

עכשיו! A'CHSHAV!

קיץ תשע"א • Summer 2011



The Official Magazine of USY

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Music and Judaism

A Perfect Harmony

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From the Editors

Music Spans Our Jewish Heritage, Experience

by Dani Leopold and Elias Strober-Horowitz

Shalom USY!

Music spans the length of Judaism's venerable history and has played an integral part in the way Jews have lived and continue to live every day. From the spiritual melodies used in prayer and celebration to the modern day a capella group, music continues to affect the lives of Jews. It is music that can help us form a stronger bond with Israel, bringing us back to the days when David strummed his harp and Miriam rocked out on the timbrel. It is music that can inspire us to carry out *ma'asim tovim* (good deeds) which define our existence as Jews. It is music that draws us together here in North America. Though we all come from different cities and regions, music is what brings us together as teenagers and as members of the larger Jewish community.

We are a truly cohesive group because of our Judaism, our love of Israel, our ruach, our devotion to our respective regions and chapters, and so much more. USY really stands for **United** Synagogue Youth. Though we may have differences, our common involvement in this organization makes us one. In music, there are many different genres and artists with varied backgrounds. While different sounds appeal to different groups of people, music can be used to connect, bond, and unify one another.

Nothing demonstrates the diversity of our community better than the numerous subjects USYers chose to write about. Different writers chose to submit topics as wide-ranging as performances in school plays, guilty-pleasure songs (which for some reason always end up as USY staples), and random syllables that somehow fit together as niggunim (melodies). USYers come from all different age groups, geographic locations, and religious backgrounds. We might be Ashkenazic or Sephardic, or have been raised in more religious or less religious households, but we are all drawn together under the umbrella of the connection we share: our faith and our organization.

There is nothing that displays the central role of music in the lives of Jews more than the tremendous enthusiasm we received from every USYer who wrote for this issue of *Achshav!*. Music serves as the perfect creative outlet for the enthusiastic amateur, the bohemian artiste, and the brilliant composer. So too, *Achshav!* and *Shalhevet* serve as creative outlets for writers of all skill levels: the student laboring over a creative writing assignment for school, the aspiring journalist searching for a

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From the President

Rolling in the Deep: A USY Parody

by DJ Kaplan

We all hear songs on the radio, the television, and on our fancy iPods and other electrical devices, but ask yourself a question: are you really hearing the lyrics right? I have decided to take one of today's most popular songs and take a minute to really "hear" the lyrics. My commentary on the song is written in **bold**. Be prepared as I dive right into the lyrics of "Rolling in the Deep," by Adele. Well, maybe not the exact lyrics.

There's a youth group that comes first in my heart,
(surprised?)

Reaching out to new members and bringing them out of the dark. **(Shout out to all the Mem/Kads!!)**

Finally, I begin to tell you a tale, **(That's right, it's my story written to the tune of the song)**

Go ahead and read it out and you'll enjoy without fail,
See why I love my journey with all of you,

Don't underestimate the things that USY can do,

There's a youth group that comes first in my heart,

Reaching out to new members and bringing them out of the dark.

The pictures on Facebook® remind me of us **(I'm tagged in WAY too many!)**

They keep me thinking of the next time we'll get in touch,

The pictures on Facebook®, they leave me breathless,

I can't help feeling,

USY has it all,

From Israel to SA/TO oh oh!, **(sorry, Rel/Ed, Comm and Mem/Kad didn't fit into the chorus! But I love all of you!)**

You have my heart for every event, **(USY needs new and creative events)**

And we prayed to hallel,

Hey USY, I have a story to be told,

I started in a synagogue on a camping trip the marshmallow's did burn **(kosher!)**

Chapter Mem/Kad devoted to each of you,

RGB came next then Regional Board too, **(Freshmen programmer and Mem/Kad VP to be exact ☺)**

The pictures on Facebook® remind me of us **(Right now I'm tagged in 5,518)**

They keep me thinking of the next time we'll get in touch, **(Probably on Skype!)**

The pictures on Facebook®, they leave me breathless,

I can't help feeling,

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DJ Kaplan of CRUSY is the 2011 International President of USY; you can e-mail his at president@usy.org.

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The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism promotes the role of the synagogue in Jewish life in order to motivate Conservative Jews to perform mitzvot encompassing ethical behavior, spirituality, Judaic learning, and ritual observance. Combining an awareness of communal responsibility with a strong sense of commitment, the United Synagogue is a dynamic force within the Conservative Movement.

My Little Black Blue Book

by Julia Leibergall
METNY

Three years ago, I attended my first-ever Regional Convention. I only went because I was going on USY on Wheels and my mom thought I should at least go to a USY event before the summer started.

Friday was a blur of a bunch of speeches by people I didn't know and a lot of "Hi, I'm Julia, nice to meet you too!"s. I didn't know some of the girls in my room, and I had no idea what a *sichah* was.

And icebreakers? Like do they really think I'm going to tell everyone what my favorite kitchen utensil is? Who even has favorite kitchen utensils? (It's a spatula by the way).

