



Music for People of Conscience
 Friday, February 10, 6:00 pm at Temple

Last month we celebrated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and in the spirit of working to create greater understanding between the Black and Jewish communities, on **Friday, February 10**, Washington Hebrew welcomes the duo of Lapidus & Myles to bring their special music and message to our congregation.

Rabbi Micah Lapidus and vocalist Melvin Kindall Myles of Ebenezer Baptist Church first met at an Atlanta MLK weekend interfaith event, and soon came together to create a musical response to injustices. *Journal* Editor Ori Hoffer spoke with Rabbi Lapidus in an email interview. It has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

[ORI HOFFER] I understand how the music brought you together. Why do you think it's important that it happened?

Whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, the fates of all living beings are inextricably intertwined. Rather than ignore or deny this most fundamental truth, our lives are immeasurably enriched when we embrace it. Human beings are seekers of connection, we are seekers of meaning. We are grateful that music brought the two of us together because it has made us both more human and aligned our lives more deeply with the fundamental truth of our interconnectedness. And the world, especially children, need as many examples of human beings connecting with one another in friendship, respect, and love as we can provide to them. We want to show the next generation the power and beauty of connection.

Since you've begun performing together, has anything changed in your view of your particular faith?

For starters, Melvin's Hebrew has improved tremendously

and my appreciation for the richness of Baptist worship and gospel has grown too. Beyond that, we've both experienced a deepening of our individual faiths but also a loosening of the grasp with which we each cling to certainty, and "being right." Alongside the deepening, we've also experienced a broadening. We confuse folks sometimes because they want to know if we're Jewish or Christian or Judeo-Christian or what. They want a label. The only label that we stand behind right now is that we are creating Music for People of Conscience. Since every one of us has a conscience, we believe our music is for everyone and meant to touch that core part of who we are.

And how have you changed personally?

It's not that we've changed, it's that we've used our music as a vehicle for better understanding our own consciences and consciousness. When we write songs together the songs teach us about ourselves — who we are, what values we espouse, what truths we feel compelled to sing. With each song and each experience we become more self-aware and therefore more curious, more enthusiastic, more grateful. Prior to our joining forces, Melvin had never been to Ohio and I had never sung a vocal harmony. Now Melvin's been to Cincinnati and Cleveland and I sing backup vocals whenever I can summon the nerve and remember the notes!

With the rise in antisemitism across the country, how does your music help fight that?

Antisemitism and racism are based, in part, on a tired, sad, and fundamentally misguided series of ideologies that all

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lead back to some sort of “supremacist” mindset rooted in fear and hatred. While potent, dangerous, and a real and persistent threat, there’s also something profoundly impotent and dysfunctional at the heart of it all. All people of conscience, including the two of us, dismantle and combat antisemitism by living our truths proudly. The narratives told and celebrated by people of conscience are exponentially more powerful than those told by antisemites and racists. One unique piece that we bring is our chosen medium for expression: music. Name one truly good song that promotes racism or antisemitism. Bet you can’t. There’s nothing musical about hatred. Now think of all the music rooted in love, justice, peace, and gratitude. That’s the playlist that’ll win the day. We’re trying to make our own small contribution to that playlist.

As you travel from place to place, do you feel your message is connecting with listeners?

In our limited but incredibly meaningful travel we have been overwhelmed by the interactions we’ve had with people of conscience everywhere. We’ve heard stories from civil rights era activists, refugees, immigrants, clergy, children, pioneers in all sorts of social causes, and so much more. We receive these stories for what they are: offerings of love. We know that our “performances” are catalysts for the telling of these stories and pray that our visits also serve as catalysts in creating

new stories. At first, we were a bit uncomfortable with the outpouring of love that we’d received. But we’ve chosen to lean in and embrace it because to receive is also a form of giving. These offerings of love fuel us and we also use them as an energy source that we can draw upon and offer to others who may be more in need of these offerings than we are.

Anything else you’d like to share?

We aren’t coming to WHC to “perform.” We’re coming to connect. We want to meet you. We want to witness you. We want to celebrate with you. We want to join forces in common cause and get into some GOOD TROUBLE. The greatest honor you can bestow upon us is this invitation and, during our time together, your generous attention. We promise to offer you the same. And we hope that all people of conscience will RISE UP and COME OUT to play.

*The album **Better Angels**, a collaboration between Melvin Kindall Myles and Rabbi Micah Lapidus, can be heard now on Spotify and other major streaming platforms. More about the projects of these two community leaders and musicians can be found at lapidus-myles.com.*

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Questions? Email Eliza Prince at eprince@whctemple.org

