

# Notes From The Spirit

BY Simone Ellin

## ***Local Orthodox trio creates soulful music***

They've been compared to musical acts such as the Indigo Girls and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, but local trio Ayelet HaShachar brings a unique blend of musicality, spirituality and religious devotion that sets them apart.

Ensemble members Shalomis (Shelly) Koffler Weinreb (guitarist, percussionist, vocalist and composer), Lisa Aronson Friedman (pianist, composer and vocalist) and Stephanie Rabinowitz (vocalist) have been singing together for the past 12 years. The group recently released its second CD, "Matai," which translates to "When." They will celebrate the new album with a concert for women only on Nov. 17.



From left, Ayelet HaShachar is composed of Lisa Aronson Friedman, Stephanie Rabinowitz and Shalomis (Shelly) Koffler Weinreb.

Ayelet HaShachar started when Rabinowitz, who was trained in musical theater, met Friedman, a classically trained pianist.

"I was looking for more creative expression," said Rabinowitz. "Lisa and I connected immediately, and we were looking for a third woman. One night, Shalomis came to a women's music event at my house with guitar in hand. I called Lisa and said, 'I found her!'" The three women have been making music together ever since.

The group released its first album, "Ohr Chadash," in 2005 and have performed locally and in multiple venues in Israel. Both "Ohr Chadash" and "Matai" were produced by Jeff Order of nationally known Order Productions. Ayelet HaShachar is a nonprofit entity, and all funds from ticket and CD sales go toward band expenses and to fund free concerts for senior centers and elsewhere.

"We all come from different musical backgrounds," said Friedman, a fact that Weinreb, whose roots are in blues, folk and pop music, believes is a strength of their collaboration.

"My influences are singer-songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Carole King, even Motown," said Weinreb.

Since the women of Ayelet HaShachar came to Orthodox Judaism as adults, they were exposed to a range of cultural and musical influences prior to composing and singing exclusively Jewish and religious music. As part of their transitions to Orthodoxy, Weinreb, Friedman and Rabinowitz came to accept and even appreciate the fact that they only perform for other women.

"In Jewish law, there is something called *kol isha*. It is part of the laws of modesty. Women don't perform in front of men," said Friedman. "There are different interpretations of this. We've decided that we won't perform in front of men, but if men want to listen to our CDs and their rabbis approve, we aren't going to pass judgment."

Rabinowitz said she is perfectly happy to work within religious boundaries when it comes to performing.

"The voice is really the soul, and there are clear and beautiful boundaries," she said.

“We have to ask ourselves why we are singing. Is it about ego or is it about spirituality?” noted Friedman. “The attitude today can be self-centered. One thing that happens when you become Orthodox is you realize the world isn’t about you. There’s a higher purpose. There is work to do.”

Weinreb admitted that when she first became religious she thought observing kol isha might be a conflict for her. She discovered it was not.

“There’s a spiritual kind of sisterhood that you feel when you’re performing for a women’s audience — they really get it,” said Weinreb.

“You go from performing to get something to performing to give something,” said Rabinowitz.

Ayelet HaShachar performs only original music, and their intimate knowledge of one another as people and musicians means that Friedman and Weinreb write music with individual ensemble members in mind.

“Each new song feels like a new child,” said Rabinowitz.

After more than a decade working together, group members feel their sound has matured and tightened. Although “Matai,” like “Ohr Chadash,” deals with spiritual and religious themes, Friedman said the group feels more like an ensemble.

“There are fewer solo pieces on the new CD,” she noted.

“I think our music has become more complicated because our lives are more complicated,” said Rabinowitz. “We have shared each other’s experiences. There’s a depth to it that wasn’t there in the first album. ... There is a pleading [quality in the music] like the album’s title, ‘Matai,’ (‘When’). When are you [God] going to bring us home?”

“Harmonies are really the hallmark of our sound,” said Weinreb. “When we sing the same note together we sound like one voice, but it’s not the voice of anyone of us. We are friends on and off the stage. We call each other sisters, and that shows up in the music. People have remarked on how well we get along onstage, and it makes the audience feel good.”

The three believe their music is accessible to less religious women as well as women of other religious traditions, and they hope to draw music lovers from outside the Orthodox community to their upcoming concert.

“Sometimes the fact that men can’t come is a barrier,” said Weinreb. “But think of it as a ladies night out.”

*The Ayelet HaShachar CD release concert (for women only) will take place on Sunday, Nov. 17 at 8 p.m. at 3209 Fallstaff Road. For additional information, email Basia Adler at [info@ayeletmusic.org](mailto:info@ayeletmusic.org) or call 410-358-9492. Tickets are \$15 for general admission and \$8 for students. Concert sponsorships are also available. CDs by Ayelet HaShachar will be available at the concert and are on sale at [ayeletmusic.org](http://ayeletmusic.org) and Pern’s Bookstore and Shabsi’s Judaica Center.*

Preview Ayelet Hashachar’s album, *Matai* [here](#)

Simone Ellin is JT senior features reporter — [sellin@jewishtimes.com](mailto:sellin@jewishtimes.com)

## Related Posts via Categories