Then came *ruach*. There I was, an awkward 14-year-old, standing on the outside of a swarming circle of teenagers that were practically screaming the words to songs I didn't know. I watched as the boys flicked their fingers to "*Bashana Haba'ah*" and the girls did some weird rendition of "Twist and Shout" by the Beatles. It wasn't until someone handed me a *B'Kol Echad* that I was able to follow along, but I didn't dare to sing out loud, especially when I didn't even know the right tune.

Let's flash-forward three years to my last Koach Divisional Kinnus *ruach* session. Some time in the middle, I think after my favorite song, "*Al Kol Eileh*," someone accidentally poked me in the back

with their *B'Kol Echad*. It was right then, between the annoyance at this person for stabbing me and the worry I was going to bleed on my white shirt, that I realized I myself did not have a *B'Kol Echad*. I had

sung every song, hummed every tune, all without even glancing at a page to see the words. The songs had become so familiar to me that I was able to rattle them off without hesitation. And while I thought about this, I looked around at the people sitting around me. Strangers three years ago were now some of my closest friends, sitting around me and singing the same songs. As my time in USY comes to an end, I think about that awkward 14-year-old I was at Regional Convention 2008: the one who didn't know the words to any *ruach* songs.

Now, when I sat down for my last slow *ruach* ever, I knew I didn't need a *B'Kol Echad* ... just a box of tissues.



Niggunim: Simple, Majestic, Passion

by Jake Fischer
Hagesher

Wikipedia describes a *niggun* as "vocal music, often with repetitive sounds such as *bim-bim-bam* or *ai-ai-ai* instead of formal lyrics." Sometimes, Bible verses or quotes from other classical Jewish texts are sung repetitively to form a *niggun*. For me, I was first introduced to a *niggun* by my Bar Mitzvah tutor during the fall of my 7th grade year.

I had great difficulty pronouncing the words of the Torah without vowels. At one point, my tutor simply stopped me and, without saying another word, began to chant my Torah portion by solely repeating the sound *lai* over and over again. When he fin-

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The Power of Muzak

by Jonathan Horowitz
NERUSY

As some of you might know, I was a participant of USY on Wheels last summer on Bus C. But I'm not here to talk to you about inter-bus or inter-trip competition. Some of you may have guessed by my opening that I want to talk to you all about that wonderful thing I love to call *muzak*, or in real English, music.

Bus C was very much your average bus in the sense that we had your typical groups of friends, your typical funny kids, your typical couples, and, of course, your typical drama. But every Shabbat, all of our titles and judgments melted away. Why, you ask? Because of the pure magic that emanated from the friend groups, funny kids, and couples; the unbelievable, unadulterated emotion that poured out of all 51 of us when we sang. When we let the music out, we let our souls out.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines music as "the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity," or simply as an "agreeable sound." I couldn't agree more. By virtue of my position as a Communications Vice President, I view music as one of the key methods of communication. Songs are almost always addressed from one to another, conveying an emotion or message of some sort. Pieces like the "1812 Overture" show composer Tchaikovsky's passion and energy. The *Tanakh* is also inundated with music, from "The Song of the Sea" to David and

his Psalms, from *Shir HaShirim* to Miriam's songs of praise to Hashem while dancing with her timbrel. In the *Nishmat* service

during *Shabbat shacharit*, we laud God in beautiful prose: *Ilufinu maley shira kayam, ulshoneinu rina kahamon galav* / Could song fill our mouths as water fills the sea, and could joy flood our tongues like countless waves? Obviously, music isn't something that can be disregarded.

When we daven *Kablat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv* on Friday nights, something unique goes on. It's something I've noticed over the course of my life, and I'm finally able to put into a tangible

thought. Whenever someone sings, or plays an instrument, or drops a beat or a verse, they are offering some of their soul to Hashem or whomever they choose to pray to. Music is a direct form of communication to God; even something like Rebecca Black's "Friday" – Friday *is* Shabbat, isn't it? But in all seriousness, I don't think there is a better or more beautiful way to communicate with God than through *muzak*. If we lose the tunes, then we will lose life as we know it soon after.

So now, USY, I'll pass on some wise advice that I learned from my father. Always have a song in your heart. Always be singing some melody, jamming out to a harmony, or rocking on to a sweet bass line. You never know if that person who has a symphony in their heart is your future best friend. To quote the popular Wild Cherry song, "Lay down the boogie and play that funky music 'til you die."



Photo by Jonah Eisen

Bonding Through Song

by Talia Gudelsky
Seaboard

The lyrics, "Deep in my heart I've got this everlasting light, it's shining, like the sun, it radiates on everyone! And the more that I give, the more I've got to give. It's the way that I live, it's what I'm living for" echo through the Dining Hall at Seaboard Spring Convention, simultaneously unifying every individual and creating a beautiful harmony. Sung again and again throughout the weekend, the music itself had an uplifting effect on the USYers. Looking around the

room, there were smiles, swaying, and hugging. Taught the first day of convention, the song served as a unifying force, thus encouraging new members to participate and making them feel welcome.

Each moment when everyone is singing in unison is emotionally breathtaking. As the seniors, gathered in the center of the room, begin slow *ruach* for their last time as a group, the abundant mixture of tears and joy conveys

the song's true emotional purity. Even the seniors' voices, filled with sadness at their approaching departure, did not diminish the unbridled beauty of the song. Hugs and intertwined hands reveal the closeness the participants feel as they sing together. While some have better voices or know the words better than others, above all else, it is the sensational connection that exists nowhere else which is so treasured.

