

## Making the Messiah Known – Through Music and the Arts Member of LCJE's International Coordinating Committee

### **The Language of the People**

Steven L. Pease, in his recent book "The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement" makes this observation:

"They [Jewish people] are disproportionately counted in most of the arts. Since their respective dates of inception, America's leading symphony orchestras have been led by Jewish conductors one-third of the time. They have created nearly two-thirds of Broadway's longest running musicals. Probably one-fourth of the greatest photographers of all time have been Jews, as have 10 percent of the world's great master architects. Of movie directors who earned Oscars, 38 percent were Jews. In broad artistic recognition, nearly 30 percent of the Kennedy Center honors and 13 percent of the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Awards have gone to them. "<sup>1</sup>

This summarizes some of the active Jewish involvement in the arts, but what about passive involvement - how well do they enjoy, attend, and appreciate the arts?

That would also be a high proportion, although I could not find the figures. Eliezer Segal, a professor of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary made this remark regarding the oratorio "Judas Maccabeus": "In spite of their small numbers, Handel recognized that Jewish patrons of the arts made up a substantial proportion of its audience. This phenomenon inspired Handel to compose a series of additional oratorios devoted to Jewish heroes, including Solomon, Joshua, Susana, and Jephtha."<sup>2</sup>

No one would dispute that the performing arts, visual arts, fine arts all play a significant role in Jewish life and culture. Matters of religion, love, joy, sorrow, history, destiny - are not merely expressed in journals and around tables, through books and articles, but they are splashed onto canvases, they ring at the end of the baton and they are captured with skill on camera, acted out in costume, and beaten out in rhythms, with wailing instruments articulating straight into the soul of the hearer. Music and arts are the languages of the soul and spirit of the Jewish people.

Why then are we just now beginning to understand this, and make a priority of utilizing this powerful tool? Within the LCJE context we have rarely touched on this subject, and even I, a musician and facilitator, was reluctant to *talk about* music, when asked to present this. I said I'd much rather *do* it.

As I searched our archives, I found very little about music, but I found one paper that is very relevant. It was presented by Bodil Skjøtt in 2005, reporting on "Oral Learners - and Jewish Evangelism".

"From the time of the Gutenberg Bible, Christianity has 'walked on literate feet', requiring literacy for those seeking the gospel".

Bodil remarked that it is written, "Hear O Israel", not "Read O Israel".<sup>3</sup>

Why have we not strategized as a whole, on the potential of using music and the arts to express our

message?

Could it be that we undervalue implicit rather than explicit communication, even when the implicit can sometimes penetrate deeper?

Are we daunted by the investment? Of time, of money, of courage?

Are we intimidated by innovation? Is it just outside our comfort zone?

Are we intimidated by the smallness of our ranks and the challenge of producing the quality required to impact these people in the "manner in which they are accustomed"?

### **Let's Look at Our History:**

1972 was a big year. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Joel Chernoff, wanting to express his new-found joy in Messiah, began taking sacred texts, writing them to music that became a fusion of contemporary folk-rock, and ancient Hebraic motifs, and surprised the world around him with "Lamb".

Way over in San Francisco, another phenomenon was emerging. The "Liberated Wailing Wall" was hitting the streets, vibrant with energy, color and costumes. Stuart Dauerman, their music director blended "fiddler on the roof" type music, with Baptist choral - and the outcome was that they too heralded a new era, fascinating and educating the Christian world, and challenging the Jewish one, using music as an effective tool of communication.

Here's what they were singing: "God So Loved the World", "Hineni", "The vineyard Song", as well as favorites like "Great and Wonderful" and "You Shall Go Out With Joy". These songs put the gospel into a setting, a package, if you will, that was crafted to penetrate Jewish hearts with the gospel truth, and awaken Christians to their roots and to God's covenant faithfulness with Israel.

Here are a few Lamb songs: "Have you ever heard, Messiah has come...", "I Will Talk to my Brothers". "Yeshua" was added to ancient blessings - "Baruch ha Shem, haMashiach, Yeshua, baruch hashem Adonoi." (We forgive the Ashkenazi Hebrew!)

