

# Jewish Music and the Millennium

(or how does a girl from Kimberley get to shake hands with the Queen?)

A Millennium memoir by **Geraldine Auerbach MBE**, Founder Director of the Jewish Music Institute  
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As the century changed and cities burst out with fireworks of every hue and shape, so too did **Jewish music seem to explode** from every crevice. We could not believe the many amazing Jewish music rockets and Catherine wheels that were whizzing and fizzing into our laps.



We had ultimately to realise that we ourselves had actually prepared all the ingredients and lit the fuse papers – but the richness of the bounty that resulted was almost impossible to grasp. To gather the implications of all that happened leading up to 2000 and during the year, I will try to put things into perspective and let their light shine for all to see.

## **Jewish music achieves a secure a perfect home**

The brightest sparkle, was that after working out of my home office for 17 years, as the Jewish Music Heritage Trust, producing ten major Jewish Music Festivals, several recordings and becoming involved with academia – the Jewish Music Institute, which I had created with a wonderful team of helpers and supporters, was invited to be based at the University of London! We had long agonised about what the future might hold and how we would achieve continuity and sustainability. Several other Jewish culture providers were also seeking a home. We were looking at how a Jewish Culture Centre might arise and be afforded and whether we could all fit in. And suddenly, like ‘manna from heaven’, we got the very best possible solution – one where Jewish music took its place along with other musics of the world, in the most prestigious academic Institute of its kind – the School of Oriental and African Studies, (SOAS) part of the University of London!

## **Joe Loss Lectureship in Jewish Music moves to the University of London**

Our lectureship in Jewish music, the first such post in the world in a mainstream University had just been invited to move from City University in Islington where it was established in 1991, to SOAS in Bloomsbury, part of the University of London. And wonder of wonders, we, now called the ‘Jewish Music Institute’ were invited to move in too! Everything changed!

## The Jewish Music Institute (JMI) comes to London University Inaugural event March 2000

In a landmark event on March 30, 2000 the Jewish Music Institute was officially inaugurated into the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. The press reported that Alexander Goehr, emeritus professor of music at Cambridge University, told an audience of more than 250 academics, musicians, benefactors, communal leaders and members of the music-loving public, that this was the moment when **Jewish music had come of age as a recognised and respected academic discipline.**

Professor Goehr added '*There were many sceptics who thought that this could not have come to pass. The JMI has confounded the sceptics and was already a long way down the road to fulfilling its ambitious programme.*

Sir Tim Lankester was the Director (equivalent to Vice Chancellor) of SOAS at the time. He mentioned the Joe Loss Lectureship in Jewish Music already settled there and welcomed the Jewish Music Institute to SOAS by saying he believed the study of Jewish music at the school would act as the bridge between the school's studies of Asian and African cultures, and he was confident that the presence of the Jewish Music Institute would do much to enrich the musical life of the campus.



Here above, we see me, as the Director of the Jewish Music Institute with Sir Tim Lankester, Director of SOAS, signing the agreement establishing the Jewish Music Institute in association with SOAS, at the University of London. (photo: Judy Obrart)



Here we are all in Sir Tim's office, looking at Professor Keith Howard, left, who was the instigator of the move of the Joe Loss Lectureship in Jewish Music, from City University to SOAS and thus also



JMI to SOAS. Next to Keith from left are: Joint Chair of JMI Lady Rosa Lipworth, (now Lady Lipworth CBE) me, Alexander Knapp, the first Joe Loss Lecturer in Jewish music, then the other joint chair Jonathon Lyons, and Sir Tim Lankester.

Below, with me and Jonathon Lyons, is the wonderful Malcolm Troup (left), formerly Professor of Music at City University London. Malcolm was the first, to welcome Jewish music as a legitimate course for study at a mainstream University anywhere in the world.



In my little speech on the occasion, I expressed my joy paying a warm tribute to those who had supported me from the beginning in 1983 such as Sylvia Lewin whose idea it was for Bnai Brith to host a Jewish Music Festival. There were many who supported the concerts, recordings, teaching programmes and publications which had grown out of that first central activity to where we were on that day. I was able to announce that Lady Solti has become the new Joint President, with Leopold de Rothschild CBE,

taking the place of the late Yehudi Menuhin.