The Soundtrack of My Life

by Ethan Shapiro
Hanegev

Recently, I was given an assignment to formulate a “Soundtrack to My Life” as if it were in a movie. Limited to only 15 songs, I saw there was an interesting obstacle at hand. Music is a key component to my life and I knew that just 15 songs to choose from an endless supply of music would be hard.

I started to think about myself as a person, what kind of music described me? As your average teenager I do enjoy all types of music, Hip-Hop/Rap being my favorite, but as your average Jewish teenager, I do enjoy Jewish tunes, prayers, and musical groups. Coming up with this 15-song soundtrack seemed like it could take me a lifetime but I knew I could choose a particular few songs for the playlist that have helped enhance my Jewish values.

An uncanny hobby of mine is trying to match modern music to prayers in which the tunes would match the Hebrew words. This is always exemplified for *Adon Olam*. At Camp Ramah Darom, my friends and I were watching *Rocky* when we realized that we could match the *Rocky* theme song to *Adon Olam*. We tried it out the next morning and it was very successful. That reminded me that I just had to add a song that reminded me of camp to the playlist because it has shaped who I am today as a Jewish individual.

A few years ago, I was taking a class on The Holocaust and my teacher played an interesting song to start off class one day. She proceeded to tell us it was a rap song by Wu Tang Clan and that the song was entitled “Never Again”; I was shocked to find out that a member of such a prestigious rap group was Jewish. After finding this out, I listened carefully to the message in the song and realized that the background music of the song included the *Shema*. “Never Again” reminds us all about the persecution of Jews and how it left an emphatic mark on the world. This was such a powerful song that I couldn’t withhold it from my playlist.

Music is a daily part of my life and has affected my view on life. Clearly it has a strong affect not only in the choices I make, but also as how I describe myself.

iDaven: A New *T’fillah* Learning Experience

by Joshua Seed
ECRUSY

Were you ever interested in leading a service at your next convention but didn’t know where to turn? Or maybe you needed a quick round of your favorite *ruach* songs to help recover from a serious case of Post Convention Depression Syndrome, otherwise known as PCDS? Well, look no further.

Introducing iDaven – USY Religion/Education’s latest resource. Among a number of International General Board projects is the all-new Jewish recordings collection, intended to assist USYers with the basics when it comes to *t’fillot* (prayers) and *z’mirot* (songs).

iDaven is truly a community project

with all clips recorded exclusively by USYers. Each recording teaches the Hebrew words at a slow, easy-to-follow pace, making you an expert once you’re finished. The database is updated regularly with new additions, so be sure to check back often. If you’re interested in contributing to iDaven, e-mail reled@usy.org.

iDaven can be found on the International USY website at www.usy.org/yourusy/reled/idaven.

Joshua Seed of ECRUSY is a member of the 2011 USY Religion/Education International General Board.

Jaffa Institute: Musical Minds

by Sarah Hoffman
Seaboard

The Jaffa Institute is a unique non-profit social agency that works with underprivileged Israeli children. Many of the children that the Jaffa Institute works with are abused and undernourished, as well as many who are simply stricken with poverty. Through different programs and centers, the Jaffa Institute works to help improve the well-being of those children and encourage bright futures.

Among its many programs, the Jaffa Institute runs an Arts Education Program for its children called *Musical Minds*. Created in 2001, *Musical Minds* has now grown to serve more than 600 children to help them mature through music education. One of the best parts about *Musical Minds* is that it has a mission to serve each and every child it can, not just those who are particularly interested in music. *Musical Minds* works with children from 15 different elementary schools in its after-school program, where kids can learn about playing instruments, singing, and dancing. *Musical Minds* also travels around the Jaffa and Tel Aviv area to teach.

A little bit of music can truly go a long way, and this is proven through the Jaffa Institute’s *Musical Minds*. Some of their goals with the program include encouraging social integration and respect, promoting healthy self-esteem, stimulating self-expression, and, of course, prompting education. Not only does *Musical Minds* spur learning, but it has a proven effectiveness as well. Through the Jaffa Institute’s work with Bar-Ilan University and an international research study called “In Harmony,” *Musical Minds* has been shown to give a cultural understanding to children along with musical understanding, and it is clear that this program is sure to keep up with its progress.

Dror Yikra to Me

by Michelle Herman
METNY

My favorite *ruach* song is “*Dror Yikra*.” I first learned the song in 8th grade, when I attended the 8th Grade Experience at METNY Regional Convention. It was probably one of the best weekends of my life.

I clearly remember walking into a room at Kutsher's Country Club with all the other 8th graders and the Regional Religion/Education Vice President (I didn't even know what a Religion/Education Vice President was at the time) had come to teach us the song “*Dror Yikra*.” This song stuck with me ever since.

