

Overture

In 1995, while on the Florida leg of a concert tour, Bob Dylan walked into Temple Beth El in West Palm Beach and attended Yom Kippur services. You would have thought Elijah had come through the door. Say what you want about Bob “Robert Zimmerman” Dylan’s late seventies–early eighties experience as a born-again Christian, the enigmatic superstar’s real roots were showing. Dylan’s synagogue appearance made local news. It also made local Jews proud. Throughout the rock era, most Jewish performers, songwriters, and musicians preferred keeping their Jewishness out of the spotlight. The Jewish contribution to rock, blues, folk, country, and pop music, and the influence of Judaism on these performers, musicians, and songwriters has been substantial, but little publicized. Identifying as a Jew was considered bad for business. Some performers, as you shall see in the coming pages, have, for years, been singing Judaism’s praises louder than we have realized. They just weren’t doing it in front of an audience or mentioning it in fan magazines.

Nor were journalists asking them about it. If they had, the media might have discovered (and reported) that, along with Dylan attending synagogue, Bon Jovi’s David Bryan blows the shofar at his temple during the High Holidays. And that during his nearly twenty-year tenure as the drummer with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Stan Lynch took his *hanukkiyah* on the road during concert tours to celebrate the Festival of Light. We might have known earlier that, from 1976 through at least 1980, the Jewish cast, crew, and guests of the hit NBC program *Saturday Night Live*, who were far from home, gathered for a Passover seder led by band member Paul Shaffer (who subsequently became music director for David Letterman). The seders were attended by Gilda Radner, Laraine Newman, Al Franken, and many of the show’s writers, as well as musical guests. Participants still talk about the 1978 seder during which Art Garfunkel sang the Four Questions.

North American Jews weren’t the only ones making an impact on pop music and trying to maintain a bond with their Judaism. This was occurring throughout the Diaspora. In the mid-sixties, Moroccan Jews Isaac “Jacky” Bitton (drums),

Marco Tobaly (guitar), and singer Jo Leb (replaced by Tunisian Jew Robert Fitoussi), who were living in France, co-founded Les Variations. The band sang in English and melded rock guitar and song structure with the indigenous rhythms and instrumentation of North Africa and the Sephardic melodies and Hebrew songs of their youth. Throughout the first half of the seventies, Les Variations was turning heads in the States with the albums *Moroccan Roll* and *Café de Paris* and were opening shows for the likes of Kiss and Aerosmith before personnel problems broke up the band in 1975. (Bitton wore a formidable Star of David around his neck during concerts.) Today, Bitton lives in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and leads a band that plays “Jewish rock ’n’ roll.” Tobaly and his family live in Paris (his wife is Israeli) and are *shomer Shabbos*.

From 1970 through 1980, trendsetting progressive British rock band Gentle Giant released a dozen albums of imaginative, trailblazing (and often uncommercial) progressive rock. Although the band wasn’t big in its own backyard, and had only a cult following in the United States, it was one of the hottest concert attractions in Europe. Band founders and brothers Phil, Derek, and Ray Shulman, all multi-instrumentalists, also had scored an international hit, “Kites,” in 1967 with their previous band, a psychedelic-rock outfit known as Simon Dupree and the Big Sound. The brothers were the sons of a Scottish bandleader and trumpeter who donned tefillin and *davened* daily before going off to play in Britain’s jazz clubs. The brothers grew up in a liberal, observant home but attended a strict Hebrew school where they were nearly turned off by the intense ritual. Still, Gentle Giant never performed on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, though the band included several non-Jewish members. Derek Shulman, the band’s lead singer, most closely followed in his father’s observant footsteps, taking a *siddur* on the road during concert tours. After moving to the United States where he became a record company executive, he help found the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in New York, and bought a home in Jerusalem, which the family uses several times a year. Commenting on Gentle Giant’s music, he says, “Our Judaism and the good ideological values of it did affect the musical and lyrical content of what Gentle Giant was. It was a little more of a thinking man’s band . . . Looking back, Judaism probably affected our music more than I realized at the time.”

