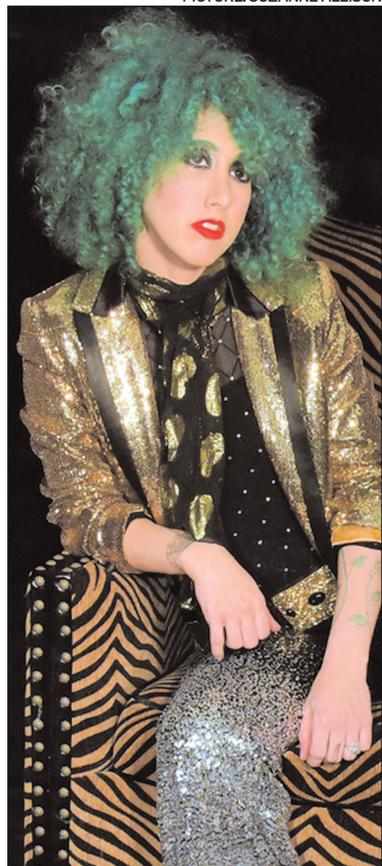


PICTURE: SUZANNE ALLISON



Rock opera uncovers the mysteries of Judaism

BY SIMON YAFFE

HAVING gone through his second divorce, musician Aryeh Shalom was at the end of his tether.

He sat, broken and alone, in his studio and did not feel he had the strength to finish his dream project, nor to even keep on living.

It was then that he looked up at a portrait depicting a tale of the Baal Shem Tov his mother had bought him.

"The symbolism gave me hope," Aryeh told me from his home outside Philadelphia.

"I felt that I was not alone and that God was with me — and all I had to do was sing."

The project in question has finally come to fruition.

Exile And Redemption: A Neo-Hasidic Rock Opera is a conceptual album which explores the mysteries of Judaism and meaning of life.

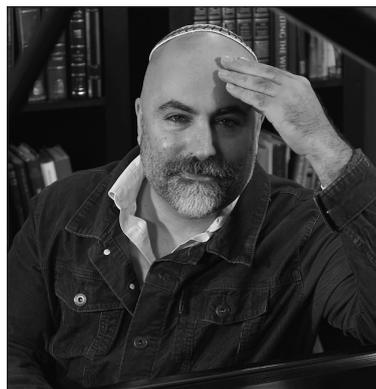
Composed of 12 songs and music videos, the first single and corresponding music video, *A Little Piece In Our Time*, was released on Tuesday.

The second chapter/music video will premiere — along with the full debut album — on Tuesday, October 13.

And additional chapters /music videos will premiere once a month over the course of the year on Aryeh Shalom.com, Facebook and YouTube.

Exile & Redemption will be made available on Amazon Prime as a full-length feature at the end of next year, and is currently being adapted as a live Broadway-style musical production.

It was while in a Jerusalem



INSPIRATION: Aryeh Shalom

yeshiva that Aryeh began to compose music in order to channel the religious revival he was undergoing.

"It was not enough just to make a conceptual album — I wanted to share my struggle with others and offer hope," he said.

Raised in a secular home, Shalom played the cello, was a member of youth orchestras and took part in musical theatre.

He went on Israel tour when he was 16 and was so inspired that he decided he wanted to go back there permanently.

But the first Gulf War was waging and, instead, Aryeh headed to London where he studied at the Actors' Studio and appeared in a number of West End shows.

"I was smoking a lot of hashish at the time and it was when I had my first existential crisis," he recalled.

"I think I realised for the first time that I was going to die — it was kind of like waking up in *The Matrix*."

"It was then that I realised I had to go on a search for the

meaning of life."

After spending time with his grandparents in Florida, he returned to Israel, even with the Gulf War still waging and Iraqi president Saddam Hussein firing Scud missiles at Tel Aviv.

"Like any typical Jewish mother, she went to the Army Navy store and bought me a gas mask," Aryeh laughed.

"But when I landed at Ben-Gurion airport, they were handing out gas masks."

"I lived on a religious kibbutz and remember the missiles lighting up the skies."

"When the sirens went off, instead of going into the bomb shelter, the Israelis just stood on top of it watching the missiles, like it was the fourth of July. They had no fear, whatsoever."

No matter how isolated we feel, we aren't alone

Inspired by his kibbutz, Aryeh moved to Jerusalem, where he studied at Jewish outreach service Aish Hatorah for almost four years in a bid to become a rabbi.

But it was during that period that he had his first manic-depressive episode — an illness he was later diagnosed with — and was forced to return to America before he received semicha.

The father-of-three found that music and arts helped to rebuild his life.