This experience, learning my first

ruach song at Regional Convention, was really when I found my connection to Judaism in USY and Judaism in general. Now, as I sing this song, I'm in 12th grade and about to graduate from high school. Hearing this song during slow *ruach* sessions, I look around at all of the members of the younger grades and I can't help thinking, “Wow. I was them once.” Just knowing that they could be hearing this song for the first-time ever makes me feel even more connected to them than usual. Since then, I've held multiple leadership



To hear Michelle's rendition of *Dror Yikra*, click on the image above.

positions and been so actively involved within USY and the Jewish community at large. I just can't stop myself from envying how much they have ahead of them. This song really inspires me for a lot of reasons. I hope you enjoy “*Dror Yikra*.”

The Wheel

by Jordana Jampel
METNY

**A moment of time seeming like a
one-thousand year lapse
crosses your mind like a two-way child.**

**Music unfolding in your eardrums,
and strings playing a melody;
a tune of sheer delight like nothing
you have heard before.**

**Little buttons behind your eyes pressed
to release the burden on your shoulders;
but you're still not sure what that weight is.**

**Stepping through a two-dimensional figure,
climbing through the wormhole, stretching it.
Farther and wider to see the catacombs
of purple molecular haze spinning around.**

**A place where the lightning catches you
and just at the right time, and the thunder misses
by a millimeter, and you realize you're alive.**

**A living breathing item, but not too sure what,
different mind in a different place, are you
a part of something greater,**



or from that greatness, something apart?

**Time warping around you through the windy wind
of greater feelings, emotion and passion.**

**Curiosity lurks around you through the
spinning,
spinning
spinning**

**you back to your origin,
where you really belong,
all in one moment of time.**

Shalhevet 

Klezmerusy and SWUSY

by Alex Hamilton
SWUSY

Music is what makes Judaism holy. Whether it was the Levite Choir at the *Beit HaMikdash*, the music that we hear in *Fiddler on the Roof*, or the *ruach* that we in SWUSY pride ourselves in, it all keeps us Jewish and connects us to Judaism in a way that we can't find anyway else.

I have made my own personal connection to Jewish music. Ever since I was in first grade, I was writing Jewish music. My first song was something awful that was supposed to be *Hanukkah* music. But as I grew older, I just kept with my terrible compositions until they took the form of something pleasant.

And my skills grew even more as I learned to play instruments. I started playing viola in fourth grade and trombone in sixth. I picked up tuba and euphonium in high school. I learned more *z'mirot* as regional Religion/Education/Culture Vice President

I thought it would be fun to write a klezmer arrangement for "*Hava Nagila*" one night. So I copied the melody out on to the clarinet line. Then I added an upright bass line to add movement to the piece a violin line with an extremely com-

plex variation of the original melody. Finally, I added another violin line to compliment the original melody. The final product was great. Next I did the same with "*Am Yisrael Chai*," "*BeShem HaShem*," "*Kol HaOlam Kulo*," "*Eli Eli*," "*Erev Shel Shoshanim*," and "*Dodi Li*." Currently I am looking for another fitting song to add to my collection.

But writing klezmer music is not my only connection to Jewish music. Down here in SWUSY, we can feel very isolated from Judaism. There are less than half a dozen kosher restaurants in our entire region; the most available kosher meat in a place like Oklahoma is Hebrew National Hot Dogs. Many of our congregations only have one rabbi and no *eruv*, a boundary which allows Jews to carry items outside their homes on Shabbat. The only way for many of us to make that connection to Judaism is through our amazing *ruach*.

I can honestly say without hesitation that SWUSY has unbelievable *ruach*. We all get into a giant mosh pit and sometimes it has to snake through the tables



because so many people are involved in our *ruach*. We jump up and down, practically everyone is involved in this. There is at the least 90 percent of the entire convention participating. Our regional staff has to tell us to

stop doing *ruach* because we fall behind in our schedule.

Last year, when I was Religion/Education/Culture Vice President for my region and I was talking with the other regional Religion/Education vice presidents, they all wanted to be part of SWUSY's amazing *ruach*! I am so excited to be part of a region that puts their spirit into everything we do, from the singers, to the musicians (love the trombones!), and everyone else who loses their voice at convention during our *ruach* sessions.

Memories and Music

by Samantha Anderson
EPA

"Words make you think a thought. Music makes you feel a feeling. A song makes you feel a thought"
– E.Y. Harburg

We all hold our USY memories close to our heart because whether or not we have graduated from USY, some of the memories are irreplaceable. These memories can resurface when we listen to a song that reminds us of an amazing memory.

The other day I was taking a long car ride with my family and I put my iPod on shuffle. My iPod contains about 1,500 songs, so there is no way that I could get through all of them, but while on this boring car ride I began to relive my past experiences, especially those with USY. Most of the songs reminded

me of past summers and events, but there were a few in particular that touched my heart and allowed me to feel the emotions of certain USY experiences.

Right as we pulled on the Pennsylvania Turnpike the song "Save Tonight", by Eagle Eye Cherry began playing. As I was singing along and annoying my 12-year-old brother, I remembered the very first time I heard this song: Quad-Regional Encampment 2008. The amazing week that the EPA, Hagesher, Hanefesh, and Tzafon regions had spent together was coming to an end. However, we were all able to rejoice in song during Sunday morning *Shacharit*. The very last prayer, *Adon Olam*, always has a great tune, and this time it was "Save Tonight."