By the mid-eighties, Yemen-born Israeli singer Ofra Haza had become an international star. Her music, initially inspired by ancient Sephardic melodies, was

filled with stories and images of her Jewish heritage, her love of country and a yearning for peace in the Middle East. She even wrote a song called “Kaddish,” about the importance and beauty of the Jewish prayer for the dead. She described the mourner’s kaddish as “a small prayer holding all of the world’s sorrow on the wings of an angel.” A veteran of the Israeli army, her popularity broadened when she began experimenting with dance and techno rhythms in the late eighties and singing in English as well as Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic. Haza began to break through in America after rap acts began “sampling” her songs on their albums. Even after her untimely death in 2000 at age forty-one, Haza remains an Israeli icon.

South African singer, songwriter, and bandleader Johnny Clegg rebelled against his Jewish roots as a child and reclaimed them as an adult. Since the late seventies, he has used his music, a blend of rock and various forms of South African folk music, as a vehicle to pursue justice, and he is credited with helping erode the country’s racist system of apartheid. He is as knowledgeable and embracing of Zulu culture as he is of Judaism and Jewish culture, singing many of his songs in Swahili and incorporating Zulu dance into his concerts. The Torah and Jewish history, however, influence songs such as “Jericho,” “Jerusalem,” and “Warsaw 1943.” His integrated band, topical songs, dramatic performances, and international popularity helped shine a light of condemnation on South Africa’s racist regime.

South African musician Sharon Katz, the daughter of Zionists who moved to Israel while she stayed to pursue her love of *mbaqanga*, *kwela* and reggae music, also wrote songs that were beacons of unity and social justice. In 1993, she campaigned for Nelson Mandela and helped teach formerly disenfranchised blacks, “coloreds,” and Indians to vote. Her creation and direction of an integrated five-hundred-person choir called When Voices Meet, and her “Peace Train” performances at railroad stops throughout the country in support of Mandela, made her a household name in South Africa. Like Clegg, Katz sings many of her songs in Swahili, but she is also fluent in Hebrew. Her first U.S. release, *Imbizo*, in 2002, was filled with songs of hope and optimism.

During the past decade, as Dylan unintentionally illustrated by attending Yom Kippur services, an increasing number of Jewish rockers have been trumpeting their Jewishness a little louder than before. What changed? The passage of time? The increasing success of pop stars who are Jewish? The nothing-to-lose-

attitude of performers who are the children of Holocaust survivors? The fact that gentile pop icons such as Madonna think Kabbalah is cool? Whatever it is, even veteran Jewish rockers from the sixties and seventies—observant or not—have become less reluctant to discuss their Jewishness. Longtime record producer Brooks Arthur (born Arnold Brodsky), who began his career as the studio engineer on most of Neil Diamond's hit singles and who also produced Adam Sandler's "Chanukah Song," observed in 1998 that among Jews in the music business, "your [Jewish] pride was more covert back then, and now it's overt."

Why? "Our parents' cry to us was 'Be American. Fit in.' So we were changing our ways. We realized twenty years later it wasn't working. For the last fifteen years or so, many people have been realizing that assimilation and intermarriage haven't been working," says Arthur, who also engineered and/or produced albums by Van Morrison, Blues Project, Bruce Springsteen, Janis Ian, Bette Midler, Liza Minelli, and comedians Jackie Mason and Robin Williams. It's also a question of mortality. "You realize you're a couple of steps closer to God, so we're cleaning up our acts. We're picking up where we left off after our bar mitzvahs," adds Arthur, who became *bal t'shuvah* in 1982. "I go to shul as often as I can, but my work and career don't allow me to get away all the time." Even so, he lays tefillin and davens every morning.