The Liberated Wailing Wall was not an appendage of the Jews for Jesus ministry. "Jews for Jesus" was their slogan. The next year, Moshe Rosen officially founded the organization. Like spontaneous combustion, "Kol Simcha" and other Messianic groups appeared, and later "Israel's Hope" emerged with another new sound, same message.

Those were our beginnings. Very good ones.

The music was - fresh, it was relevant, infused with passion, it was well-done, what was lacking in skill and professionalism was somehow made up for in authenticity, vitality and originality. The message was clear and it was compelling.

In our discussions we may want to ask ourselves if, in the interim period from the mid-1970's until today we have sustained the effectiveness of the pioneers in presenting the gospel through music, and look at the arts in general, and see how well we have "made Messiah known."

## **What is Happening Today?**

There is a garden in Ein Kerem, a suburb of Jerusalem, with beautifully appointed bronze reliefs stationed throughout. They tell the story of Joseph, the beautiful "type" of Yeshua, especially in the way that he related to his "own." It is an on-going object lesson, a parable of salvation told over and over to Israeli visitors.

In the South of Israel is a powerful "dialogue" (as sculptor Rick Winneke calls it) of suffering, between the crucifixion and the holocaust. The Fountain of Tears is a wall, sixty feet long and twelve feet high with panels and pillars of stone, with life-size bronze figures facing them, based on Jeremiah's, "O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I would weep day and night for the slain of my people". The symbolism of this project poignantly "places the two most difficult issues of the Jewish people - at the same table" one Israeli said, "leaving me short of breath". This is the kind of thing that bypasses the intellect and stirs the spirit, taking it by surprise. This is what art does. Hundreds of Israelis have visited this site, and have experienced this same stirring as they are confronted with their messiah's suffering in a new way, experiencing something they'll never forget.

By the sea of Galilee, the drum-beats match the throbbing bass notes as the Newsboys, a world renowned worship band is gathering crowds at "B'Rishit" a new-age festival. Young "Yaron" is listening, with his thin arms folded. His stomach is cramped because of a chronic disease that may kill him. A man sees him and asks if he can pray for him. From that moment, Yaron's condition reversed and today he is a healthy, vibrant believer - and, I might add, a very talented musician, who is now using his skill to proclaim the message.

Many CD's have been released, just for the purpose of getting the salvation message out. Irit has produced two, for example, that are useful tools to communicate the gospel. There are many more, far too many to list today.

Stage musicals have been produced and performed, drawing Israelis as well as internationals.

David Loden, a pioneer of messianic music in Israel asks this question:

"If you could fill a hall with several hundred non-believing Israelis, present the gospel in a clear, scriptural and beautiful way, in their own language, in an artistic form that they can appreciate, and have them applaud and even pay for the privilege of hearing it . . . wouldn't you"?

He is referring to a series of classical concerts that have been performed in Israel, as well as a series we are planning for the near future. Taking liturgical works, translating them to Hebrew, and presenting them with excellence along with local orchestras and singers, is something that is a no-brainer, if you understand the Israeli mind-set. They are familiar with Vivaldi's "Gloria" but have never heard it's power in their own language. To date, Handel's Messiah and Vivaldi's gloria have been translated for performance in Hebrew, and there are more to come.

Hearing these works from the "Liturgi-Kal" choir carries a distinct advantage. The majority of the singers are believers, and not only they, but many in their communities make it a point to pray for the event, that God's word will hit the mark.

Another idea. Good, professionally-done concerts. Recently an evening called "Midor Lador" -

From Generation to Generation was performed in Jerusalem to a full house. While the concert was mostly praise and worship, the gospel message contained in the songs was clear, and the unbelievers that were present were deeply touched!

Irit Iffert will tell you about other exciting developments that will pay long-term dividends in equipping God's people to use music and the arts to spread the message of the Kingdom.

**Endnotes:**

1 Steven L. Pease (<http://www.jewishachievement.com/about/about.html>) 2010.

2 Eliezer Segal, *In Those Days, at This Time: Holiness and History in the Jewish Calendar – 2007* pp. 73,74.

3 Bodil F. Skjøtt, *Oral Learners and Jewish Evangelism – paper presented at LCJE 2005.*

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