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It's Such a "Mega Event"!

by Will Landman
METNY

Stepping off the bus, we found ourselves in a nondescript parking lot near a field where people were playing assortments of sports. A huge playground and stadium loomed in the distance. We, USY Israel Pilgrimage Group 3: Israel Adventure Plus, were hungry, excited, and just hoping to see other Pilgrimage groups. When we arrived, we immediately ran into another USY Israel Pilgrimage group and it was so exciting to see our friends.

As we walked around the park, we talked to people who were from Noam, an organization affiliated with Israeli and European teens. The group we saw from Noam was from Great Britain and together we moved toward the concert venue. It was

crazy event to be a part of. There were thousands of people there from every organization imaginable. The music was truly awesome. Imagine a concert as big as Coachella, Lollapalooza, or Bamboozle except filled with Israeli singers, rappers who use Hebrew instead of English, and many others. The main band everyone was excited to see was Subliminal, a group I'd actually never heard of before. I've listened to Israeli musicians and groups, but I had not heard any of Subliminal's songs.

I knew there were people present from Mexico, France, England, and other places but I felt the unity by looking over the hundreds of people in front of me towards the stage. I saw country flags

held up, people chanting with pride, and I even met someone from London who I hoisted up on my shoulders. The craziness of the event and the throngs of Jewish teenagers was awesome because we may have all been from different locations throughout the world, but we were united through the common bond of Judaism.

We left before we got to hear Subliminal perform their full set but I was satisfied with what we had heard already. It's not every day you can say you have been to a concert with hundreds of Jewish people in the Jewish Homeland. It's an experience I never will forget. Pure awesomeness!

Music and Judaism are important aspects of my life. When they were in unity at this event, rightfully named "The Mega Event," I felt at home in Israel. It truly was a "Mega Event."



Photo by Missy Zedeck

From the President

Rolling in the Deep: A USY Parody

Continued from Page 2

USY has it all,
From Israel to SA/TO oh oh!,
You have my heart for every event,
And we prayed to hallel,
USY has it all,
From Israel to SA/TO oh oh!,
You have my heart for every event,
And we prayed to hallel,
Then I became president of CRUSY in 2010
Doing my best to help USY however I can,
Turn each program into treasured gold,
a Mike and Ike speech was the next step for me to hold, **(Fun fact, Just Born Inc. the creators of Mike and Ikes, sent me a box to congratulate me! It was 10 pounds).**

USY has it all, **(Duh.)**
USY has it all,
It all, it all, it all,
USY has it all,
USY has it all,

From Israel to SA/TO oh oh!,
You have my heart for every event,
And we prayed to hallel,
USY has it all,
From Israel to SA//TO oh oh!,
You have my heart for every event,
And we prayed to hallel,

And we prayed to..
And we prayed to...
And we prayed to...
to hallel.

So there you have it! USY and Adele clearly have some sort of connection! Music and USY go hand in hand, and I know that you'll really be able to see it throughout this edition of Achshav! Please remember that I'm here for each of you, and if you ever have any questions or just want to sing a song that's good too!

USY A Cappella Groups

USY, have you heard the musical sensation that is sweeping the USY nation? That's right! Regional a cappella groups! Regions from all across North America are beginning to build a cappella performance groups composed of some of their most talented members. METNY has started with their group, Trey Kaley, which has been performing at Regional events and conventions. NERUSY's talented Nerusapella even had the opportunity to perform their smash hit "Abanibi" at IC 2010's USY Choice Awards. As if *Shacharit* Live weren't enough for the Seaboard Region, their members also display their musical abilities in the group Kol Hayam. To check out the videos, click on each image below.



Trey Kaley

Trey Kaley is the New City Jewish Center a cappella group. Among the group members are Meir Berkman as Tenor 1, Josh Becker as Tenor 2, Noah Singer as Baritone, and Ami Kurland anchoring as Bass and Vocal Percussionist. Trey Kaley performs at various *simcha* events, as well as for their synagogue and impromptu concerts at METNY events. The featured link is to the Passover Parody of "Tic Toc," by Ke\$ha, but their other videos and performances can be found through the suggested videos.



Nerusapella

The room, filled with thousands of USYers, resounded with the music. The *ruach* blasted through the crowds of people, all bearing witness to a swirling cyclone of sound. Well, maybe that's a slight exaggeration, but not by much. Nerusapella's performance at the IC's USY Choice Awards 2010 was really a rocking experience not to be missed. "Abanibi", a classic Israeli song, is as fun to listen to as perform because of its bouncy beat. Written in a type of Hebrew pig Latin code, has a chorus with a touching message: I love you.



Congregation Beth Emeth

As Beth Emeth's kick-off chapter event for the year wound down, some friends took a moment to share in the beauty and togetherness created by some of their favorite slow *ruach* tunes. Everyone attending was inspired by beautiful renditions of "Ozi" and "Vehaer," among other favorites. The music really set the tone for the closeness the chapter would feel during the coming year in the Seaboard region.

Niggunim: Simple, Majestic, Passion

Continued from Page 3

ished, he turned to me and said, "Prayer is so much simpler than many teens make it out to be. Just close your eyes and sing."

