

Peter, Paul and Mary bring a song for peace to a divided Israel

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It started as a song to express opposition to Israel's invasion of Lebanon. It was created by Peter, Paul and Mary of 1960s anti-Vietnam war protest song fame.

But by the time the trio performed "Light One Candle" before thousands of rapt Israelis below Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, the words had come to reflect the painful dilemma of Israel's antiwar movement, and its differences from the movement that tore America apart over Vietnam.

The song was originally written by Peter Yarrow (Peter of the troupe who is Jewish) to express his strong feelings of opposition to the war in Lebanon. According to friends, the group wanted this song to create an impact in Israel similar to that of "Blowing in the Wind," the song written by Bob Dylan which became synonymous with youthful US antiwar protesters in the 1960s.

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"Light One Candle" was first performed in concert in the US at Hanuka time - the Jewish festival of lights. The song brought down the house. But Peter was dissatisfied, worrying that it was too strident to have wide appeal in Israel. On arrival in Israel he brought it to a leading activist, Janet Aviad, in Israel's largest anti-Lebanon-war group, Peace Now.

"He asked if we had any peace songs," recalled Ms. Aviad, a sociology professor at Hebrew University, noting ruefully that while many popular Israeli singers are doves, the more right-wing Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) movement has been most successful in using music to rouse its followers.

But Yarrow also consulted Ze'ev Chafets, a young former head of the Israeli government press office under the present Begin government who had grown up in Detroit in the 1960s. Yarrow's aim was to weed out any sensitive passages from the lyrics "so everyone would hear them," he later told questioners.

In an Israel racked with unprecedented bitter strife over the Lebanon war, that was not an easy task. Hostility has steadily mounted between antiwar activists calling for immediate total withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, and supporters of the government position of waiting until an unwilling Syria pulls back its troops as well. Senior government officials have held the peace camp responsible for continuing Israeli casualties by virtue of their giving "encouragement" to the Syrians.

One example of the bitterness: The Peace Now office in Beersheva received a letter saying it was "a shame that Nazis didn't finish off the Ashkenazim" - a reflection on the primarily European (Ashkenazi) Jewish background of the peace movement and the heavy government support from among Jews from Arab and Asian countries.

Mary Travers (Mary of the group), waving expressive hands, swinging her long blonde hair, and looking unchanged from the past, unlike her two balding colleagues, recalled the group's dilemma. "We didn't want to be against anything specific like Lebanon or the occupation, but for something - the moral ethic which is the essence of Israel."

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The thousands of nostalgic music lovers packed into the grounds next to the Sultan's Pool area below Jerusalem's old city walls provided a challenge. Many were American immigrants drawn by '60s memories who had taken different paths: some in the peace movement, some members of Gush Emunim, some wearing the small knit headcovers signifying the religiously observant. Large groups of native-born Israelis, many bused in from outlying collective farms, also sat avidly listening on the grass.

Performing by lights and moonlight on a modern stage, the trio's first rendition of "Light One Candle" roused less enthusiasm than throwbacks like "Puff the Magic Dragon," but Peter, Paul and Mary were caught up in their words, singing: "Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice justice and freedom demand, Light one candle for the wisdom to know when the peacemaker's time is at hand."

"They are trying to tiptoe between the raindrops," a Peace Now activist in the audience complained.

When the trio launched into "Blowing in the Wind," the audience's mood began to change. Some lines, such as "How many deaths does it take till we know , that too many people have died?" brought fierce applause.

"The concert came the day we reached the 500th casualty in Lebanon," Ms. Aviad explained. Moreover, unlike the US antiwar movement, everyone in that audience - in a country with almost universal male reserve duty - had either fought in Lebanon or knew someone who had.

Most had friends among the dead or wounded.

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As a last encore the trio repeated their song: "Light one candle for the strength that we need to never become our own foe, Light one candle for those who are suffering, pain we learned so long ago.

"Light one candle for all we believe in, let anger not tear us apart. Light one candle to bind us together with peace as the song in our heart. . . ."

At the chorus, lights flickered throughout the audience, who were now singing , "Don't let the light go out, It's lasted for so many years. Don't let the light go out, Let it shine through our love and our tears."

"I loved it," said Ze'ev Chafets.

"It was great," said Janet Aviad, who hopes the song will soon be translated into Hebrew. "This country has been torn apart. This was maybe the only

occasion when you could get (opposition) Labor Party members, Tehyia (the right-wing renaissance party), and National Religious Party people together."

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"It was great to have something with which everyone could identify, especially after recent rallies," she said, a reference to the recent peace rally where a fellow demonstrator and personal friend had been killed by a grenade tossed by an unknown opponent.

"It has been a tough year," she added quietly.