For the past 18 years, he has worked with people at Philadelphia's Chevra Social

Club, a group for young Jewish professionals in their 20s and 30s.

But Aryeh suffered further heartbreak in the last year with the death of his mother, Chana, from ovarian cancer.

"One of the things I was hoping and praying for was that she was able to hear the finished album, which Hashem blessed us with," he added.

"Only once the rock opera was finished did it evolve into a visual album."

"The songs were arranged to evoke another layer of my life story, further illustrated by the visuals of the film, which are a synthesis of personal historical fiction (with creative license) and adaptations of my favourite chassidic tales."

"I think this generation, more than ever, needs to know that they are each extraordinary."

"A famed rabbi once said, 'The day you were born was the day God decided the world does not exist without you'."

"If I was to sum up the project in one phrase from the album it would be from the song *Human Becoming*."

"The lyrics state: 'I make my bed in heaven, I make my bed in hell, I know that you are with me, why, I cannot tell, to be like an angel by the grace of God, but my beauty's imperfection, I'm perfectly flawed.'"

"I think that is a timely message as we approach Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur."

"My hope, especially during this time of social distancing, is that people will find solace in the telling of this tale and find strength in the notion that, no matter how isolated we may feel in quarantine, we're never alone."

■ Aryeshalom.com

Veronica's single speaks volumes about relationship with her father

GUITARIST Veronica Witkin, pictured above, has been using the coronavirus lockdown to good effect.

Veronica, who is lead guitarist with all-girl rock band Glam Skanks, has recorded her first solo single *Pictures of You* . . . and even had her dad, Bruce, produce and play on it.

Joining the Witkins pair on the track is drummer Rob Klonel.

"This year has been rough, but here's a little something that I hope will brighten your day," the 28-year-old said.

Bassist Bruce was a founding member of The Kids, the band that actor Johnny Depp later joined, and has also toured with The Hollywood Vampires.

Bruce produced Glam Skanks' debut album *Glitter City*, which was released by Unison Music Group, which he co-founded.

Los Angeles-based Veronica performs in Glam Skanks as Veronica Volume.

In 2017, Veronica told the *Jewish Telegraph* that she was raised in a "not overly traditional" Jewish home.

She explained: "My (paternal) grandma would go to see her rabbi almost every day and I would go with her to his house every Friday night for a Shabbat meal."

"Today, my Judaism is more of a cultural identity — especially in the current political climate."

"I want to make sure I keep hold of that and not lose any of my Jewish culture."

Glam Skanks, who toured the UK as support for Adam and the Ants, are heading back into the studio next month to work on new material.

They also have a new vocalist after Ali Cat left the band in 2018.

Jewish singer Audra, is now on the microphone.

■ Download *Pictures of You* at vwithkin.bandcamp.com/track/pictures-of-you

Chris Cornell's daughter wants to explore family's Jewish heritage

BY ADAM CAILLER

THE daughter of legendary rock singer Chris Cornell has clarified, for the first time, her family's Jewish lineage — and admitted she wanted to explore it more.

Speaking to the *Jewish Telegraph* about her new Instagram interview series *Mind Wide Open*, Lily Cornell Silver, whose father was lead singer with rock bands Soundgarden and Audioslave before committing suicide in 2017, aged 52, explained: "My mom Susan's dad — his whole family is Jewish and from Russia."

"They emigrated to Ellis Island in America from there."

"There is Jewish heritage on my dad's side, as my grandma — his mum — does talk about it."

"They were raised Irish Catholic, Chris's dad was Irish



ONLINE SERIES: Lily Cornell Silver

Catholic, but there is definitely some Jewish heritage there, but none of us really know for sure,

and it's something I really do want to learn about."

University student Lily's new series was inspired by her father, as she discusses various aspects of mental health with different guests.

The popularity of the series has grown, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

She told me from her home in Seattle: "There were no resources around dealing with mental health in a pandemic, because unless you're, like, 100-years-old, nobody has experienced it."

"That was what I was mainly looking for in this time and not really able to find, so that's something that I was wanting to create."

The series launched on what would have been her father's 56th birthday with Dr Laura van Dernoot Lipsky.

Guests have included Dr Marc

Brackett, the founder of the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence, Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder and Guns N' Roses bassist Duff McKagan.

The pandemic has been a large talking point in the series, and Lily was hopeful for how her generation will learn and grow from the situation.

Lily, 20, said: "There's hope, just in the fact that it has really brought many of our societal issues to the surface."

"Mental health is one of those things where people just can't pretend it's not happening any more."

"Hopefully, we'll all remember how intense and dramatic this time is, but also that it'll be a turning point for society — there has to be a tangible change made."

■ Watch the show at mindwideopenproject.com