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Stars of David

Local author reveals rockers with Jewish roots

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More than likely, it's no great revelation that rocker Bob Dylan is really Jewish, or that he was born Robert Zimmerman out in Minnesota. The same goes for Long Island native Billy Joel and Brooklyn-born rock icon Neil Diamond.

But what of other rock stars, like "Golden Oldies" Jay Black of Jay and the Americans - including members of his band? Or, Janis Ian, singer of the heartbreaker, "At Seventeen?" Or singer-songwriter, Phoebe Snow? Who suspected they, too, were Jewish?

Who's Jewish in the pop music world, and the effect a Jewish heritage has had on their music, is the subject of "Stars of David: Rock 'n' Roll's Jewish Stories," by Scott Benarde, former Fort Lauderdale News/Sun-Sentinel and Palm Beach Post music columnist, who's currently with the media relations and marketing department of the Kaplan Jewish Community Center in West Palm Beach.

"I wrote 'Stars of David: Rock 'n' Roll's Jewish Stories' because the time was ripe and right for a book that chronicled the contribu-



Scott Benarde, author of "Stars of David: Rock 'n' Roll's Jewish Stories," spoke recently at Temple Shaarei Shalom in Boynton Beach, for its adult education's Sounds of Our Heritage series. STAFF PHOTO BY MARTA MULLAN MARTIN

tion of Jewish singers, songwriters and musicians during the rock era, and also shed light on the surprising influence and impact Judaism has had on the music and those who made it and still make it," Benarde says on his Web site.

"These were areas that simply hadn't been explored in much breadth and depth," he

adds. "It was time to illuminate the fact that Bob Dylan was not the only rocking Jew on the planet, that the Jewish contribution to the music runs deep, and like the Jewish people, is diaspora-wide."

The seed of what became "Stars of David: Rock 'n' Roll's Jewish Stories" was sown when Benarde took his

younger cousin to a David Lee Roth concert in 1986.

"I was able to get backstage and meet Roth," Benarde says. "When I told him he was [my cousin] Russell's bar mitzvah gift, Roth said, 'that's when I started to learn to sing,' [at his own bar mitzvah], I was just blown away."

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Later, when Benarde learned Bob Dylan had stopped off during his tour in South Florida to pray at Temple Beth El of West Palm Beach on Yom Kippur, another seed was sown.

"Realizing Judaism is important to these musicians, I thought I'd investigate further," he says.

Writing the book was a learning process, Benarde says.

"I learned lessons from some of these people," he says. "They're in a career that is more difficult to 'do' Jewish than my career is - yet they are outdoing me."

Although his book

has been out for three years, it's still a popular read, and soon will require a second printing. In addition, Benarde is on the roster of the UJC Speakers Bureau and has lectured around the country on his book and the pop music field. He was a recent guest speaker at Temple Shaarei Shalom in Boynton Beach, for its adult education's Sounds of Our Heritage series.

Jeanne Shupper, who works on the adult education committee, was instrumental in bringing Benarde to speak at the shul.

"He wrote a very interesting book on rock stars," she says. "He was a big hit."

Many in the audience

was surprised to learn which particular performers were Jewish, and were so enthralled they didn't want the lecture to end, she says.

"When people were leaving, they were saying how much they enjoyed it," she says. "After two hours, when he finished, people didn't want him to leave. We're going to have him back to go into depth about the subject."

"Stars of David: Rock 'n' Roll's Jewish Stories" is published by Brandeis University Press, and is available through Borders, Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com. Scott Benarde can be contacted through his Web site: www.scottbenarde.com.