

Style

Like father, like daughter

Neshama Carlebach perpetuates Rabbi Shlomo's music

BY SUSAN JACOBS
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Like her father before her, Neshama Carlebach uses music as a tool to bring people inspiration and comfort.

The daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach will be in Pittsburgh on Sunday, June 4, to perform at Congregation Beth Shalom as part of the Pittsburgh Jewish Music Festival.

"I started my career basically because he passed away," said Carlebach of her father, who died of a heart attack in 1994 while traveling on an airplane.

A prolific musician and storyteller, Shlomo Carlebach wrote more than 5,000 songs over the course of his life, said his daughter. He also traveled constantly, bringing music and connections to Judaism to Jews all over the world. His songs are incorporated in services across the spectrum of Jewish denominations, with some of his tunes so well known and widely used that many do not know their source.

After his sudden death, Neshama, now 31, took over his remaining gigs, thus continuing his legacy. In the years since then, she has produced five albums, with a sixth soon to be released. The majority of her older albums have been filled with her father's songs, along with a few original compositions, but her upcoming album is to be entirely hers.

"I feel like I've really given him a lot of honor and said what I want to say," she said, adding that her father would have told her "it's time to get out of your diapers," i.e. to make a name for herself.

But she continues to honor her father's memory and to perpetuate his music.

The concert for the music festival is titled "A Tribute to Shlomo Carlebach" and will be filled with his music.

Neshama,



Photo by Nedara Carlebach

Neshama Carlebach

for whom the concert will be a Pittsburgh debut, was selected for the music festival because of a combination of her own talents and the familiarity of many Pittsburghers with her father's music, said Aron Zelkowitz, director of the festival.

"As soon as I went to her Web site, I knew this was a high-quality artist," said Zelkowitz. "I wanted to bring her in."

Neshama will be in town with her band, including her long-time producer, David Morgan, who has influenced her development as a musician. While in town, she'll also have a chance to see some relatives of her husband, Steven Katchen.

Most of all, she'll have a chance to share her father's music with more people.

"We're still constantly finding songs he never performed," she said. Neshama and her band have not decided yet which songs they will perform at the concert. For them, each concert is spontaneous and unique.

"It depends on the audience and how

we feel," she said. "We never decide until the last minute."

As a rabbi, Shlomo Carlebach reached out to Jews who were alienated from Judaism or experiencing some sort of pain, and brought them back to their heritage. Many people who met him for only a brief time felt an intense connection with him, and he encouraged people to call him whenever they were troubled.

"I've learned to have more boundaries than him," said Neshama, whose Hebrew name means soul. "I think I'm foremost a performer as opposed to a soul doctor."

She is also trying to broaden her audience to appeal more to secular audiences and not just Jewish ones.

"I try to sing for more of the world," she said.

As a female performer, that world often does not include Orthodox audiences. Many Orthodox authorities proscribe men from listening to women's singing voices, which has limited Neshama's performance opportunities.

"It's very hard as a woman in the Orthodox community," she said. "I appreciate the Orthodox places where women have a voice."

Neshama still follows the Orthodox lifestyle of her family, and feels at home in Orthodox congregations with separate seating for men and women.

"In shul, I like to be on the side," she said. "My work is different. It's been a really beautiful career for me, but very challenging."

Her father, she said, did not limit the venues in which a woman could perform.

"I had a really great relationship with my father," she said. "My father was my hero."

That is why she continues to bring his music to new audiences, she said. "It's about feeling something meaningful that brings them a spiritual experience."

(Susan Jacobs can be reached at sjacobs@pittchron.com.)

Want to go?

Neshama Carlebach will perform on Sunday, June 4, at 7:30 p.m. at Congregation Beth Shalom. The final concert of the Pittsburgh Jewish Music Festival, "Songs for the Seasons," will take place Tuesday, June 6, at 8 p.m. in Levy Hall at Rodef Shalom Congregation. For tickets, visit www.proartstickets.org, or call (412) 394-3353.

'Songs for the Seasons' wraps up music festival

The third and final concert of the Pittsburgh Jewish Music Festival will feature an eclectic mix of performers and compositions.

"Songs for the Seasons" will include songs inspired by Jewish holidays and lifecycles.

"These are not traditional cantorial works," said festival Director Aron Zelkowitz. Instead, the works that will be performed are contemporary compositions that allude to traditional Jewish themes.

Some of the pieces are purely instru-

mental, while others will be accompanied by vocalists. Cantor Amy Goldstein of New York and local concert soprano Katherine Soroka will perform along with members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, including Zelkowitz himself, who plays cello.

The evening's music comes from several different composers, with various styles. The program's longest piece, "Elijah's Chariot," by Judith Shatin, ties together themes from several holidays, while other pieces are more narrowly focused, such as Lucas Richman's "Kol

Nidre," which specifically relates to Yom Kippur.

The priestly blessings, traditionally bestowed by kohanim, and the sheva brachot, which are part of the wedding ceremony, serve as the inspiration for other compositions.

There is no standard melody for the sheva brachot, said Zelkowitz, and the version used in the concert is designed to express the meaning of the blessings.

"There are many short selections and a wide variety of music," he said of the concert. In between musical performances,

there will also be poetry readings.

The multi-faceted evening came together in pieces, as Zelkowitz knew that he wanted to include certain compositions and then found others that would complement them. Then, he found performers who would fit the parts.

"We get performers best suited to perform the repertoire," he said. "We're striving to become a festival of national artistic quality."

— By Susan Jacobs