

Bat Kol

This Purim, Rinat Yisrael Mishloach Manot is re-releasing a classic of American Jewish music – the Bat Kol album. Bat Kol was a group that performed and recorded in the early 1970's and revolutionized the sound of American Jewish music.



In 1972, when Bat Kol formed, there were already performers and groups creating Jewish music for an American audience. Notable among them were Shlomo Carlebach, The Rabbis' Sons and The Or Chodosh. Many of the tunes introduced by these performers are still sung today. Bat Kol differed from these performers by introducing a modern Popular/Rock sound into their music. Anything resembling Rock was frowned upon by the Jewish music establishment in the early 1970's and Bat Kol was viewed as iconoclastic by most people who bought Jewish music recordings. But among YU and Stern College students, raised on the Rock and Roll of the sixties, Bat Kol was very popular. The Bat Kol album was released in June, 1973. No more than 1000 albums were ever pressed. With the disappearance of

long playing records (LP's) and record players, the music has not been heard for many years. Recently, the LP recording has been converted to a CD. The copy we are releasing was supplied by Rabbi Yehuda Rosenbaum, the administrator of the Kof-K and a Bat Kol fan during his years at YU. Another YU alumnus is a fan better known to the Plainview community - the orchestra leader Gary Wallen. During the Gary Wallen Orchestra's first performance at the Young Israel of Plainview's journal dinner, they played a Bat Kol medley.

The early 1970's was a period of activism among young orthodox students at Yeshiva University. The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) and Techiya were mobilizing strong support for the emigration of Soviet Jews and their rebirth in Israel. The YU Seminar and NCSY were promoting a rebirth among young American Jews. All of these organizations needed musical groups that would appeal to a young American crowd. These groups played for week long YU Seminars and NCSY weekends and they performed at benefit concerts to support the organizations. During a one month period in the spring of 1973, while working on their album, Bat Kol performed at two concerts and the conferral of an honorary degree upon Israeli Prime Minister Golda

Meir. The programs of these events are appended. Several of today's Jewish leaders were beginning their leadership roles at those events. Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, the Director of the National Jewish Outreach Program, was the Master of Ceremonies of the Techiya Benefit Concert. Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, President of On Wings of Eagles: International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, was the lead singer of the Y'DID Singers who performed at that concert. Richard Joel, President of YU and former International Director of Hillel, was the Head Advisor of YU's Eastern Regional Seminar and spoke at the Yolanda Benson Music Festival. Of the many groups performing at that time, Bat Kol was chosen to perform at the Golda Meir Convocation.

The members of Bat Kol came together in the fall of 1972 to form the group and record an album. There were a variety of connections between the members of the group. All the members had attended Camp Morasha and had performed there. George Freudenstein (the member who brought all the others together), Jay Richman and Ave Gold were all classmates at YU High School – Manhattan. George and Ave had gone on to NYU while Jay, Maish Yarmush and Josh Rosensweig were all students at YU. At the time the group came together, the average age of the members was about 20 years and none of them had any experience with managing a group, or recording an album. Nevertheless, the members of Bat Kol were, individually, an interesting collection of talents.

Maish (Martin)Yarmush (from Boro Park) As the group's lead singer, he had a strong, appealing singing voice (He is the first voice in *Adon Olam* and *Y'did Nefesh*). He also composed several melodies on the album (*Y'did Nefesh*, *Yigdal* and *Ashrei*) and orchestrated the album together with George Freudenstein. Maish went on to earn a combined MD PhD in Biomedical Engineering. Today, he is Professor of Surgery and Biomedical Engineering at Harvard / MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology. He is also chairman of the Biomedical Engineering Department at Rutgers University. He lives in Newton, MA.

George Freudenstein (from Riverdale) was the individual whose commitment brought the group together and got work on the album started. George was a talented, self-taught, pianist. In addition to playing keyboards on the album, George composed several of the melodies (*Yibaneh*, *Yasis*, *Esah Einai* and he collaborated on *Eitz Chaim*). George orchestrated the album together with Maish Yarmush and produced the album together with Ave Gold. Today, George is an accountant and CEO of EMI, a mortgage guaranty insurer in Israel. He lives in Ramot Yerushalayim.