He then went on to share with me how, during his teenage years, when he reached a part of a prayer that he didn't know the words to, he would switch to a *niggun* and still feel the same connection to God that he did when chanting actual Hebrew words. He had learned from his Rabbi that as long as you sing the *niggun* as passionately as you would sing the words of a prayer, God will still recognize your calls.

To me, a *niggun* is such a simple yet majestic melody that can instantly relax a person and take one's mind off the

most troublesome worries. Singing a *niggun* can remove your thoughts from the stressful world we live in today and allow you to appreciate the moment. Whether it's quietly singing *nana-na-na* while driving down a calm, peaceful road or passionately belting those same syllables with fellow USYers during a *Kabbalat Shabbat* circle, *niggunim* are always attached to the simple yet extremely moving moments of Judaism where we feel so connected to God without having to say anything.

So, USY, I urge you to join the club of *niggun*-ers. Next time you find yourself in a quiet and simplistic moment, take a step back, close your eyes, and sing.

Music In Your Personal Life

by Monica Weitz

Hagesher

“Take my hand and well make it I swear.” Written for the song “Livin’ on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi, these words mean the world to Hagesher as a region and to me as well. When a song comes on the radio you instantly think of a person, an event or a memory. We sing them at every dance, running into the middle of the dance floor to bring us together yet again. The song is an expression of unity through all of Hagesher and it brings us together.

Music is always what I turn to when I am feeling a certain way. Its my reason for everything.” This was written on a Starbucks cup as #268 of the series “The Way I See It.” Everywhere in the world, even on Starbucks cups, the way music helps people is constantly displayed. Throughout the world, music helps people get through tough times. It allows them to let go of their troubles and escape.

These days, Tumblr® is a very popular social networking site. People all around the world use it as a place to express their feelings and post pictures they like. On Tumblr®, people post their feelings towards music, what their favorite music is, and even how they think music helps in their lives. One of the big posts on Tumblr® is “music makes the world a better place.” Many people agree that music is extremely beneficial, especially during hard times. It allows for a release of the emo-

tions going through ones head.

There are a tremendous number of summer programs offered through USY. On every trip, each group or bus comes up with a song that is “their song.” It can be something fun through the summer, but after the summer has ended it carries memories through each word. This song can help someone going through a really tough time, reminding them that they have a support group of 48 or so people behind them that are only a phone call away. This one song means so much. It can be something fun through the summer, but after the summer has ended it carries memories through each word. Every time you hear it, all the memories of the amazing summer come flooding back.

When you hear a specific song, you instantly think of a person, an event, or a memory. These memories can help a person get through some of the toughest times in life all by just playing at the right time.

Music is a very big part of today’s society. To say it can only help a little in times of need would be a huge understatement. “We’ve got to hold on to what we’ve got.” Just as “Livin On a Prayer” says, USYers have got to hold on to each other and remember what we’ve got.

From the Director

Ruach Inspires Special *Shabbat* Moments Across North America

by Jules A. Gutin

During the Spring, I had the opportunity to spend time at a number of Regional Conventions, as I do each year. I always enjoy these visits because it gives me a chance to visit USYers and staff on their “home turf,” getting to know them a little better. As I join in the singing during *Kabbalat Shabbat*, and the *ruach* at *Shabbat* meals, I realize the important role that music and singing contribute to our USY experience. It reminds me of my own years as a USYer where *ruach* played such a central role.

I am particularly moved by the singing at *Seudah Shlishit*, the third

Shabbat meal. About 15 years ago, USYers developed a tradition of singing special songs and melodies at the last *Shabbat* meal reflecting their love for *Shabbat* and their sadness over its departure. It has become a very meaningful part of our *Shabbat* experience. In fact, one of our main motivations to finally revise *B'kol Echad* was so that we could include many of the *Seudah Shlishit* songs which were not part of the USY repertoire when our *shiron* was first issued in 1986.

As the USYers in different regions, at International Board Weekends, and

on USY Summer programs sit in a circle singing those beautiful melodies, and as I join them, I realize these special moments have become one of the ways we create our very special cohesive community. While the songs may not be identical to the ones we sang 45 years ago when I was a USYer, the impact is the same. Each generation of USYers has its own songs. Each generation sings a “new song,” a *shir chadash*. May we continue to sing and spread our *ruach* for many years to come.

Jules Gutin is the International Director of USY; you can e-mail him at gutin@uscj.org.

The Tales of a Milkman

by Israel Ben-Asher
METNY

To METNY, I'm known as Yisroel, which usually means I'm greeted with an overly enthusiastic "OOHHH YISROEL!" But for a while, to Solomon Schechter of Westchester and my cast and crew, I was known as Tevye the Milkman.

Solomon Schechter School of Westchester was originally supposed to do a production of *Brigadoon*, but our director didn't think the people auditioning were right for the parts, so he switched the show. Now although what he did next wasn't exactly too popular amongst those who were auditioning, he went with his gut and what came out was described by many in reviews as "astonishing" and "the peak of professionalism."