Rising new stars rarely think twice about talking about Judaism. Singer-songwriter Lisa Loeb, whose career was launched when her song "Stay (I Missed You)" from the *Reality Bites* soundtrack reached No. 1 in 1994, mentions starring in plays at the Dallas Jewish Community Center in her official record company bio. That's something few performers would have included in an official bio a dozen years ago. During a December 1997 television interview when asked what she would be doing for Christmas, Loeb boldly and honestly answered that she celebrated Hanukkah. Singer-songwriter Marc Cohn, winner of the 1991 Grammy Award for Best New Artist, whose parents died before he was of bar mitzvah age, has been re-examining his Jewish heritage to the point of participating on the critically acclaimed 1996 Hanukkah compilation CD, *Festival of Light*. He sings the lead track, a soulful version "Rock of Ages/Ma'oz Tzur." His 1998 album, *Burning the Daze*, is full of spiritual yearning and soul searching. And what of Adam Sandler's 1996 novelty tune, "The Chanukah Song"? Something must have changed not only for Sandler to write and record it, but for mainstream radio to play it frequently enough for the album on which it appears to sell well over one million copies.

But society, we know, was not always so tolerant. At the dawn of the rock era in the fifties even though the owners of many of the major record labels were Jewish, “Hanukkah” remarks such as Loeb’s were no-nos. Like many film stars, she might have been compelled to change her name to increase her appeal to the masses—or simply to fit in. Many performers did. The members of Jay and the Americans, who had a string of hits between 1962 and 1970 (“Only in America,” “Come a Little Bit Closer”), went through wholesale name changes early in the group’s career. Kenny Rosenberg became Vance; Howie Kirschenbaum became Kane; Sandy Yaguda became Dean, Marty Kupersmith became Sanders, and David Blatt became Jay Black. Do you think keyboard player-arranger Manfred Mann, a self-described cultural Jew from South Africa best known for taking Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen songs to the top of the pop charts (“The Mighty Quinn,” “Blinded By the Light”), would have been easier to market as Manfred Lubowitz? Would J. Geils Band harmonica player Magic Dick have sounded as sexy being introduced as Richard Salwitz, or lead singer Peter Wolf as Peter Blankfield? How about Cars lead guitarist Elliot Easton? Isn’t that name hipper (that is to say, less ethnic), than Elliot Steinberg? Phoebe Snow is cooler than Phoebe Laub; Janis Ian hipper than Janis Fink; ditto Carole King who was born Carole Klein, and Taylor Dayne, born Leslie Wundermann. And which rocks more for the co-founder of Jane’s Addiction, Porno For Pyros and the Lollapalooza festival, Perry Farrell or Perry Bernstein? British blues guitarist Peter Greenbaum simply dropped “baum” to become Peter Green before co-founding Fleetwood Mac in 1967 and writing the now-classic song, “Black Magic Woman,” which became a huge hit for Santana in 1970.

Some names just don’t “rock,” or were “too Jewish” (though that attitude is changing). So Haifa-born Chaim Witz and New Yorker Stanley Eisen respectively became Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley of Kiss. You get the picture.

Al Kooper’s parents changed the family name from Kuperschmidt long before their son became a Dylan sideman, joined the Blues Project, then founded Blood, Sweat and Tears. “My parents must have known I was destined for greatness,” Kooper joked of the name change. Mountain guitarist Leslie West’s mother gave her sons the choice of West or Winston when she decided to leave behind her married name of Weinstein after a divorce. Had Lou Reed’s father, Sidney, not changed the family name to Reed before son Lou was born, the co-founder of the Velvet Underground would have been Lou Rabinowitz. (His birth name was never Louis Firbank as many music reference books have erroneously reported.) The

fathers of songwriters P. F. Sloan (“Eve of Destruction,” “Secret Agent Man”) and Diane Warren (“Un-Break My Heart,” “If I Could Turn Back Time”) changed their family names in the 1950s to get work. Sloan had been Schlein; Warren had been Wolfberg. To be fair about name changes, Lollapalooza co-founder Farrell has discussed his Judaism during concerts, not tried to hide it, and in the late nineties announced that his return to Torah study helped him overcome a heroin addiction. (Farrell, who often uses his Hebrew name, Peretz, gave his child the biblical name of Yovel and based his 2001 album *Songs Yet to Be Sung* on the biblical concept of the jubilee year.) And keyboard player Manfred Mann never legally changed his name. “I think of myself as Lubowitz,” he says. “There are two of me. I’m only Mann on stage.” Songwriter Eddie Schwartz, best known for penning the 1979 Pat Benatar classic, “Hit Me with Your Best Shot,” says he isn’t sure if he would have changed his name earlier in his career. He admits he “agonized over it a lot.” Since he had written “Best Shot” under his own name, he kept Schwartz. It didn’t seem to hurt him when as singer Eddie Schwartz he had his own Top Thirty hit, “All Our Tomorrows,” in 1982. Even so, he says, “I wondered if it impaired my career, though I’m very proud of who I am.”

