

# SHALOM *Y'all*

GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG INSTITUTE OF  
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## COMMUNITY VISITS

ON THE ROAD IN THE JEWISH SOUTH



# THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SEDER: REFLECTIONS AND REACTIONS FROM LAPIDUS & MYLES

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IN 2019, THE ISJL AND THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY (MDAH) HOSTED THE MISSISSIPPI Freedom Seder in Jackson, Mississippi. This event celebrated the 50th anniversary of the inaugural Freedom Seder that took place in Washington, D.C., after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A team of people from different institutions collaborated to create a unique *haggadah* (seder booklet) and program, bringing together Passover traditions and stories of Mississippians fighting for change.

After three years of pandemic hiatus, we were so excited to resume the Mississippi Freedom Seder this April. When considering what musical element to bring to our 2023 seder, we realized that this was the perfect time to bring in our presenters roster musical duo Lapidus & Myles for an exciting community visit to Jackson. Rabbi Micah Lapidus and Melvin K. Myles performed virtually for ISJL communities in August 2022, and we knew their music would fit perfectly with the seder's themes.

Melvin Myles is a Mississippi native, making it a perfect match to have his voice grace our seder table, and we knew that Rabbi Micah Lapidus had been waiting for a chance to visit Melvin's home state. This community visit would also give them the chance to perform for and interact with the ISJL, MDAH, and the Mississippi Jewish community, as well as the interfaith crowd at the seder.

Our 2023 Mississippi Freedom Seder was an astounding success. Over 120 people gathered together at the Two Mississippi Museums campus, home to the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. We came together to sing, eat, and celebrate. I asked Lapidus & Myles to reflect on their experience.

Melvin Myles (left) and Rabbi Micah Lapidus brought their incredible music to the Two Mississippi Museums.



**What did you think when you were approached about being a part of the Mississippi Freedom Seder?**

**Lapidus & Myles:** What an honor; what a beautiful synergy; and how can we figure out how to be in Jackson on March 28th! The Mississippi Freedom Seder aligns perfectly with our vision of creating music for people of conscience. It is an experience rooted in faith and spirit with deep ties to the Civil Rights Movement while simultaneously being a completely contemporary and forward-looking gathering of present-day people of conscience. With our music we constantly strive to honor the rich and often complicated legacy of the past but in fresh and forward-thinking ways. The Mississippi Freedom Seder does precisely that. Add in the fact that Melvin is a proud native of Clarksdale, Mississippi, and it felt “meant to be.”

**Which of your original songs help tell the themes of the Passover story? How did you create a song cycle for the seder?**

Passover's themes are universal and timeless. Egypt, the Wilderness, and the Promised Land—these are all physical but also spiritual locations. Each of us can identify times when we feel that we feel we are in Egypt, in the Wilderness, and, hopefully, also moments when we feel that we have reached the Promised Land. As an intellectual exercise we can quite literally go through our catalog of original music and categorize songs as “Egypt”, “Wilderness”, and “Promised Land” songs. As far as this particular song cycle, there's an added layer—not only can we be in all three places at once, but our journeys are never truly linear. The “Promised Land” selection for our song cycle just might turn the whole journey on its head. As the



song says, “The Promised Land... is full of sand.” Just like the Wilderness, just like Egypt... but then again maybe not!

**What was your experience spending time together in Mississippi for the first time?**

We’re still processing our time in Mississippi together. From Micah’s perspective, it was deeply rewarding to be in a place and connect with a series of narratives that are so personal and rich with memories and experiences for Melvin. For Melvin, a Clarksdale native, it was great to share some of Mississippi history and in particular some of the challenges faced by

Melvin’s family and so many others who had to endure the racism and prejudices of that time, so many of which continue to this day. It was impactful to say the least.

**What was it like working with the ISJL and MDAH to execute this event?**

We felt like honored guests from start to finish. Not only were the logistics incredibly smooth, but our time in Jackson was inspiring and eye-opening. Touring the Two Mississippi Museums as well as Beth Israel Congregation really helped us understand the multifaceted and complex context that is Jackson and Mississippi more general-

ly. The passion of the staff at MDAH and ISJL was palpable and made a very strong impression on us. It was wonderful to be immersed in such a mission- and values-driven community.