You see, my fellow USY-ers, our director picked *Fiddler on the Roof*, which to most eyes is a "Jewish" show. "Oh how original," we thought. "A Jewish school doing *Fiddler*!" That was the skepticism with which kids approached the show. I, on the other hand, jumped on the opportunity to audition for Tevye, having played him in a middle school rendition. I saw the potential we had to make this one of the best high school renditions of *Fiddler* to ever be produced. Having seen the film many many times, I captured the character of Tevye and landed the part. Along side of me was Elan Weinberger, 2010-11 METNY regional president, as Motel the Tailor, and Stephanie Nelson, 2010-11 METNY Israel Affairs Vice President, as my beloved daughter, Tzidel ... at least I think that was her name. Too many daughters to remember.

In the beginning not everyone was happy that we were doing *Fiddler* just based on the fact that they knew it was "a show about Judaism." They didn't even know what the show was about, yet they were ready to dismiss it. As rehearsals progressed, however, they found out it was so much more.

First off, they actually read the script and realized that it was a whole lot more than just a "Jewish show." Just goes to show you: don't judge a book by its cover! The cast started to realize and appreciate the true beauty in the story and the music. With their new perspective, they played their characters in a much better fashion.

What we also realized is that, contrary to popular belief, *Fiddler* isn't really a Jewish show at all. Sure, there's a rabbi, and the Jews are forced to leave their village of Anatevka be-

cause of Russian pogroms, but there was a whole bigger message. And that I can tell you in one word: tradition!

The show is mainly about Tevye's struggle to keep life the way it's suppose to be according to what he was taught all his years. Ever wonder why the show is called *Fiddler on the Roof*

in the first place? Picture trying to play a fiddle on a roof. All of your movement would cause you to fall off balance, just like the fiddler, Tevye, was shaking from all the change that was occurring around him and was struggling to keep himself and his way of life from falling apart.

Fun fact of the day: *Fiddler* is the most popular show in ... Japan. Who knew? They hold tradition to a very high standard there; it's pretty much their life, conserving their family name and other facets of tradition. After the cast took all this into account, we applied it

to our performances and came out with an amazing show.



To see Solomon Schechter School of Westchester put on a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*, click on the image above.

Memories and Music

Continued from Page 7

I loved how it brought us each hand-in-hand singing with lifelong friends. This memory is one that is not always on my mind, but whenever I hear "Save Tonight" I always am able to feel the love and the passion that USY has to offer.

Midway through the trip, right after we pulled off of a rest stop, the song, "My Favorite Things," from *The Sound of Music*, filled my headphones. This song sends an inspiring message and it is absolutely beautiful, but even more importantly, it reminds me of my first Shabbat on Italy/Israel Pilgrimage 2010. In Italy, I was a little timid and scared at first because it was all so new and exciting, but during our first *Shabbat* a nice old man, Shmuly, taught our group *L'Cha Dodi* to the tune of "My Favorite Things." Now, I cannot watch *The Sound of Music* without singing *L'Cha Dodi* in my head.

Music is such an important part of my life; I love how it allows me to remember my past experiences. Just as the American song lyricist E.Y. Harburg once said, "A song makes you feel a thought."

Bible Raps Nation Goes USY

by Sydney Cohen
METNY

Bible Raps is an educational group that seeks to make Torah and Judaism more relatable to kids by presenting it through a modern day musical medium: rap. Bible Rap's own Matt Bar and Ori Salzberg visited METNY USY's Encampment last summer. Their creative songs about the Torah inspired USYers to create their own original songs to reflect on

how they felt about the Torah and USY. Bible Raps brought professional equipment to help create the songs. But more importantly, they also brought their expertise. Matt helped with the lyrics and Ori worked in the portable studio to make the beats.

When I signed up to make my own Bible Rap, I had no idea what I was get-

ting myself into. I was so nervous walking into our little studio set up in Camp Ramah in the Berkshires that I was shaking. As the time went on, the kids became friends with Matt and Ori and produced an amazing song reflecting on how we feel about prayer. When we performed it at the talent show it was truly an experience I was thankful I could participate in.



To see METNY USY's Chazak Division Bible Raps Video, click on the image above.

The Mix Tape of My Life

by Steph Goldstein
Hanegev

Try to imagine USY without music ... it would be impossible! Music and USY go hand-in-hand. Music is a way to let yourself loose and have fun and that is what you feel like when you are at USY, whether it's a chapter, regional, or international event. Music is an aspect of USY that will never be lost, whether it is the different melodies we use for prayers such as *Adon Olam*, or whether our excitement for *ruach* is through the roof.

So many songs remind me of different times in USY. After going on USY on Wheels: Mission Mitzvah (Bus H '09), I made a USY on Wheels CD of songs that reminded me of my amazing summer and songs that we would blast on the bus and sing to. It wasn't any different when I went on USY Israel Pilgrimage: Israel Adventure (Group 2'010); I made yet another mix when I got home from Israel.

Music was an extremely prominent source of entertainment on my

USY Summer Program experiences. Between *ruach* and slow *ruach* on USY on Wheels, along with blasting music and dancing on bus rides, to *ruach* and slow *ruach* on USY Israel Pilgrimage, and then making lyrics to different songs from "Dynamite" to "Wannabe" for HaEvent, music is part of it all. Singing with my whole USY Israel Pilgrimage group on Saturday night for "slowach" was something I have never experienced before; I have enjoyed "slowach" a ton of times before that with my region and on USY on Wheels but this was different.