Another reason Jewish performers kept their pedigree quiet was, of course, fear of anti-Semitism and the accompanying possibility of losing work and fans. Nashville-based singer-songwriter Henry Gross, a transplanted New Yorker (and a yeshiva graduate), said in 1996 that many of his Jewish colleagues were reluctant to discuss the subject because being Jewish in the Bible Belt could be a career death warrant. Gross, best known as a founding member of Sha Na Na, and for the 1976 Top Ten hit “Shannon,” is an outspoken Zionist but has a sense of humor about the situation. He jokes about starting a Nashville TV show called *Heeb Haw*. In his spare time, he and his friends try to give classic rock song titles a Jewish flavor—remember, for example, the 1968 Iron Butterfly hit “In-A-Haggadah-Da-Vida.”

And try being the only Yid on the tour bus. Mickey Raphael, the harmonica player in Willie Nelson’s band has had that distinction since the early seventies. Fortunately, like his friend Henry Gross, Raphael has a sense of humor, too. When asked what it’s like to be the only Jew in the band, Texas-born Raphael, who also lives in Nashville, often responds, “Well, besides manipulating the press and controlling world banking, I’ve got my hands full.” New York City-born bass player Harvey Goldstein was nineteen when he took the stage name

Harvey Brooks after he “got into a Jewboy scenario” and was attacked during a break at a gig in Michigan in the early sixties. “I took that name to avoid conflicts,” says Brooks. “I thought, ‘Just let me get a professional name without any connotations, the blandest name I can find.’” If Brooks was a bland name, his bass playing was anything but. He got his break working on the classic Bob Dylan album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, in 1965.

Not every Jewish rocker acquiesced to a name change or was intimidated by anti-Semitism. Singer-songwriter-keyboard player Barry Goldberg and his best friend guitarist Michael Bloomfield, out of sheer pride, would not change their names. But then they had a role model—Goldberg’s uncle, Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg. “It hurt me, not changing my name,” says Goldberg, who along with Bloomfield did stints with Dylan and the Electric Flag, as well as his own Barry Goldberg Reunion. “Bloomfield and I were really into our heritage, and traditions, and proud of our names, and if people didn’t like them it was tough shit. We were emphatic about keeping our real names.” Goldberg also released an album of electric blues in 1969 called *2 Jews Blues*. Executives at Goldberg’s record company, most of them Jewish, opposed the album title for being, of course, “too Jewish.” (The year also saw the release of another album that didn’t hide its Jewish influence. The second album by the rock band Spirit, *The Family That Plays Together*, featured the song “Jewish,” a rock version of Psalm 133, “Hinei Ma’Tov.” The previous year, the Electric Prunes put out what might be considered the first two albums to marry religion and rock, *Mass in F-Minor*, and *Release of an Oath: The Kol Nidre*. The band included no Jews. The idea for these religious rock albums came from the band’s Jewish manager, Len Poncher, who hired Jewish composer David Axelrod to write the music.)

During the seventies, Richard “Kinky” Friedman took a somewhat defiant approach to Jewish pride by calling his satire-soaked country band the Texas Jewboys. The name was a play on legendary country swing band Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys and, Friedman says, it represented “the twin cultures from which I spring forth: Jewish and Texas.” His approach, in which he tried to defuse the epithet “Jewboy,” was misunderstood by some, including the Jewish Defense League, which threatened his life. Where does that Texas Jewboy defiance come from? It could be, says the singer-songwriter turned crime novelist, that “the independent Texas spirit makes for a stronger Jew. It could be that we’re not intimidated.” That concept is exemplified by one of his best-known songs, “They

Ain't Making Jews Like Jesus Anymore," in which the protagonist fails to turn the other cheek. (Nearly twenty years after Friedman's debut, singer-songwriter Dan Bern embarked on a concert tour with a backup band dubbed the International Jewish Banking Conspiracy.)