*We loved having Lapidus & Myles with us for this meaningful interfaith moment. If your community needs inspiring interfaith performers for an upcoming event, Lapidus & Myles are a wonderful choice. Email programming@isjl.org to learn how we can help bring them to your community!*



Lapidus & Myles toured the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum with Freedom Rider and museum docent Hezekiah Watkins (above) and Deputy Director (and former ISJL staff member) Rachel Myers (below).



Above: visiting the Mississippi Civil Rights Trail marker at Jackson’s Beth Israel Congregation. Below: the crowd at the Mississippi Freedom Seder.



**Are you looking to do more interfaith programming in your community? We have many presenters on our roster who specialize in engaging interfaith audiences. Check out Lapidus & Myles, Rabbi Joshua Garroway, Jane Larkin, and Lex Rofeberg—email programming@isjl.org to learn more!**



# NEW PRESENTER HIGHLIGHTS

**W**E'VE BEEN HARD AT WORK PUTTING OUR AMAZING PRESENTERS ON THE ROAD ACROSS THE SOUTH. AND we're excited to welcome several excellent musicians, artists, and speakers to our roster! **If you'd like to bring these folks to your community, email us at [programming@isjl.org](mailto:programming@isjl.org).**

## BETH HAMON

Singer-songwriter, music educator, drummer and visual artist whose work focuses on love, hope, sustainability and inclusion. Her years as a performing musician and music educator are evident in her programming, whether through coffeehouse shows, Shabbat service leading, songwriting workshops or making musical instruments and Judaica from found objects. Through story, song and art, Beth uses her voice to encourage others to find and use theirs.



## LEX ROFEBERG

Lex Rofeberg serves as Senior Jewish Educator for Judaism Unbound. He co-hosts and produces its weekly podcast, downloaded over 2 million times worldwide, and serves as a faculty member of Judaism Unbound's UnYeshiva—a digital center for Jewish learning and unlearning. Ordained as a rabbi in 2021 through the Jewish Renewal movement, his courses and guest lectures focus on topics including Digital Judaism, Judaism and Sports, Jewish Pop Culture, and Interfaith Families.

## ELLIE FLIER

An inspiring performer and songleader, Ellie Flier has found her passion and purpose in writing Jewish music. An eclectic mix of Jewish day school, a college major in opera, and ten years as a Nashville songwriter gives Ellie a unique quality and sound as she deconstructs Hebrew liturgy to find deeper meaning in the context of the world around us today. At home she co-founded and leads Jewsic City, a popular monthly musical service for young professionals. On the road she has performed at the URJ Biennial conference and at communities around the United States, Israel, and Europe.





## LAPIDUS & MYLES

Lapidus & Myles is a collaboration between two faith-based musicians in Atlanta. Micah Lapidus is a Reform rabbi and composer-in-residence at The Temple. Melvin Myles is a highly regarded soloist with the Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church Choir, former pulpit of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Evocative of the long-standing ties between these communities, their music and message is all about bringing people together in a spirit of love, respect, peace, and justice.



## WHO KNOWS ONE? LIVE WITH MICAH HART

Who Knows One? LIVE is a hilarious show that uses the phenomenon of Jewish Geography to illustrate how interconnected we all are, no matter our backgrounds or how we identify as Jews. Building on the popular game show that became a hit in the Jewish community during the pandemic, this in-person program incorporates interactive games, storytelling, and community-building to create a unique, memorable, and FUN evening for audiences of all ages!

## PAPER MIDRASH FEATURED PRESENTERS AT THE 2023 ISJL CONFERENCE

For our keynote at the 2023 ISJL Conference, Paper Midrash will present a "Make Your Own Golem" paper-cutting workshop. Rabbi Shawna and Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik will teach the legend of the golem and its connection to our current times. This workshop will be a time for exploration, reflection, and reinvigoration. Our hope is to bring an experience to our participants that will help them reconnect to their passion for Jewish education and community. Participants will then be taught how to use paper-cutting materials and will create a golem out of comic books that embodies what their community needs in the coming year. This will not only be a fun, educational workshop, it will be an opportunity to use a new medium to set goals and intentions.