"Slowach" and *Havdalah* were one of my favorite parts of USY Israel Pilgrimage because we were in Israel; it was such a special unforgettable experience. It was amazing sitting in a circle on the roof of the Fuchsberg Center on Agron Street singing "*Yerushalaim Shel Zahav*" looking over Jerusalem, the City of Gold.

From the Editors

Music Spans Jewish Heritage, Experience

Continued from Page 2

venue, and the budding novelist, thrilled at the opportunity to exercise his talents. The very fact that *Achshav!* and *Shalhevet* are publications for writers of all levels of proficiency make them the perfect receptacles for writers with extremely varied aspirations. All told, no one who writes for *Achshav!* or *Shalhevet* is worse off for having done so.

So USY, when you read this issue of *Achshav!*, we sincerely hope that the music inside jumps off the page at you, inspiring you to new-found appreciation of your heritage. We hope you love it and embrace it. Right down to the last note.

B'Ahavah,

Dani Leopold **Elias Strober-Horowitz**
Achshav! editor *Shalhevet* editor

P.S. Due to the incredible amount of submissions we received in response to our request for video submissions, we were not able to include the actual videos, as the size became unmanageable. To be fair to all of those who submitted, we included links and snap shots of most. Enjoy!

Play for Love

by Kenzy Forman
Seaboard

One brisk fall Sunday afternoon, the crimson leaves fell gracefully from the oak tree to the lawn of Congregation Beth Israel. It was the cold kind of day not many people would remember; most people would be home snuggling up with a book and some tea, wistfully dreaming of warmer times to come. On chilly Sunday afternoons, Rachel's friends were usually off on their merry way spending time together without spending money by going on walks through Central Park. Rachel was typically with them during this weekly outing, but her parents told her that this week she would be playing her clarinet for kids at the shul's daycare.

CBI was a second home to many children whose parents worked a lot. Rachel's neighborhood was rather poor; many of the parents worked six days a week. The congregation was very open

to the use of instruments whenever possible, whether this meant they used music as an educational tool or for *t'fillah*. The problem was that only 12 out of 500 kids were musically talented in the area and willing to help with musical services.

Rachel happened to be one of the 12 musically talented kids who was willing to help out with musical services. The kids who were regulars generally cycled out who played instruments each day of the week (except on *Shabbat*, of course) and, depending on which kid was playing that day, the service had a different mood. When Eli his played guitar, for example, the service was always folksy and traditional, but when Sarah played her guitar, it was much more modern and upbeat. Adam brought his saxophone, although it was not a congregational favorite, so he usually only volunteered

the days when other people could not. There was also a small percussion ensemble of six boys who were a favorite of the "Mini-Minyan" service for ages 3-10 on Tuesdays. Each weekday, a musical volunteer, or group of volunteers like the percussionists, lightened the hearts and lifted the spirits of the *shul*-goers.

Rachel never played for anyone but her band class before. Now she had been volunteered by her parents to be the weekly musician for the Sunday daycare kids. All she really had to do was sing a few songs by Debbie Friedman, an Israeli musician, and play a few tunes they recognized from Hebrew school, but still she was nervous. She worried that the kids would think her clarinet was dorky, or sounded like a duck choking on a dog toy, which is what her arch-band-nemesis, Becca, had blustered at her last year when she was 4th chair. This year she had improved enough to be 2nd chair, practically a maven, and planned to impress those children.

The afternoon arrived, and the fun flew by. Rachel's clarinet was cleansed of spit and the keys shined like her brother's new *bar mitzvah kiddush* cup. The moment she arrived in poster-covered colorful elementary Hebrew school classroom used for Sunday afternoon daycare the kids attacked her with joy. They leaped on her with interest of her instrument. They could not wait to hear what she had for them. She played for them for the full two hours, getting them to sing along with her as well. Rachel hadn't even realized that she had vocal talent or the ability to get kids this excited about prayer.

Playing her music for the children filled Rachel with joy. She was no longer upset at her parents for deciding to volunteer her. This weekly visit would be the activity she looked forward to the most. Every week.

One Voice

by Seth Toplin
Seaboard

Koom koom alay alay, koom koom alay, koom koom alay lay lay lay koom koom alay alay. Though the singing started with just three people, before long the *niggun*'s sweet sounds quickly filled the room. We all stopped what we were doing to join the *niggun*, adding our own spirit.

It was Seaboard USY's LTI Weekend, where chapter and regional officers come together each year to talk about leadership in USY. An alumnus turned staff taught us this three part *niggun*, and once someone

started singing, the rest of us joined in. We were unified and nobody wanted to stop singing.

Niggunim provide something special: they let us express ourselves and connect through song in a way that we can't do by just talking. While I'm singing a *niggun* with my friends from Seaboard, it doesn't matter whether or not there's drama, or who is friends with who at the moment. We're all together, and we just connect to the song, to Judaism, and to each other.



To hear a spontaneous *niggun* at Seaboard's Leadership Training Institute Weekend, click on the image above.



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