Lady Lipworth, joint chair of JMI paid her own tribute to my efforts and called this partnership with SOAS '*an ideal marriage*.'

I said that that from the very first festival of Jewish music that I created, I have felt that I was touching a red-hot, cable, stretching from the Bible to infinity, and that many people wanted to be warmed by its glow. Since that time, I have felt impelled to try to make Jewish music available in whatever ways I can.



Interspersed with the speeches were musical interludes from various Jewish traditions, presented by some of JMI's superb Jewish musicians – klezmer clarinetist **Gregori Schechter** (right); leader of the UK's first klezmer band, Yiddish composer and singer **Majer Bogdanski** (left); soprano **Noa Lachman**; and harpist **Louisa Duggan**.



The *piece de resistance* of the celebratory event however, was, after an interval with delicious snacks, a performance of **Mendelssohn's Octet played on eight priceless Strads!**

Students and teachers of the Royal Academy of Music carefully brought over and played these treasured Stradivarius instruments, from the Royal Academy of Music, and from a collection loaned to them by our patron **David Josefowitz**.

As one member of the audience put it: This event was a defining moment for both British Jewry, and British musical culture.



*Teachers and students of the Royal Academy of Music, rehearsing Mendelssohn's Octet on 8 Stradivarius instruments, owned by the Royal Academy of Music and David Josefowitz.*



## Turning point

This was an absolute turning point. As I said, everything changed! Our location changed. We had recently changed our name (from the Jewish Music Heritage Trust to the Jewish Music Institute) – which more accurately reflected what we were doing. We had new Presidents, Lady Solti and Leopold de Rothschild CBE jointly replacing Yehudi Menuhin who has recently died. They were invited by our former joint-chairmen, Lady Lipworth and Jonathan Lyons, and we welcomed a new and wonderful Chairman, Walter Goldsmith. Even some of our trustees and patrons changed. Our status had changed overnight and our credibility and our ability to raise funds, apply for major grants and stage academic events changed forever – for the better.

## International conferences, practical workshops and summer schools.

At a stroke, we were able to turn our direction from a mainly performance-based organisation, to encompass the study of Jewish music. Working with the SOAS Department of Music and the Joe Loss Lecturer in Jewish Music, we could encourage post-graduate degrees in Jewish music by providing scholarships kindly supported by the late Joe Loss's widow, Mildred Loss. We could host and run international conferences, practical workshops and summer schools – and we could establish the Jewish Music Institute Library supported by Doris and Bertie Black. And we stimulated the creation of the World Music Summer School at SOAS.

## What is Jewish music?

You may well ask, as many do, what is 'Jewish music'? From our point of view, it is simply music written or used for Jewish purposes or with Jewish texts, from wherever Jews have settled over the millennia and across the globe.

## JMI SOAS Millennium Award Scheme

The next shining star in the Jewish music millennial firmament, was winning a grant of nearly a quarter of a million pounds, for the JMI Millennium Award Scheme. JMI in partnership with SOAS Department of Music was enabled, with this bounty from the Millennium Commission, to give away grants of between one and four thousand pounds each, to individuals for life changing projects in Jewish music.



Exciting proposals flew in from across the country. The nearly sixty successful candidates were paired with mentors and monitors to ensure fruitful outcomes. Each project needed an end-product that would benefit a community. To help attain their aims, the money could be spent on travel, training, equipment, performances and publications.

