

And now for something completely different:



Rocker's latest release is spiritual and God positive

By SHAYLA GUNTER-GOLDSTEIN
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Josh Nelson's music is difficult to categorize. It's faith-based, spiritual and God positive, yet it's mostly straight-up rock.

And Nelson, while professing a desire to be a positive role model for Jewish youth, is simply a rocker at heart - a very talented rocker.

The Josh Nelson Project's debut CD release, *Lift*, is unique new Jewish music, unlike any most of us have ever heard before.

"I want to push the envelope of what Jewish music has been and what it will continue to be," says the 30-year-old Nelson, who has been making music for years.

He began playing piano at age six, guitar at eight, drums at 11 and double bass at 13, and was performing in clubs in his native New Bedford, Mass., at 14.

Nelson went on to earn both bachelor and master's degrees in music, and is now close to completing his doctorate.

He got his academic credentials while touring and recording with Jewish musicians, including Craig Taubman, in the United States. He also played with Yom Hadash (New Day), the band he formed with his brother Jon.

Yom Hadash produced several albums and toured heavily. It was a formative experience for Nelson, however, the musical direction was a group effort and left him feeling like he needed something more.

"So much music inside me needed to come out," he says. "I had to branch out on my own and express what was in my heart."

That desire to express himself has manifested itself in *Lift*, a hard-rocking release that will at times have you joining in on air guitar. The CD, however, does have its tender and moving moments with some stunning and poignant ballads.

Emotions run high on the album. The title track *Lift*, with its compelling Middle Eastern sound and rhythm, communicates that faith can provide hope and direction when we are broken.

The heartbreaking *I* is an expression of Nelson's grief over the tragic death of his younger brother Jeremy. Then the listener is snapped out of the melancholy with *Positive Change*, a funky, sexy and danceable track that suggests we "have immense power to effect change on a deep and important level in other people," Nelson says.

With the song *Seven*, Nelson conveys his love of Shabbat and reminds us how it can help us start over, slow us down and clear our heads.

The stunning track *L'dor Vador* (*From Generation to Generation*) is a haunting anthem to our history and our future as the Jewish people.

"We are words and we are stories, we are pictures of the past. We are carriers of wisdom, not the first and not the last," the lyrics say.

All the tracks on *Lift* were composed, arranged and written by Nelson, with several drawing on traditional liturgy for inspiration.

Nelson finds it fascinating to compose melodies for existing text.

"Everyone has his or her own unique experience with spirituality," he says.

"For example, the opening track *Yih'yu L'ratzon*, taken from Psalm 19:15, translates to 'May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to You, O God, my Rock and my Redeemer.'

"This text reaches beyond the act of prayer and speaks volumes about the power of the human voice. It expresses that every word we say over the course of a day has the ability to have a positive impact or effect on the people we meet."

Nelson is aware of how his music can do just that for his audiences - in large part the Jewish youth for whom he performs at concerts through organizations such as the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), United

Synagogue Youth (USY) and the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO), as well as at synagogues.

His goal is to be a positive role model for youth, and he loves his involvement with them. Nelson will be in Toronto for the Union for Reform Judaism biennial convention in November 2009, performing and serving as musical director for the event.

"For me, music is really a chance to take a risk and do something that is different. I'm not afraid to make music that expresses who I am and what I believe. My music is definitely rock, and definitely spiritual. It's an expression of the way I observe the world," he says.

Lift is available through iTunes, Amazon.com and other online sources. It will be at major music retailers and Judaica stores soon. For more information, visit www.myspace.com/joshnelsonproject or www.joshnelsonproject.com.

'I want to push the envelope of Jewish music'



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