

## **Shofar-Palooza and David Zasloff: a Satchmo on Shofar Coming to Las Vegas for One Night Only: August 23rd**

**By (and reprinted with permission from) Linda Parker Horowitz**



What happens when East meets West, Japan comes to the Vegas Val-ley, and you eat sushi with kreplach? David Zasloff's "Shofar-Palooza," concert/comedy experience a cross-cultural musical soup with a decidedly Jewish flavor.

Once you hear David play the shofar, you "will never think of it as a ram's horn again. Last year before Rosh Hashanah, I experienced this wondrous shofar event in L.A., and heard David magically transforms an ordinary ram's horn. Opening the evening with the traditional T'kiah G'dolah blast, David's sweet, spiritually haunting call to worship, fills the space and echoes through building, awakening souls to begin the New Year, the tone lasting for what seems to be minutes, not the usual seconds.

David's shofar calls are musical, almost mel-low, not the bright, harsh sounds produced by even the most experienced Bal Tekiah (shofar player). His shofar becomes a musical instrument, which David plays like a standard trumpet. And what a treat to hear a variety of tunes, not blasts – on a shofar! When he plays "Hatikvah," the audience sings along!

Throughout the evening, David jokes amiably, putting everyone at ease, his deep-set eyes connecting with the audience. Moving seamlessly among instruments, he plays an exquisite piece on the autoharp, a haunting melody on Shakuhachi (Japanese) flute, playing diverse musical instruments with extraordinary ease and dexterity. He also plays trumpet, piano, percussion, and guitar. A Wynton Marsalis on shofar, David plays his own composition, "Jumpin' In Jerusalem," grooving and tapping the rhythm with his foot as if playing "Jig's Jag." Ending the piece, he raised his shofar in victorious punctuation. "Next year in Jerusalem," he

exhales. The audience breaks into cheers and applause, astounded by his virtuosity.

After sharing the shofar's history, (certainly more interesting than my Hebrew school version), David invites audience members, who bring their shofars, up to the stage for a lesson. He coaches kids and grown-ups, helping those brave souls improve their technique for the High Holy Days and finding among them some children destined to be the next Louis Armstrong or Dizzy Gillespie.

David began his musical odyssey in the Bronx at age 8 learning the bugle then trumpet, expanding to percussion, guitar, Shakuhachi flute, and of course, shofar. He studied music at the High School of Music & Art in New York City (of "Fame" fame). After graduating, he set-off on a journey toward spiritual enlightenment and whatever else intrigued him, stopping first in Vermont to be a ski instructor. After nearly dying on the McKenzie River, rather than developing a fear of water, David faced the rapids, not just learning how to run white water, but becoming a river guide on the Rogue River.

Despite being a thrill-seeker in his early life, David explains that throughout his life "...playing music has always been a spiritual pathway to consciousness. Every time I pick-up an instrument, I experience God." And his joy and connection to God translate to everyone present.

His commitment to Judaism matches his ardent dedication to music. David recounts



the moving story of his recent visit to Cuba with his wife (whose family escaped Castro) bringing aid in suitcases full of everyday items like toothbrushes and bandages, much needed in Cuba. His surreptitious journey to a Cuban synagogue to daven is disheartening and sad. Through David, the audience sees the crumbling bricks and worn pews of the sanctuary, the dark room dank and musty smelling. Yet David's Yiddishkayt and effusive heart endow the story with humor, bringing laughter and more importantly, hope.

David launches into how similar the Jewish and Cuban souls and cultures are, proving his theory with a few bars of Latin music. He's absolutely right – sounds like Klezmer.

Concluding the evening with all newly-appointed Baal Ti'kiim standing for one communal T'kiah G'dolah blast, David ensures that ones souls is not merely awake, but definitely 'jivin' toward Jerusalem.'

Welcome the upcoming 5770, with David Zasloff right here in Las Vegas, and, if you have one, bring your shofar, as Valley Outreach Synagogue is delighted to present "Shofar-Palooza" on Sunday, August 23, 2009, at 5:00 PM at Matryoshka Restaurant, 7700 Las Vegas Boulevard South in Las Vegas. Tickets for the evening, which includes a delectable, Eastern European dairy meal, are \$36.00 for standard seating and \$72.00 for preferred seating. Seating is limited and may be reserved by contacting the Valley Outreach Synagogue office by phone at (702) 436-4900 or by email at valleyoutreachsynagogue@aol.com.