

Music

MUSICAL MUSINGS
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The song in my heart

It feels like ages since I last wrote. So much can happen in such a short time. Last month felt like a novel unravelling. But compared to this month's excitement, last month was as thrilling as the adventures of a small-town insurance salesman!

Well, I promised last time that I'd tell you more about the recording process, and I'm not one to break a promise. I've been shuttling back and forth to New York like a yo-yo, in between singing at chasunas and other simchas. My last trip was BH hugely successful and I, along with my stateside friends, put the final touches on several songs. Some of these were simply melodies without words. So my producer passed these melodies over to famed lyricist, Miriam Israeli, who's been working on them tirelessly to create original English and Israeli lyrics.

It's interesting to look at the credits, not just for the music but for the whole project. Behind each project of this magnitude, behind the solo name, there's often an army of people collaborating to make it a success. I know from experience that music is always a team effort – a group of creative lightbulb minds, fizzing with ideas and working together to develop and perfect a product – in my case, the songs. Fortunately, I'm blessed with a team of eight amazing people who work with me to take my concepts and convey the spirit of their lyrics in a song. What's great is that they don't compromise on quality. These people know that Rome wasn't built in a day. I guess this is the great lesson I have learnt from them. So once the melody has been settled and we have the final lyrics, my producer passes the completed song to my arranger. His job is to write the music. This is a long, drawn-out process in which he works industriously with the musicians and engineers in the studio to create the music that I will sing. It's so exciting to watch the plan unfold. Something worked on for months by so many people finally takes perfect shape, like a caterpillar miraculously evolving into a butterfly. To recap (do try to

keep up!): the composer creates the melody, and the melody is sent to the lyricist to create the words. The song is then sent to the arranger who records the final version of the song with the musicians. Once the track is completed, I pop over to the studio to add my vocals and the finishing touches to the song. You see the responsibility? I'm the front man, the poster boy for this team of dedicated artists. So it's up to me to make sure that you appreciate and enjoy every note and every word they've created. Think of it like this – I'm just the messenger.

I remember recording my last album. It was August and I was in New York. The weather was sweltering and as you can imagine, it wasn't the best environment for singing. Walking into the studio, I found that the air-conditioning was broken. In England we live by the rule, 'Britain muddles through'. Or, if you prefer, 'Keep Calm and Carry On'. In other words, we'd shrug, sigh, shut up, and put up. That's not the American way of life. I'll never forget watching in amazement as the team schlepped these huge portable air conditioner systems through the studio to make me feel less like a reeled-in fish, flapping and gasping for air. Those songs ended up being the most passionate tracks on the album, delivered with real emotion and feeling – most likely because I wanted nothing better than to get back to my hotel for a shower and an iced coffee!

Joking aside, singing on these finished tracks is wonderfully liberating. It's really important to be in the right mood. On my last album, I was working on a single track for a full day. I just wasn't feeling the connection to the song, so I went back to my hotel, rested up and returned at two o'clock

in the morning. And then I sang with all my heart and soul, finishing the song in one take. Frame of mind is crucial. The song must erupt from you like a volcano. To quote almost verbatim the words of the poet John Keats: if it doesn't come as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.

I always tell people that this is the difference between music in the Jewish world and music in the wider world. Jewish music, rather like the Yiddish language, has that extra quality, something mysterious, unique and indescribable, that can't be faked, or recreated. It has neshoma. It comes not from the soul of one individual but from the soul of the Jewish people, from a spiritual dimension beyond the reach of language and logic.

I must tell you that I take this principle and belief of mine everywhere: to the studio, to weddings, barmitzva's and every simcha. Each event is unique, personal and precious. People often ask me with blunt curiosity: 'Don't you get bored doing wedding after wedding?' The answer is simple. Of course not! It's a spiritual thing, something I crave more and more. Pouring your heart out, whether at a wedding or in the studio, is something you can't fake. It brings out the goose bumps – and sometimes a flash of pride courses through your veins. It's an honour and privilege to be asked to be part of someone's great day. They've chosen me to sing for them to celebrate the most precious moment of their lives. It's a responsibility but also an unbelievable honour that I predict will never become 'boring' or monotonous. I wrote last time, and I'll say it again: no simcha is the same. Each one has its own special magic. That's what I remember every day. A wonder that I take with me wherever I go. And I'm always learning.

I've just received the lyrics for another lovely song. I need to send these to the composer to look over and then I hope to confirm the sixth song on my new album. This is not the end of the journey, but every stage is a deeply rewarding experience and I can't wait to share our beautiful work, because you, the audience, are the final and most important part of the team.



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