

music Jewish simply because the rapper is Orthodox or uses only Yiddish or Hebrew, regardless of the content? All of the above? And how do you build and reach audiences for such a disparate market, anyway?

THE ANSWERS MAY BE FOUND simply by recalling the evolution of Jewish music over the centuries, as Jews absorbed the sounds of other cultures from the various countries in which they lived. That, after all, is how klezmer was born and evolved. As far as Frank London, another Klezmatics co-founder is concerned, the situation is no different today. “We don’t need to be on a Jewish label, but if a mainstream label told us to tone down our out-front, in-your-face Jewishness in order to sell more albums, we would reject them instantly. And we’d be at odds with our own allies,” he says. “So it’s refreshing to be on a label that says, ‘Well, of course, we’re Jewish, now let’s check out the music.’ Don’t assume you know what Jewish music sounds like. If people think they know what Jewish music sounds like, the diversity of sounds on JMG should dispel this prejudice.”

McLees acknowledges the challenges, but isn’t wasting time trying to figure out what to do. Already, he’s aggressively pushing the new Klezmatics record as a folk, not a klezmer, album, because there aren’t any klezmer tunes on “Wonder Wheel” and the Woody Guthrie lyrics are all in English, not Yiddish. The timing for such a move is serendipitous, given the success of Bruce Springsteen’s recent album devoted to Pete Seeger, and other so-called Americana material, such as the music featured on the “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” soundtrack released six years ago. And McLees is also developing a blogging strategy and exploring marketing to Evangelical Christians, a budding market in the United States for many things Jewish.

“People who sell music are cynical, because they think they’ve seen it all before,” he says. “But Matisyahu’s success opened up minds to new ideas. There’s no question that he helped — a visibly Jewish artist breaking into the mainstream. If you consider him a home run, I think there’s several doubles and triples, and a couple of other home runs out there. Look, I’m a convert — a wide-eyed believer. My idea is to be upbeat, proud and positive. I’m in people’s faces. That’s why I call the label the JewishMusicGroup.”

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A Pilgrim’s Progress

With characteristically gorgeous writing, A.B. Yehoshua challenges despair by imagining a character who learns to feel again as he accompanies a bombing victim’s body to a proper burial

Yael Goldstein

TO THOSE WHO ARE FAMILIAR with the densely textured, exuberant poetry of such books as “Mr. Mani,” “Journey to the End of the Millennium” and “The Liberated Bride,” A.B. Yehoshua’s most recent literary effort, “A Woman in Jerusalem” (published in Hebrew under the far better title “The Mission of the Human Resources Man”), might seem not so much a novel as a sigh: weary, dispirited, brief. It is, of course, a gorgeously expressed sigh. Yehoshua’s language, translated fluidly by Hillel Halkin, is as taut and elegant as ever, and his characters, though never named, are still likely to strike readers as far better realized than many of the people they know. While the humor that trembles beneath almost every line of “The Liberated Bride” here only peeks through in short, shining bursts, and the optimism is nowhere to be found, “A Woman in Jerusalem” is by no means a downer. This isn’t Yehoshua despairing; it’s Yehoshua rallying the philosophical apparatus he needs to *keep himself* from despair.

“A Woman in Jerusalem” was written at the height of the second intifada, which probably accounts for the dramatic change in mood. (“A Liberated Bride” was written in the calmer days following the Oslo Accord.) Yet while terrorism is the context of the book, it is not its concern. The concern, instead, is one man’s moral pilgrimage, both physical and metaphysical. The book opens with a public relations crisis in a major Jerusalem bakery: A stub from the company’s payroll department has turned up

in the personal effects of an unidentified terror victim, and a muckraking journalist is planning to publish an exposé, revealing the inhumanity of an employer so indifferent to its menial laborers that it could fail, for a full week, to note a disappearance among them. The bakery’s elderly owner is horrified to have his humanity called into question — “What is left to us if we lose our humanity?” he pleads with his human resources manager, as if humanity were one more thing he could delegate to a trusted employee. And so our hero, the unnamed human resources man, gets saddled with a job that will change the very fabric of his moral makeup. His task is to determine the identity of the unfortunate employee, and to explain how the company has managed to remain ignorant of her death for such an egregious length of time.

At first, the efficient former army officer and recent divorcé is annoyed by the task set before him, even going so far as to resent the laborer, who “had gone shopping without so much as an ID card for the sole purpose of making him... responsible for finding out who she was.” But as he begins his investigation into the identity of the murdered woman, he comes to feel real sadness for this non-Jewish Eastern European emigrée who managed to get herself blown up in a country, and among a people, that were not her own. The sadness gradually transforms into a sense of profound responsibility, based upon a compassion that is complicatedly mixed up with love. For our hero, this change in attitude toward the dead woman requires a dramatic broadening of emotional capacity.

When we first meet the human resources man, his emotional landscape is dominated by those twin emotions of modern professionalism, irritation and obligation. His highs seem to derive chiefly from checking items off a global “to-do” list, performing duties as they are demanded of him, whether by his boss, his ex-wife or general societal conceptions of virtue. (It is this last, for instance, that seems to motivate his decision