

A Hidden Talent Unveiled

In the last few years, a new voice has risen to the forefront of the Jewish music world. New, at least, to the greater public—especially in America. But Yitzhak Fuchs has been singing publicly for over 25 years, his soulful performances treasured by a small circle of music-loving devotees, mostly in Israel. His strong core of fans became acquainted with his unique style either through hearing him at wedding performances, or through the purchase of one of his self-marketed albums, sold from his tiny silver shop hidden away in Mea Shearim. Even his albums were only produced after close friends and ardent fans exerted much pressure on him.

A talent like Fuchs could hardly remain hidden forever. He combines a folksy, straight-from-the-heart style with his uncanny natural musical aptitude to leave audiences spellbound. He views the minimalist approach of his

first album – just his own voice and his guitar – as the epitome of his art, and indeed he needs no accompaniment for his music to achieve its effect.

Each of Yitzchak's pieces is an original. His mind is a wellspring of melody, constantly producing new tunes. For many of his songs he writes original lyrics too, and for others he draws on sources from Tanach and Chazal.

Less than three years ago, Fuchs was "discovered" by a group of music-lovers from Brooklyn who convinced him to spend time performing in America. Since then, many of the "big stars" of Jewish music have purchased the rights to perform his songs: Mordechai Ben David (Menucha v'Simcha), Lipa Schmeltzer (Hallelu), Shloime Taussig (Lashem Ha'aretz Umloah), Yeedle and Avraham Fried (future releases).

Where does Yitzchak Fuchs come from, how did he catapult into the limelight, and what took him so long? To answer these questions, Zman visited him at his (temporary) home in Brooklyn.

As he took the stage, he looked out at the crowd gathered in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center. Every seat was filled. His eyes were scanning the thousands of faces watching his steps as he moved into position. His hands were beginning to tremble slightly. To date, this was undoubtedly the largest audience he had ever performed before. His left hand clutched his guitar as he lifted his right hand to the strings, closing his eyes to regain focus. He uttered a silent prayer to Hashem, who had guided his every step until now.

As soon as he started playing, he was in a world of his own. The audience was entranced by his stirring and passionate melodies. Thousands of eyes were fixated on this magnificent performer, but none could penetrate to the depths of his soul. In a flash, 27 years of toil and tears, joy and passion played through his mind. The constant wandering and striving toward his goal of releasing the music bubbling out from within him and sharing it with the world had finally led him to this place.

Instead, the multitudes were shocked, wondering how it could be that this mature, seemingly middle-aged person with a flowing white beard was just now coming into the spotlight of the public arena. Why hadn't they heard this amazing

performer until now? New fans puzzled over the mystery.

The applause was loud and sincere. He had captured the attention of thousands of music enthusiasts in one night. With this performance, his name was now spoken synonymously with some of the most admired and gifted musicians in today's Jewish music arena.

The Lone Wolf

Yitzchak was born in 1954 in Petach Tikva, near Tel Aviv. Both of his parents were immigrants who had survived the war. They came from *frum* homes – his father from Poland and his mother from Chust in Czechoslovakia (now in Ukraine). During the war, the Fuchs family fled to Russia and were able to survive. The rest of their family perished, with the exception of one sister of his father, who had previously emigrated to America, and a sister of his mother.

The Fuchs family moved to Italy for a short time after they were able to leave Russia, and one year later in 1948 made their way to *Eretz Yisrael*. There, they settled down and began to build a family of their own. Their faith had been shaken by their tragic wartime experiences, and they did not return to the observance with which they had been raised.



Yitzchak Fuchs at the HASC concert in 2010.

Yitzchak grew up in the stereotypical secular milieu of Israel in the 1960s. His family celebrated Jewish holidays, like the Pesach *seder*, but aside from that religion did not play a role in their lives.

"They couldn't even be termed traditional," Yitzchak told us. "My father was not *anti*-religious. I never heard a word against religion, but they were not religious."

One thing that always attracted the young lad was music. He had an excellent voice, and was always humming new tunes. A deep appreciation for music ran in the family. Yitzchak recalls that many times his father, lacking any real instruments, would set up an improvised one-man band, striking the tabletop with a spoon for rhythm and creating a makeshift kazoo out of a comb and a piece of paper, singing all the while. Before long, Yitzchak picked up an inexpensive flute and began to teach himself to play. He sang at school events, and every other chance he got. Yitzchak Fuchs was hooked on music, and it was the beginning of a lifelong love.

Yitzchak was an excellent student, but he eventually became bored with his regular school curriculum. At 16, he decided to apply to Israel's prestigious pre-military academy, the *P'nimiya HaTzeva'it*. There,



Practicing before the HASC concert.



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