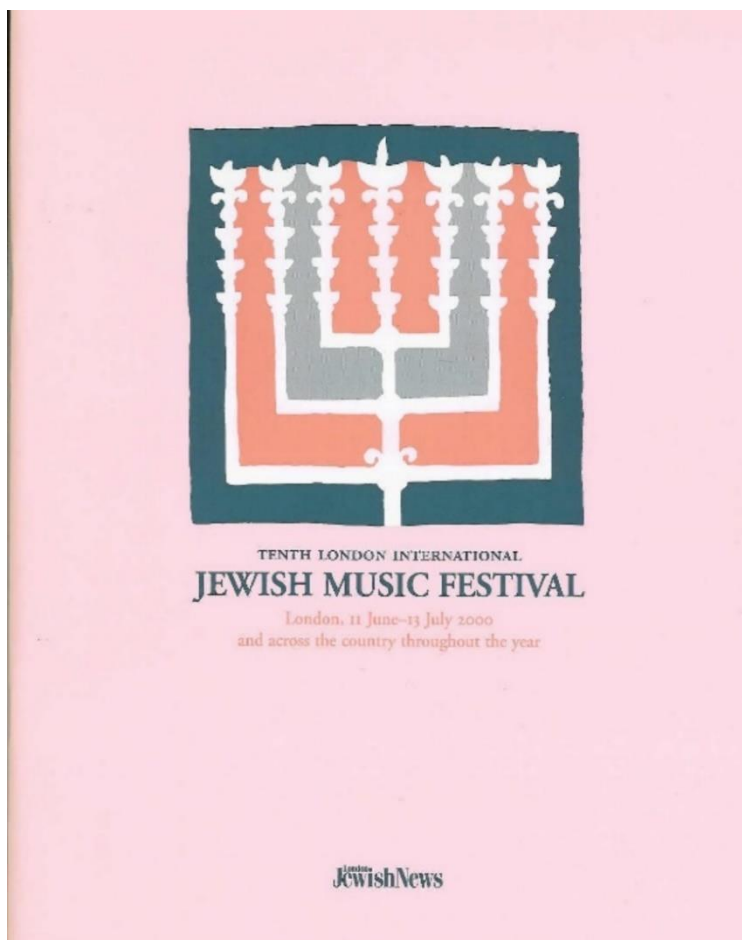
Awardees arranged choral festivals and conferences, produced CDs, wrote musicals, oratorios and even a novel. Concerts, cabarets and dance workshops were held in schools, concert halls and hospitals around the country and even in prisons. Subjects included Jewish jazz, medieval poetry, Torah chanting, Argentinean tango, Israeli piano music and music originally suppressed by the Nazis.

Because of the experience of working on their projects, award winners went on to great success. Meg Hamilton, a classically trained violinist has become a key player in both Jewish classical and folk music; **Michael Etherton** now directs several Jewish Choirs and the Jewish Film Festival; and **Vivi Lachs** went on to complete a PhD in London Yiddish songs and has started the London Yiddish Parade, which includes a marching band and Yiddish chorus.

These awards were indeed life-changing and far-reaching. A revolution was kick-started towards the sustainability of Jewish music in the UK. Many of the talented and dedicated musicians were enabled by these awards to become the next generation of superb performers, music directors and teachers of Jewish music in this country. Examples are, **Ben Wolf**, who is now the Music Director of Belsize Square Synagogue and of The Zemel Choir. He won an award to complete his piano concerto Le Chaim. He readily acknowledges that the research he did for this award helped him get his first jobs in Jewish music and it went on from there.

**Ilana Cravitz** was another award winner who having used the funds to study in New York how to form a fiddle kapelye (klezmer ensemble) is now the de facto premiere klezmer performer and teacher in the UK running courses, jams and workshops. She is the author of the OUP's Klezmer Fiddle, a-how-to guide and the lead performer of the internationally acclaimed London Klezmer Quartet. You can read about all the awardees and their projects here <https://www.jmi.org.uk/old-archive/projects/millenniumawards.html>

## 10<sup>th</sup> London International Festival of Jewish Music



By the summer of 2000, we were into our 10<sup>th</sup> major London International Festival of Jewish Music. This festival was also supported by the Millennium Commission. Noa Lachman my trusty lieutenant, had been superb in making applications for these Millennium grants. The festival followed the nine biennial such major events from 1984.

