

The Concert Was Cancelled. Where Do We Go From Here?

By Dr. Yitzchok Levine

It seems as if people have nothing else to talk about other than the cancellation of the “Big Event” — a concert that was to feature the popular singer Lipa Schmeltzer. In addition to discussions between individuals, the Internet is abuzz with posts about a *Kol Korei* that was issued, signed by more than thirty of the most respected Rabbanim in America, which led to the cancellation of this concert. The secular media is also showing interest; the *New York Times* felt that what happened merited an article in its March 3rd edition.

It is not the purpose or the place of this piece to join this debate. What I would like to deal with is the question of entertainment in general and music in particular.

I doubt that there are many who would disagree with the concept of providing appropriate outlets for relaxation. American society — and, make no mistake, we are to some extent a product of the environment in which we live — has

adopted the attitude that leisure time activities are important, whether sports or music or whatever.

However, as Orthodox Jews we are required to use our leisure time in a manner that is in accordance with *Halachah*. And, if at all possible, these activities should accrue some positive benefits. It is clear that those who issued the *Kol Korei* felt that the “Big Event” did not meet these conditions.

Without discussing this particular concert — which some claim was “kosher” since it was to provide separate seating as well as separate entrances for men and women — please let me share some of my personal reactions to what is today termed “Jewish music.” The last time I attended a concert was more than ten years ago. At this concert I saw the performers behaving on stage in a fashion reminiscent of what goes on at rock and roll concerts. In addition, the gyrations of some of the kids in the audience were not what one expected to see from *frum* Jewish youngsters. Does music being played and listened to in this

manner deserve to be termed “Jewish music”?

I am also taken aback by some of the music that I hear at *chasunahs* today. First of all, it is so loud that I often cannot converse with the person sitting next to me without shouting. Secondly, much of this music sounds to me like rock and roll with Hebrew lyrics superimposed. At one *chasunah* I attended I found the music and its beat so intense that I left the *simchah* hall and went into the hallway outside. Someone I knew asked me why I had come outside. I told him that I could not tolerate the volume of “the rock and roll music.” A man standing next to me added, “And it is not even good!” It turned out that he was a professional in the music industry, someone who certainly knows about music.

Perhaps some Jewish music has evolved to a point where it no longer deserves the name “Jewish,” and perhaps some of the activities associated with this music need to be re-evaluated. Is it not the Torah way to reevaluate one’s activities on a regular basis?

We need to provide “kosher,” creative activities for the Orthodox community that are fun and have some positive benefit. *Mechanchim* often discuss how crucial recess time is for American boys. Any *Rebbi* will confirm that some sort of physical activity provides the boys with the release they need so that they can continue learning after recess.

All of us need a “recess” from time to time to refresh ourselves so that we can continue with the tasks of our lives. This is especially important for our youth. I wish I knew what are appropriate “breaks” and what are not. Truthfully, I don’t. But this I do know: we cannot forbid all recreational activities. Indeed, we are now challenged to develop guidelines for recreational activities that will enhance our lives. This is something that we must do, and it must be done quickly!

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