

Kindred Spirits — More Than a Concert

By Rabbi Baruch Cohon

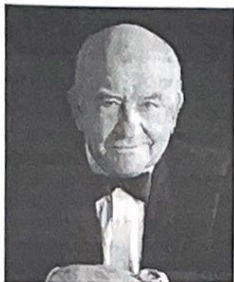
LOS ANGELES — A large enthusiastic audience gathered at Disney Hall on June 5th for an event called *Kindred Spirits*, featuring the L.A. Jewish Symphony, four vocal soloists, four motion picture and TV personalities, the 150-voice Freedom Mass choir of the First AME Church, and its minister, all MC'd by our own publisher Phil Blazer. The goal of the evening was to celebrate Israel's 60th birthday by contributing to its prime rescue organization, Magen David Adom, the Israeli Red Cross. Despite a few rather long speeches, no one came away disappointed.

How could you, with tenor voices like those of cantors Alberto Mizrahi of Chicago, David Propis of Houston and Ilan Davidson of Temple BethEl in San Pedro who also produced the ambitious program. Then there was Alisa Pomerantz-Boro whose duet with Propis on Carole Bayer Sager's song, "The Prayer," brought a standing ovation.

And a fifth voice should be mentioned—that of concert master Mark Kashper's violin. His solo on Julius Burger's *Ziegenmelde* combined lightning virtuosity with mellow tone.

Dominating the music, of course, was the L.A. Jewish Symphony itself. Founder-conductor Dr. Noreen Green continues to grow and to take the orchestra to new levels of excellence and variety. The famed Disney acoustics only heightened appreciation of her accomplishments.

Particularly interesting were some of the arrangements, adapting for a symphony some tunes



Ed Asner

originally conceived for a folk ensemble, or an unaccompanied voice, or a rock group. Three of the arrangements for *Kindred Spirits* were the work of the orchestra's pianist, Chris Hardin.



Valerie Harper

Of course this evening was not all music. Out of 20 entries on the program, only 11 and the encore were musical numbers. Interspersed with them came readings and presentations. Awards went to Israel's leading pharmaceutical company, Teva, and to the Itzhak Rabin Center. They were acknowledged—

either in person or, in the case of Dalia Rabin, by video from Jerusalem. Ed Asner, TV's Lou Grant who now is a frequent guest performer at Westside JCC's playreading series, re-appeared Ben Gurion's 1948 proclamation. Golda Meir was quoted by Valerie Harper of "Rhoda" fame, who just returned from marshalling the Israel 60th birthday parade on New York's Fifth Avenue. Mike Burstyn—veteran of Israeli *Kuni Lemel* pictures who most recently appeared locally as Lansky—contributed a powerful reading of Herzl's address to the 1897 Zionist convention. Millie Perkins, the original star of the film version of *Diary of Anne Frank*, reprised the part in a brief quotation. And Reverend John Hunter delivered Martin Luther King's great speech declaring that anti-Zionism is nothing but anti-Semitism, another form of race hatred.

Mr. Communications Phil Blazer tied it all together and added some interesting side-lights, like reminding the audience that the Bible is the only book that outsells *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

The polished passionate sound of the AME choir brought a special excitement to the evening. They rendered Moses Hogan's unusual arrangement of the old spiritual "Battle of Jericho" with verve and drama. Their tenor and soprano sections glittered, although they seemed to lack balance in the lower voices. But the spirit echoed!

Jewish music, clearly the prime repertoire of most of the performers, ranged from Paul Ben-



Noreen Green

Haim's stirring *Celebration* which had the orchestra dramatizing the restless energy of Israel with high-powered dissonances and compelling rhythm—to Abraham



Cantor David Propis

Ellstein's classic arrangement on the liturgical text *V'irushalayim Ircho* ("Return to Jerusalem Your City") rendered by Alberto Mizrahi with his unfailing cantorial quality and vocal excellence. A standard in his own repertoire, this composition is one Mizrahi recorded with the Seattle Symphony. Interestingly enough, at least one member of the orchestra here has a special relationship to this number. Violinist Ezra Klinger told me he once played it for Jan Peerce at Madison Square Garden! I didn't hear that one, but I'll take the one I heard any time.

Still radiating the look and sound of the "Jewish Pavarotti," Mizrahi brings joy to the stage—and to the audience. Between those extremes we heard Sephardic Sabbath table songs rendered by all four cantors, and Ladino folksongs by Mizrahi and Davidson. Davidson soloed in the *Israel Overture* by Lucas Richman which included the Yiddish *Vu Ahin Zol Ikh Geyn* ("Where Shall I Go?"), the El Al hit *Bashana Habaah* and of course, *Hatikvah*.

Appropriately, as the man

who conceived the plan and put the whole evening together, Davidson made the presentation to Magen David Adom before he sang, and considering all he had to do he deserves special praise for the fine quality of his performance. He also rendered the prayer for Israel, *Avinu Shebashamayim* in Meir Finkelstein's setting, kind of a Shul-plus-Broadway style which fits a smooth voice like Davidson's admirably.

Alisa Pomerantz-Boro's own composition on the text of the daily thanksgiving prayer *Modim* gave the orchestra some difficult transitions, alternating between a flowing melodic refrain which she encouraged the audience to sing, and a series of recitatives that seemed to go nowhere. Gifted with a warm clear voice, however, this cantor's granddaughter made a hit with the audience. Now in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, Alisa formerly sang at Tefereh Israel of San Diego. David Propis, whose congregation in Houston has the largest membership of any Conservative synagogue, recorded an entire album with Alisa called *Together as One*.

He also frequently concertizes with Mizrahi and Meir Finkelstein—in another edition of the Three Tenors. The Magen David Adom cause is close to Propis too. He treasures a poster of his father appearing in a 1938 benefit for MDA in pre-state Palestine. He dedicated his solo in this program to his father's memory. Yet he chose to sing a number that bridges between cultures—*You Raise Me Up* by Graham and Lovland, with the AME choir joining him. His ringing high A's, and the choir's full-throated background, brought the audience to its feet.

Both Propis and Mizrahi compared this experience with Black choirs they sang with before. Mizrahi sang with the Beney Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew choir in Chicago, Propis with the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston which boasts 5 choirs. The FAME Mass choir, under the spirited direction of Rev. Dwayne Knox, is perhaps the most celebrated of them all, drawing as it does on no less than seven choirs for its talent.

So KINDRED SPIRITS was more than a concert. It was a musical, conceptual and multi-media adventure. If you were not there, you missed something worthwhile.



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