We presented 80 events between 11 June and 13 July 2000 in London and across the country. It was opened by Lord Britten of Spennithorne at Sadler's Wells Theatre. International and local groups participated in every kind of Jewish music from liturgical to jazz, klezmer to cabaret – Ashkenazi, Sephardi and music from the Middle East, in London's most prestigious concert halls churches and synagogues. You can see the whole programme here with all the other festival programmes:

<https://www.jmi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Jewish-Music-Festival-June-July-2000.pdf>

## A Day of Jewish Culture in the Millennium Dome

There was yet another very special Millennium treat in the Millennium festival.



I had noticed that the organisers of the activity in the Millennium Dome were welcoming culture groups of different origins, Japan, Korea etc. I approached them and mentioned that the UK had a vibrant and talented Jewish Community and asked if they would like us to present a day of Jewish Culture in the Millennium Dome.

We ended up presenting 28 acts from around the country on four stages on 9 July 2000. Choirs came from Cardiff and Newcastle, a dance troop from Birmingham and rock band Manchester. The Dome had its **largest attendance** of any day that year as busloads Jewish fans and followers arrived from all over the country to support their performers.





## An Endorsement from The Queen

And with all these shining stars, who could have thought that in the midst of it all, I would be



awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours? The crowning glory was going to Buckingham Palace in October 2000.

We were allowed three adults and our daughters. We invited Sylvia Lewin – the then Chairman of JMI, who was the person who started it all by asking me to help make a Jewish Music Festival in

1983. My husband Ronnie's sister Bertha was visiting us from Durban, so she got the chance to 'come to London and visit the Queen' Our two daughters Loren and Karen, dressed for the occasion and we were chauffeured by our son Anthony. The event was most impressive – we got to walk through the picture lined corridors of Buckingham Palace, be instructed on how to bow and curtsy in the drawing room and make our way to



the ballroom where the occasion – a bit like graduation but more gracious and with music – culminated in shaking hands, skin to skin, with the Her Majesty the Queen and tell her about Jewish music!





After the ceremony we invited some close friends and family to the Skylon restaurant at the Royal Festival Hall for a lovely lunch. (see above with my medal: left to right **Sue Mariner**, **Judy Obrart**, **Sylvia Lewin** (the ones apparently responsible for nominating me for the honour) and Ronnie's cousins Geoff and Helen Perry with their backs to us. More celebrations took place during the following weeks. Rosa (Lady) Lipworth hosted a lunch for forty people in my honour at her home – in the swimming pool extension where she hosts charity events – including several for the Jewish Music Institute. Sir Sigmund Sternberg, who was influential in these matters hosted an evening reception at the Sternberg Centre, and my Bnai Brith Lodge, hosted a surprise dinner at a local restaurant. My MP Tony McNulty (Labour Party) invited me (and other constituency honourees such as Ben Helfgott (now Sir Ben) the Holocaust Survivor, to join him for lunch at the House of Commons. Many letters of congratulation were received. Here are a few I especially appreciated.

Dear Geraldine

'This is a well-deserved tribute to your role in raising the profile of Jewish music and culture both in this country and abroad. The success of the Jewish Music Heritage Trust in involving young people and helping to introduce Jewish music and culture to thousands of people is a testament to your expertise, popularity and perhaps most importantly – enthusiasm. I am delighted that your achievements have been recognised in this way'. **Chris Smith, Secretary of State, Dept of Culture Media and Sport.**

May I say how thrilled and delighted we were to hear of your well-deserved Birthday Honours Award. Having worked with you over the years on the Jewish Music Heritage Trust, and having witnessed your dedication, dynamic endurance and incredible ability to inspire others with your own enthusiasm, I can think of no-one who more richly merits being officially recognised for your contribution to our musical heritage. **David J Goldberg Senior Rabbi, The Liberal Jewish Synagogue**

'We are delighted that your vision, your unwavering faith in what you were doing, combined with persistence and sheer determination have resulted in official recognition of your achievements. You have crossed interfaith boundaries and created an academic niche for Jewish music, whilst making a Festival giving hundreds, if not thousands, a unique musical experience they may not otherwise have enjoyed'. **Valerie Bello, Vice President, Bnai Brith UK and Chairman RSGB Women**

My cup for 2000 was truly overflowing. But there was more!