Not every Jewish pop star's behavior was as exemplary as his or her art or craft. Then again, the Torah is filled with flawed leaders and kings. "It was a chaotic, crazy time," Barry Goldberg says of sixties rock-and-rebel culture. "We were like guinea pigs for chemists and drug dealers." Some converted, or practiced other religions. Many have intermarried (though many of that number have retained their Jewish identity and are raising Jewish children). Rockers observing Shabbat? Not many. In fact, many Jewish pop singers have recorded best-selling Christmas albums. Neil Diamond has recorded two. Credit contemporary jazz saxophonist Kenny G (Gorelick), who recorded one of the hottest-selling Christmas albums of the nineties, for also releasing "The Jazz Service," music for Shabbat eve, though he did that in 1986 before he became a superstar. (Producer Brooks Arthur explains the Jews-making-Christmas-albums trend this way: "Christmas is American now, a national holiday that on a lot of levels no longer is religious, and Christmas sales are 60 to 70 percent of annual sales at retail, so why not get on the ride? And if you make some money from a Christmas album, give tzedakah, give money to your shul.")

Many Jewish rockers are role models, whether they intend to be or not. They try to acknowledge, observe, or worship as best as they can in an industry in which it is difficult to do so.

Bob Dylan did take time out to observe Yom Kippur. His son-in-law, rocker Peter Himmelman, best known for scoring the TV show *Judging Amy*, is the Sandy Koufax of rock 'n' roll. He does not perform on Shabbat, let alone Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. The three Jewish members of the Jakob Dylan-led Wallflowers, who catapulted to fame in 1997 with the Grammy-winning album *Bringing Down the Horse*, make an effort to recite the blessings over the wine and bread to acknowledge Shabbat, before performing on Friday nights. The band's secret weapon is keyboard player Rami Jaffee, who the others refer to as "Rabbi Rami."

These days, Himmelman and Jaffee are far from alone. Something is beginning to stir in the hearts and minds of Jews— young and old—in the music business. They are more willing to discuss their Jewishness and, in many cases, less reluctant to let it show. Even the acerbic Lou Reed took part in the third an-

nual nonsectarian Knitting Factory Cyber-Seder on April 12, 1998 (“the third night”) in the promenade at Avery Fisher Hall at New York’s Lincoln Center. All 640 seats were sold for what was also a United Jewish Appeal (now called United Jewish Communities) fund-raiser. And organizers estimate between six thousand and eight thousand people visited the Cyber-Seder Web site. Reed performed the part of the wise child. Sandra Bernhard, John Zorn, the Klezmatics, Hannah Fox of the band Babe the Blue Ox, as well as a host of avant garde New York musicians, also participated in the performance Seder. Knitting Factory owner Michael Dorf (who opened the club in 1988 using money saved from his bar mitzvah) has turned his place into a flagship performance space for Jewish musicians, especially those playing jazz, klezmer, and experimental music. In 1998, he released the debut CD on his new Jewish Alternative Movement (JAM) record label, *The Jewish Alternative Movement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, featuring the Klezmatics, Hasidic New Wave, and former Captain Beefhart guitarist Gary Lucas.

Spin Doctors drummer Aaron Comess says he didn’t realize until recently that studying for his bar mitzvah was one of the musical highlights of his life. This from a guy who co-wrote a pair of Top Twenty hits, “Little Miss Can’t Be Wrong,” and “Two Princes,” and whose band’s debut album in 1992 sold five million copies. “I was brought up in a kosher home,” Comess says. “I was playing piano at five, and always knew music was what I wanted to do. Studying the tropes, the melody notations of the Torah, was an amazing musical experience. We had an incredible cantor at our temple and he made me learn the hardest melodies, and the melodies they use on a lot of these prayers are incredible. I learned how to sing and read Hebrew. It was a real drag then, but looking back it was a pretty cool thing.” (Spin Doctors co-founder and singer Christopher Barron — whose last name is Gross — is also Jewish. The band even included an Israeli guitairist, Eron Tabib, for a while.) If Janis Ian’s newer songs received the radio play songs such as “Society’s Child” and “At Seventeen” received in the sixties and seventies, more people would have discovered “Tattoo,” her song about the Holocaust, which was on her 1993 album *Breaking Silence*.

