efforts. The Israel Emergency Solidarity Fund, an organization that raises money for victims of terror, recently put out a CD, "Jerusalem," written by Malky Eisenberg, and performed by the popular religious quartet Shalsheles. Miriam Schreiber, a Chicago-based concert promoter produced the CD and put together a Sounds of Solidarity concert package with Shalsheles to sell to different cities to raise money for Israel. So far, her efforts have netted over \$150,000 for victims of terror.

For many artists, the Israel cause is more spiritual than political. Ex-Angeleno Yehuda Katz, lead singer of Reva L'Sheva, an Israeli band that draws its inspiration from '60s and '70s folk rock, said that his band aims to bring the "simcha of eretz Yisrael [the joy of the land of Israel]" to audiences in America. "Our lyrics are about a spirit of ahavat Yisrael [loving your fellow Jew], and ahavat eretz Yisrael (loving the land of Israel), and a very important goal for us is shalom beineinu [peace between ourselves] as a way to achieve true peace in the world," Katz said in a phone interview with The Journal. "You may call it utopian and naive, but when we play we come into contact with thousands of people, and that is all you need to make a change."

Reva L'Sheva will perform Saturday, Feb. 22, 8:30 p.m. at Congregation Mogen David, 9717 W. Pico Blvd. For tickets, call the Happy Minyan Hotline at (310) 285-7777.

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