## Larry Adler Concert at St John's, Smith Square

On Wed 20 September we had the pleasure of presenting a concert by the renowned and inimitable mouth-organ star, **Larry Adler**. He was 86, and performed with an outstanding young Australian piano prodigy, Simon Tedeschi, aged just 19, with whom he had recently toured Australia with. Larry, a Patron



of JMI, and his manager had specially asked us to present this concert – which we were thrilled to do at St John's Smith Square. It was amazing. Larry is not only a superb musician but also a great raconteur. He played *Rhapsody in Blue* accompanied by none other than composer George Gershwin – on the piano-roll. He quips that Gershwin said 'it sounds like I wrote the bloody thing for you!' (Above, Larry is with Sylvia Lewin at the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday lunch we gave him a few years before. And left with me at the concert)

## Tribute to Yehudi Menuhin November 2000, Southbank Centre

And the year was not yet over! At the Southbank Centre that November, we pulled out all the stops with four concerts, a 'video box', a talk, a film and exhibition in tribute to our late President **Yehudi Menuhin**. It was hosted by his biographer Humphrey Burton and for we were honoured to have the patronage of the Prince of Wales.

Menuhin was the first virtuoso to bring the music of non-western cultures to the concert stage in the West. He performed with such figures as Ravi Shankar, playing Indian ragas. With Stephane Grappelli, the jazz violinist, he played arrangements for two violins of popular show tunes. Today 'World Music' is a huge industry, but Yehudi's was a lone voice that carved the channels through which the music now flows.

How fitting, then, that he was involved, as Honorary President of the Jewish Music Heritage Trust (now the Jewish Music Institute), in seeing Jewish music take its place together with the musical cultures of the world at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, in February 1999. He was interested in the development of Jewish music along with the music of its neighbours in the Middle East, in the ancient and modern worlds.

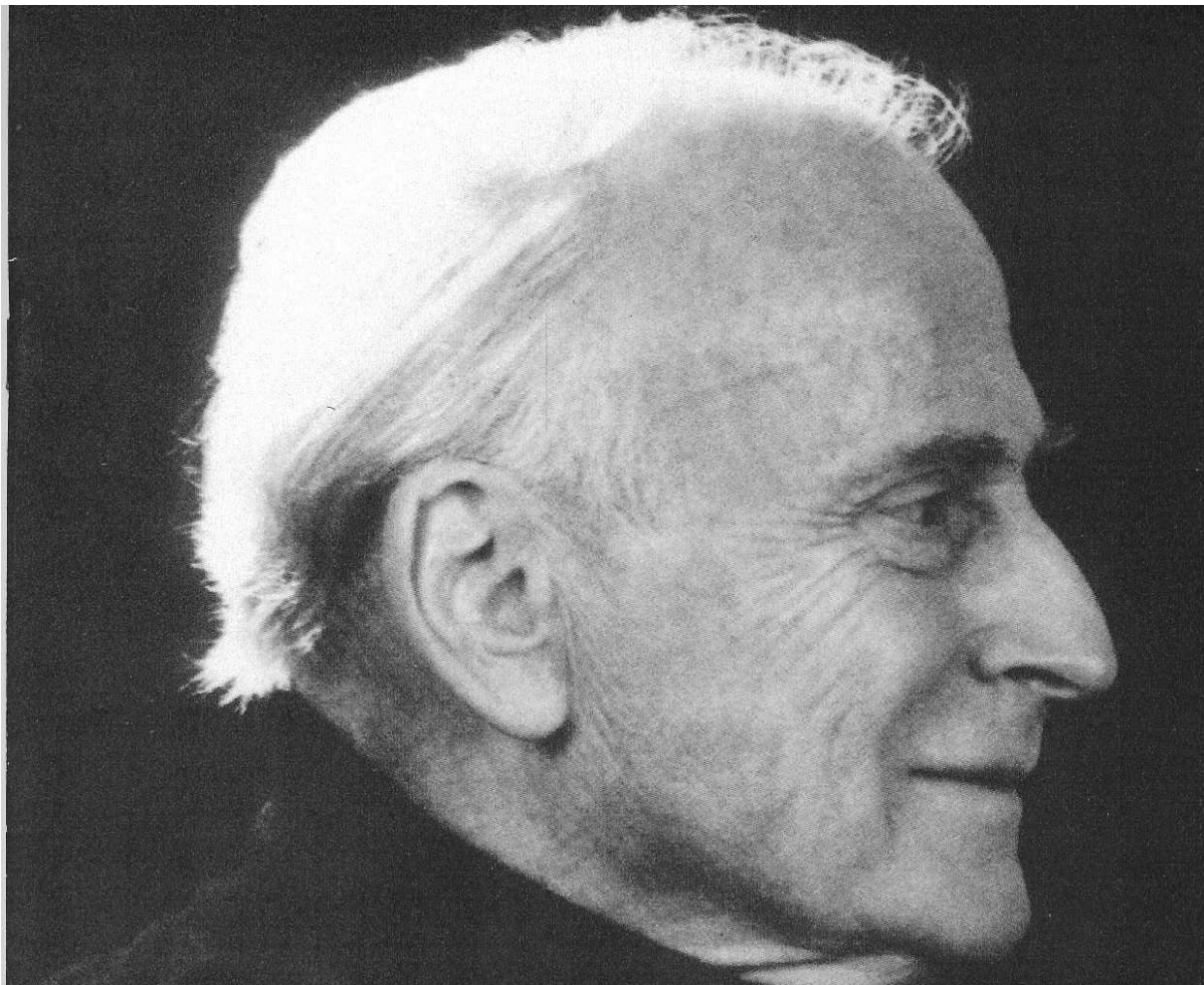
**Our mini-festival to Menuhin** took place on Sunday 26 November 2000, from 10:00am to 10.00pm at the Southbank Centre with concerts in the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room and in the foyers,