The Holocaust, in fact, has served as a dark influence for many Jewish (and some non-Jewish) songwriters. Aside from Ian, Bob Dylan, Procol Harum’s Keith Reid, Dan Bern, Peter Himmelman, Kinky Friedman, Jill Sobule, Dan Pritzker of the funk ’n’ roll band Sonia Dada, David Draiman of hardcore band

Disturbed, the rapper Remedy (Ross Filler), and non-Jewish Captain Beefheart (Don Van Vliet), are among those who have grappled in song with the ultimate calamity of the twentieth century. Reid and Bern, as well as Billy Joel, Kiss founder Gene Simmons, Rush singer and bass player Geddy Lee (born Gary Lee Weinreb), are children of Holocaust survivors. So are Lee Oskar of WAR, Ten Wheel Drive lead singer Genya Ravan, and Bob Glaub, one of rock's most respected bass players. Disturbed's Draiman is the grandson of survivors.

Receiving a Jewish education was influential, too. Toronto-born songwriter and singer Eddie Schwartz credits attending Zionist summer camps from ages nine through fifteen for helping him develop his musicianship and songwriting themes. "I learned lots of Hebrew folk songs and dances of modern Israel. I think the wonderful spirit of those songs, the spirit of strength through adversity had an influence on me and is thematic to what I do as a writer. I have tremendous pride about that," Schwartz says.

As Jewish musicians and songwriters reached their forties, more began to reflect on their heritage. Mickey Raphael, who traces his family to Sephardic Jews of Spain, spends much of his free time on tour with Willie Nelson reading about Jewish history and Kabbalah. Many of his books were provided by a Reform rabbi he met after a Willie Nelson concert at the kosher Concord Hotel in New York in 1991. "I'm really interested in Judaism now. I love the history," says Raphael, a Reform Jew. "I think when I turned forty I wanted to find out more. Maybe it's because your mortality comes into focus and you begin to look for some meaning in life."

Something keeps pulling people back to reconnect with their Judaism.

Take tough-as-nails record executive Henry Stone (born Epstein). He started in the record business in 1948, made some of the first records by Ray Charles, James Brown, and Sam and Dave, and gave a break to a couple of eager kids who would go on to form KC and the Sunshine Band. Unable to have a bar mitzvah at thirteen, he finally became an official son of the commandments in 1992 when he traveled from Miami to Israel with his rabbi and was bar mitzvahed on Masada—at the age of seventy-one. He simply felt compelled to do it. "In my later years, I got more Jewish," says the semiretired record mogul. Just two years before that, Stone's son Joe scored a novelty hit with 2 Live Jews and the album *As Kosher As They Wanna Be*, a parody of the X-rated rap act 2 Live Crew and its controversial album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*. Included on the comedy record,

however, was a more serious song called “Young Jews Be Proud.” The younger Stone included a thought-provoking song about Judaism on several subsequent 2 Live Jews releases because, to him, Judaism wasn’t just a laughing matter.

In 1991, a Chicago poet named David Berman formed an alternative rock band, and named it Silver Jews to do what Kinky Friedman had tried to do twenty years earlier, which was to reclaim the word Jew, “a beautiful word,” says Berman, which anti-Semites had turned into a pejorative one. In 1993, Phish, one of the most popular concert attractions of the nineties, began performing “Avinu Malcanu” and “Yerushalayim Shel Zahav (Jerusalem of Gold)” in concert. Bass player Mike Gordon, one of the band’s two Jewish members (drummer Jonathan Fishman is the other) brought the songs to the band to include in its vast repertoire.