Josh Rosensweig (from Kew Gardens) played guitar and sang on the album. Josh was an avid James Taylor fan and could usually be heard during practices picking James Taylor tunes on his 12 string acoustic guitar. The guitar introduction to *Eitz Chaim* is an example of his playing (He is also the first voice in that song). Josh (together with Maish) arranged the unique three part harmonies that characterized Bat Kol. He went on to get a doctorate in law from NYU. Today, he is the Chairman of the Board of the First International Bank of Israel and a senior partner of the I. Gornitzky & Co. law firm. He lives in Raanana, Israel.

Jay Richman (from North Bergen, NJ) sang on the album. The Bat Kol album was not his first. One year earlier, Jay and Maish sang together on the album *Shmelke's Nigunim*. Jay's wide vocal range and talent for singing harmony was an important part of Bat Kol's sound (Jay sings all the high harmonies on the album and is the first voice in *Yasis*). Today, Jay owns a wholesale plumbing supply company. He lives in Teaneck, NJ.

Ave Gold (from Spring Valley, transplanted to Flatbush) played drums, bongos and tambourine and helped to produce the album. His impeccable timekeeping anchors the album's rhythm section while his creative Popular/Rock style of drumming adds to the progressive sound of the music. Today, Ave is the Medical Director of the Sleep Disorders Center, a member of the Pulmonary/Critical Care Division and Associate Professor of Medicine at Stony Brook University School of Medicine. He lives in Plainview, NY.

The Bat Kol album was recorded at Ultrasonic Studios in Hempstead, Long Island as an 8 track, stereo LP. In 1973, 16 track recording was possible, but too expensive for Bat Kol. The 8 tracks were used principally for instruments to allow for balancing of the sound (toning down louder instruments and amplifying softer instruments). Only one or two tracks were left for the voices. As a result, there was little opportunity to balance the voices and the sound on the album is very much the way Bat Kol's voices would have sounded in a live performance.

In the recording studio, the group was joined by 4 additional musicians: Mickey Lane on bass guitar, Stanley Mermelstein on trumpet, Stanley Miller on flute, saxophone and violin, and George Walters on cello. Only **Mickey Lane** and **Stanley Miller** played every song. They both fit in well with the Bat Kol's personality and made an enormous contribution to the Popular/Rock sound of the album.

Mickey Lane had spent the sixties as a Rock studio musician and had become a regular on Jewish music albums of the early 1970's. As a member of the rhythm section, Mickey's bass can be heard playing off Ave's drumming to produce a solid support for the melodies and the harmonies that float above (as in *Adon Olam* or *Y'did Nefesh*).

Stanley Miller was an enormously talented musician. His greatest gift was his ability to improvise on any instrument he played. This was also a bit of a problem. Stanley viewed sheet music as a *suggestion*. His attitude toward the musical arrangements was similar to the attitude of airline passengers toward flotation seat cushions (*He was glad to have the sheet music along, but he prayed he would never have to use it!*). It was an effort for George and Maish to get Stanley to play the music the way it was written. As a result, they picked their battles carefully and allowed Stanley some freedom to improvise. The soprano sax line in *Eitz Chaim* (that *snake-charming* sound) and the flute line in *Y'did Nefesh* (where the flute weaves around the melody) are two examples of Stanley's improvising. In fact, the instrumental track of *Y'did Nefesh* on the album is

the first time either Stanley or Mickey heard the song (it was a recorded first rehearsal that was so good it became the final take!).

In addition to the talented musicians who joined Bat Kol, there was a studio engineer, John Bradley, whose expertise was recording. Even John, however, got into the creative mode. He was the one who thought that *Yasis* needed a police siren and he dreamed up the ending to *Yigdal* (One of *Yigdal's* weaknesses was that it was never meant to end!).

After the album was released, Bat Kol went on to perform until February, 1975. In September, 1973, George and Josh left Bat Kol to study in Israel and never returned to the group. They were replaced and Bat Kol changed its focus to Israeli Popular/Rock music. Bat Kol introduced its audiences to *Pit'om Kam Adam* (from *Festival Hazemer*) *Tayn Shabbat* (*Festival Hazemer*), *Yo Ya* (from *Sipurei Pugi* by the group *Kaveret*) and many other popular, secular Israeli songs (They also continued to perform the most popular songs from their album and more traditional Jewish music). The introduction of Israeli Pop/Rock to an orthodox Jewish American audience is one of Bat Kol's lasting contributions (Today, at any Bar/Bat Mitzvah or wedding, Bat Kol's influence is responsible for that Israeli Popular/Rock music called *Simcha dancing*).

If you have read this far, you have too much time on your hands! All you really need to know is in Bat Kol's music. We hope you will enjoy this album as much as we do.