At each of the events, one of the young pupils at the Menuhin School performed a work particularly associated with the young Yehudi. **Humphrey Burton CBE**, BBC broadcaster, TV producer and



author of the definitive biography of Yehudi Menuhin, was the host. He gave a lecture (Yehudi Menuhin: the legend and the legacy) and wove a thread through the whole event introducing the young artists. Performers included the **Yehudi Menuhin School Orchestra** directed by **Malcolm Singer** and soloists from the school. **Live Music Now** an organisation created by Yehudi to enable young musicians to play for those not usually able to access classical music, like patients in hospitals and prisoners. These young players gave a wonderful performance and gave free tickets to several audience members who might not otherwise have been able to come.


Our special guest was Yehudi's surviving younger sister, the pianist **Yaltah Menuhin**, who performed a Mozart sonata with **Nicola Benedetti**. Apart from Orchestral and Chamber Concerts, there was a Film – 'The Violin of the Century' by Bruno Monsaingeon. Anne Simor, mounted a beautiful exhibition of Yehudi Menuhin memorabilia from his archives, and the audience was invited to give their own memories of Yehudi in a Video Box placed in the Foyer.



A Tribute to  
**YEHUDI MENUHIN**

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales, Special guest artist: Yaltah Menuhin, Hosted by Humphrey Burton CBE, Menuhin's biographer  
Sunday 26 November 2000, 10.00am–10.00pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room

Royal Festival Hall  
Queen Elizabeth Hall  
Purcell Room



For the evening concert we welcomed the Ashdod chamber orchestra from Israel to perform works by Israeli composer, Tzvi Avni, Ernest Bloch and Shostakovich's mighty 14<sup>th</sup> symphony under the baton of Israeli conductor Omri Hadari (whom Michael Webber and JMI had promoted during his sojourn in London several years before).