In 1995, Judith Edelman, a bright talent and compelling songwriter based in Nashville, released *Perfect World*, the first of three albums melding bluegrass and pop that she recorded through 2000. “I think Judaism manifests itself in my music,” said Edelman, the New York–born daughter of 1972 Nobel Prize winner (in medicine) Gerald Edelman. “My whole approach to lyric writing is informed by the way I was brought up, which is with the feeling of being a Jew. When I think of what it feels like to be a Jew, it’s with a little bit of sadness in every ounce of happiness. It’s never fully light. Jews are not reckless in their happiness. There’s always the sense that the other shoe could drop, so pay a little attention to the left hand of God, or to the darker side of life.” She added that there’s a little bit of redemption in every situation, so her songs, “don’t leave things without the possibility of a little bit of sweetness.”

In 1997, former Van Halen lead singer David Lee Roth released his autobiography, *Crazy from the Heat*, in which he devoted a whole chapter to Judaism’s influence on his life. In 1998, a white, Jewish rapper from Staten Island calling himself Remedy garnered international attention with his gripping hip-hop-style history of the Holocaust. Titled “Never Again,” it was featured on a compilation album produced by members of the rap act Wu-Tang Clan. In 1999, singer-songwriter Dan Bern, a purveyor of a combination of folk, rock, and punk styles and stream-of-conscious lyrics, began referring to himself by his original family name Bernstein, reclaiming a part of his Jewish heritage that had become a victim of the Holocaust.

By the end of the nineties, an acoustic rock trio from Boston called Guster, all of whose members are Jewish, had released three albums and gained a national

following. The band's Web site unabashedly, and with great humor, offered clues as to the band's collective Jewish background. The band's "FAQ" page began with "Q: Are you guys a Christian band? A: Rather than answer this with a simple 'Yes' or 'No,' we suggest you check the following sources for clues. 1) Brian's last name is Rosenworcel. 2) Any photo of Ryan where you can see his profile. 3) The (band's) . . . contract . . . where we stipulate that 'the dressing room must be furnished with plenty of borscht, noodle kugels, potato latkes, gefilte fish, and homemade rugulah for dessert.'" If that answer didn't offer enough clues, their more than occasional performance of "The Dreidel Song" in concert, or the time one of the band members incorporated a shofar into a show in Vancouver, should have clinched it. In 2000, the Atlanta-bred duo of Evan and Jaron (Lowenstein) made music history, becoming as far as can be determined, the first observant Jewish pop act to score a Top Twenty hit. The twin brothers, who observe Shabbat and keep kosher, climbed the charts with a guitar- and harmony-laden pop-rock song in which they declared they were "Crazy for This Girl." The Lowensteins proved that the term "religious rocker" wasn't an oxymoron, and that rock and religion could coexist.

In 2001, a young band from the New York area released its major label debut, *mission: you*. The band's name overshadowed the album's title, and was spelled proudly in large type across the cover: The ROSENBERGS. Though not all the members of the band are Jewish, the band name is a billboard for where the group's leader, David Fagin, is coming from. He is the product of a Jewish upbringing and proud of it. The name was inspired by a friend's hip, octogenarian grandparents. Asked how the non-Jewish members of the band feel about the name, he replied, "A previous member wanted us to change the band name, so we changed him." (Names can send the wrong signal as well. Because of its name, many fans of the punk-pop band New Found Glory believe the members are born-again Christians. In fact, three of the band's five members are Jewish. Says NFG bass player Ian Grushka, "Sometimes when people ask, I just say, 'Yeah, we're a Christian band.' They'll figure it out sooner or later.")

Even rock's old guard has come a long way. Bassist Harvey Brooks, who changed his professional name from Goldstein all those years ago, now says this of the switch: "If I had to do it again, I wouldn't."

These are shining examples of rock 'n' roll's Jewish stories; for the most part untold tales, but tales that command telling. They are the undercurrents and

subplots that give the music fascinating new context, and in many cases, new meaning. Some of the stories hinted at in this “Overture” are found in detail in the coming pages. You’ll also find many other revealing stories. Either way, the singers, songwriters, and musicians gathered here have contributed mightily to the vast ocean that Jewish disc jockey Alan Freed dubbed rock ’n’ roll. My hope is that collectively they tell the big story of the all-encompassing role Jews and Judaism have played in making this music. I can’t imagine what rock ’n’ roll would be without the Stars of David.