

Building Jewish and queer community with song and love

Hannah Davis, special to the WJN

Temple Beth Emeth hosted an Outdoor Spring Campfire Concert on May 2 in the tent on the synagogue's grounds. Three queer Jewish leaders and musicians — Batya Levine, Arielle Korman, and Ann Arbor native Aly Halpert — performed original music in a moving participatory concert and celebration of community. Attendees danced and sang along to new and familiar melodies alike as the musicians performed songs from Halpert's debut album *Loosen* and Levine's debut

much of this music has come from healing the loss of my brother, who was of that community. It feels particularly meaningful to get to bring that music back.

Batya Levine: I feel like there is something special about going to a place where I didn't really know anyone, but it was clearly a place that Aly is connected to, and feeling the warmth and welcome of being received by the Ann Arbor community. I was also struck by how there were a number of people who came from interfaith singing groups. That



Karov, accompanied by Korman's soaring violin and voice. A standout melody was Korman's song "Ki Li Ha'aretz," from the collaborative Shmita album *Shirei Shmita*.

In honor of the tradition of counting the omer (the 50-day period between Passover and Shavuot), when some refrain from engaging with instrumental music, the trio did a portion of the concert without accompaniment, and the final song in the show was a beautiful rendition of the omer blessing.

WJN talked briefly with Halpert and Levine while they were en route between shows about their experience on the tour so far.

WJN: How has the tour been so far?

Aly Halpert: This tour is a big adventure for us. None of us has gotten to tour before, particularly with the pandemic. Batya's album came out and they were thinking of touring but didn't get to, and my album just came out too. It feels super powerful to get to debut this music with people, the way the music was actually designed, to be sung with and for community. It feels like a big blessing. And it's been fun! And a lot of work, but worth it.

WJN: What was it like visiting Ann Arbor for the first time, Batya, and coming back to your hometown, Aly?

AH: It feels particularly meaningful to get to combine the world I live in now with my roots, my home. I just love the Ann Arbor community and people there so much. So

felt powerful, to feel like the music has been reaching past the Jewish community. Never having been there, I felt very welcomed in, and it felt very familiar even though I didn't know anyone there. Some is the connection to Aly, and some is how and who we were welcomed by. And the intimacy the music creates — I didn't know people, but some of them knew my music and there was that connection. I resonate with Aly: this music is meant to be sung in community and with people together. It's been a really strong feeling everywhere we've gone.

AH: The other day we were in Ann Arbor was very rainy, but we made sure to go to Argus Farm Stop on Liberty and to Zingerman's, because you've just gotta do it!

BL: They were both fabulous stops.

WJN: Any meaningful experiences or stories you'd like to share?

AH: There's no single moment that's stood out, just being excited about all the different connections. There was one person at Oberlin who had grown up on my street and is now a rabbi in Cleveland. People are popping up in unexpected places!

Find out more about Aly at <https://www.alylalpert.com/>, Batya at <https://www.batyalevine.com/>, and Arielle at <https://ariellekorman.bandcamp.com>. ■

Adult b'nai mitzvah at TBE

Candace Bulkey, special to the WJN

On the evening of June 4, erev Shavuot, seven women became b'nai mitzvah at Temple Beth Emeth. Under the guidance of Cantor Regina Hayut, they studied for nearly four years in preparation for this event. They had reached that point through a variety of paths, some born Jewish and denied a bat mitzvah as teens because they were girls, others who had converted and wanted to become a bat mitzvah as a next step in their journey.

The group opened with a montage of statements describing why they chose to be

soon become a bar mitzvah, she joined the b'nai mitzvah class to learn Hebrew and feel qualified to stand on the bima as a religious participant as well.

Trina Fuller converted as an adult and wanted to continue her Jewish journey as a bat mitzvah.

This was not supposed to be a four-year odyssey — the original date for the service was in June 2020. Due to COVID, that was postponed, and study continued for two more years. It turned out to be serendipitous, however, as this year is the 100th anniversary



Photo by Elena Weissman. Left to right: Molly Lindner, Barbara Heller, Candace Bulkley, Rachel Glick, Cantor Regina Hayut, Cilla Thomas, Sheila Deskins, Trina Fuller.

on the bima as B'nai Mitzvah, after which they lead an erev Shavuot service with their Divrei Torah woven into the service.

Rachel Glick was told by her father that b'nai mitzvah were for boys.

Sheila Deskins just recently completed her conversion with an immersion at the mikveh at Temple Israel, and chose her Hebrew name which she discussed in her d'var Torah.

Barbara Heller-Burstein had been too shy to complete her bat mitzvah as a teen and had turned away from Judaism earlier in adulthood. As she became reconnected, she wanted to develop a better understanding of the rituals and have the chance to read Torah.

Cilla Tomas grew up in Switzerland in a strict Orthodox-Conservative temple where men and women were separated. Finding a home in Reform Judaism at TBE, she wanted to study and become more engaged in Reform Jewish life.

Molly Lindner converted as an adult years after her daughters became Bat Mitzvah but did not really feel connected to Judaism until joining the Kol HaLev choir. It was her connection to the music that prompted her to also study Hebrew. During the pandemic, she participated in Rabbi Josh Whinston's Morning Blessings program on Zoom, developed her Hebrew reading skills, and was prompted to join the adult b'nai mitzvah class to deepen her knowledge.

Candace Bulkley was a congregational leader at TBE but did not feel connected in the religious aspects of the temple. Wanting to set an example for her son who will

of the first bat mitzvah in the U.S. and the 50th anniversary of the ordination of the first woman Reform rabbi.

It was also an opportunity to learn more about the festival of Shavuot which is one of the three pilgrim holidays, along with Passover and Sukkot, in Torah. On Shavuot, we not only mark the harvest of the first fruits as observed in ancient Israel, but we also read from the Book of Ruth and recite the Ten Commandments. Jewish tradition has aligned the receiving of Torah on Mount Sinai with Shavuot which is celebrated 50 days after Passover, the holiday marking the exodus from Egypt.

"This Adult B'nai Mitzvah service was one of the most meaningful and moving experiences of my career," said Cantor Hayut. "I am so very proud of all the members of the class for their determination to stay with this after so many years. They truly rose to the moment, sharing their wisdom and leading every aspect of the service so beautifully! We really do have a whole new group now of capable and excellent leaders in our midst! I hope to see them all on the bima again soon!"

It was a lovely evening when many congregation members, family, and friends were able to join in the sanctuary, or virtually on Zoom. The weather cooperated for the first in-person oneg since the start of the pandemic, held under the tent in front of TBE.

Cantor Hayut hopes that a new adult b'nai mitzvah cohort will form in the fall. Anyone interested in participating should email her at cantorhayut@templebethemeth.org. ■