### **Yehudi Menuhin Colossus of the musical world**

I always marvelled at the energy of Yehudi Menuhin. Whenever we wanted to see him, his staff, always courteous, would tell us which one day, or two days he might be in London in the forthcoming quarter. That man had a workload heavier than someone fifty years younger. When looking at what he did, one is struck by the fact that personal aggrandisement was never his interest, but that he used his great position of fame and influence to empower and enrich others. Apart from audiences who were enthralled and spiritually moved by his playing, he was always eager to encourage young artists whom he admired and give them opportunities to advance their careers. This is quite apart from the young artists that he nourished in the Festivals he organised around the world and trained in the schools that bore his name in Switzerland and in Surrey.

We were thrilled to have had **HRH Prince Charles** as the Patron of the day. he wrote a forward in the programme, though did not attend. He wrote:

*I am delighted to be the Patron of a day paying tribute to a dear friend, the great musician, humanist and educator, Yehudi Menuhin. So many of his family and friends as well as members of the organisations he initiated and encouraged have come together under one roof to celebrate his great contribution to life and music. It is poignant to think that Yehudi, who was born to Russian Jewish parents, whose life touched so many people across the globe, spent his last public appearance in London with the Jewish Music Institute, as its President bringing Jewish music studies to SOAS, and presiding over an evening devoted to Russian Jewish music. This day, organised by the Jewish Music Institute, is a wonderful idea and a fitting way to remember a remarkable man. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person but wish the endeavours that Yehudi Menuhin created grow from strength to strength and that his memory remains an inspiration to us all.*

### **Creating other platforms**

All the while I was building up the Bnai Brith Jewish Music Festivals (see leaflets below) and the various forums and focus groups, which all came together as the Jewish Music Institute – there were other platforms and organisations that acknowledge me as the instigator or facilitator for their establishment and say that without me they may well not have happened

These included (some of which had served their course, and others are still very much active).

- Jewish Renaissance Magazine (2001) <https://www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/>
- The South African, Jewish Music Centre in Cape Town with Stewart Servater, Fay Singer and Ivor Joffe (2002)
- Jewish Culture UK (2003 – 2007)
- Jewish East End Celebration Society (2003) <https://www.jeecs.org.uk/>
- The Jewish Music Centre in Brazil – with Nicole Berger (2008)
- The Hans Gal Society <http://www.hansgal.org/hansgalsociety/32>



- International Ernest Bloch Society (2006) <http://ernestblochsociety.org/>
- 'Simcha on the Square' (2006-2008) <http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Ideas/Album/Simcha.htm>



The Millennium was certainly a turning point for Jewish music and JMI.

## After retirement from JMI

After I retired as Director of JMI in 2011, there were new platforms that I have initiated or facilitated:

- The European Cantors Association and its Academic Wing (2012) [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu)
- The Bert Jansch Foundation (2013) [www.bertjanschfoundation.org](http://www.bertjanschfoundation.org)
- The Kimberley Jewish Community website and Newsletters (2013) <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Home.html>
- Rev Malcolm Weisman memoirs <http://malcolmweisman.org.uk/> (2015)
- Magnified and Sanctified – two International Conferences on the music of Jewish prayer with Leeds University and Hannover University of music and dance (2015 and 2019)
- The class of 60 Wits medical graduates Newsletter, website and reunion (2020) [https://wits\\_medical\\_alumni\\_1960.mailchimpsites.com/](https://wits_medical_alumni_1960.mailchimpsites.com/)
- Bnai Brith First Unity Lodge virtual lodge during lockdown (2020)

- International Forum for Jewish Music Studies (IFJMS) (2020) <https://jewishmusic.hcommons.org/>
- Conversations on Zoom (2020) <https://jewishmusic.hcommons.org/conversations-on-zoom-coz/>
- Community History On-Line (CHOL) (2021)

### **A loving and tolerant family**

I have been blessed by having a wonderful and tolerant husband and children, superb collaborators, and dedicated teams of helpers, first class trustees and mentors. This is what has enabled so many good things to happen.

Having found myself in this field of Jewish music that I, through no particular ambition, I have been gifted the opportunity to meet and work with many amazing and talented people, to provide the platforms that have given enjoyment, employment, knowledge, pleasure and satisfaction to many – including to me. It's been a wonderful experience and it's good to see so much of it still thriving.

**Millennium Memoir Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, April 2021**

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