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'Spineless' Rugby Union cowers to anti-Israel threats

NICOLA MILTZ

The head of SA Rugby was bullied by anti-Israel "human rights" lobbyists, and given an ultimatum to withdraw the organisation's invitation to an Israeli rugby team to play in a local tournament.

President of SA Rugby, Mark Alexander, told the *SA Jewish Report* that he and members of SA Rugby received countless "death threats" before succumbing on 3 February to demands to rescind an earlier invitation to the Tel Aviv Heat rugby team to play in the Mzansi Challenge next month.

"What was I supposed to do?" he asked.

When asked who was behind the threats and if he had reported them to the South African Police Service, he said, "I'm not going to give the names or go into details, the appropriate authorities are dealing with it. Go to the source, whoever is anti this."

Alexander insists that the threats were the sole reason for the organisation deciding to rescind its invitation to Israel's rugby team to compete in the upcoming Mzansi Challenge tournament, which kicks off on 24 March.

The multicultural Tel Aviv Heat squad comprises players from a host of nations, including numerous South African players and less than a handful of Israeli players, bridging culture, race, nationality, and religion.

SA Rugby announced recently that it was pumping new life into domestic-franchise rugby with the invitation of five international teams – the Diables (Spain), Simbas (Kenya), Welwitschias (Namibia), Tel Aviv Heat (Israel), and Goshawks (Zimbabwe) – to clash with the six local sides in the Currie Cup second tier – the first division.

That segment of the competition has been renamed the Mzansi Challenge.

However, days later, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) announced that it had withdrawn the invitation to Tel Aviv Heat to play following "representations from multiple stakeholders".

"We made a conscious decision to invite Tel Aviv Heat, but after we received death threats, we decided not to tempt fate because what if something goes wrong? We weren't prepared to take the chance," said Alexander, clearly rattled by pressure from the anti-Israel lobby.

"Rugby and sport in general has the ability to bring people together and enhance social cohesion. We don't want to hold events that divide us. We must take security threats seriously," he said.

The African National Congress (ANC) reportedly said in a statement, "We hope this decision will serve as a reminder to Israel that its illegal occupation of the

Palestinian land is an injustice that shouldn't be tolerated."

Said Alexander, "We have a responsibility to make sure that players and spectators are safe. When there are threats, we simply don't have the financial muscle to ensure that safety measures are put in place," alluding to earlier media reports highlighting SA Rugby's R258 million budget deficit for the year.

"We're a self-funded organisation. We stand on our own, and we can only do so much with the money we have. We're just a simple organisation that delivers high-performance athletes in a safe environment. We don't take sides.

"We don't discriminate against anybody," Alexander said, "It would be wrong to host a tournament where

there are threats of unrest and security risks."

"We're a sporting structure, not a political body. The trouble is, no one takes a stand. They allow the little guys to be pushed around because we're an easy target. It's a disgrace."

Alexander has come under attack from all sides after the shock withdrawal of the invitation to the Israeli team.

"It's a sad day for SA rugby and SARU to allow itself to be intimidated by a bunch of thugs," said Zev Krengel, the national vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

Describing the decision as "disgraceful and frankly embarrassing," the SAJBD said it constituted "outright discrimination".

"SARU has a disgraceful history of not allowing players of colour to play during apartheid, and it seems little has changed. It's still a racist, discriminatory body 35-odd years later, doing exactly the same to Jews. It has no backbone," Krengel said.

However Alexander insists the decision has nothing to do with race or antisemitism.

"I love the game, we don't care where you come from, we don't see colour, but I've had death threats since we announced the teams," he said.

"We decided to include the Israeli team not knowing the pressure we would be under. All we want to do is play the game."

"It's appalling that the governing body of SA Rugby has caved in without a fight to those whose sole aim is to boycott Israel in every possible forum, even to the detriment of South Africa itself," the SAJBD said in a statement.

"Threats, bullying, and intimidation have, of course, always been the modus operandi of the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions]

Continued on page 4>>



President of SA Rugby
Mark Alexander

Photo: Facebook

Israel to the rescue



Photo: Israel Defense Forces

Israel's 150-strong search-and-rescue team works around the clock to save lives in the aftermath of the earthquake in southeastern Turkey. The Israeli Defense Forces has sent a further 230 people to establish a field hospital in the area.

See stories on pages 2 and 8

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Israel sending aid to Turkey and Syria in wake of earthquakes

DAVID I. KLEIN – JTA

Israel is sending aid to Turkey and Syria in the wake of two earthquakes on 6 February, one 7.8 and one 7.5 in magnitude, and several aftershocks, that have left more than 11 000 dead. Israel will send medication, tents, and other supplies to Syria, its neighbour that it considers a hostile state, according to Hebrew language media. The Israeli military will also send rescue teams to both countries, the Israeli embassy in the Turkish capital, Ankara, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). That embassy was only recently formally re-established after years of diplomatic tension. "At the request of the Turkish government, I have instructed all authorities to make immediate preparations to provide medical, and search-and-rescue assistance. The foreign and defence ministers have already been in contact with their counterparts and we will – in the coming hours – agree on the dispatching of a delegation as soon as possible," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted on Monday morning, Jerusalem time.

The quake, whose epicentre was in the eastern Turkish province of Kahramanmaraş, was felt throughout the region as far as Israel. It was the highest magnitude the country has experienced in nearly a century, and has had the highest number of casualties in decades. Antakya, a city in southeastern Turkey at the Syrian border, was hit particularly hard. When the JTA visited the city last year, 14 Jews remained in a community that has stood for centuries, stretching back to the days of the Seleucid Empire. The city's namesake, Antiochus, was the villain of the Chanukah story. Three members of the largely elderly community were trapped by rubble after their apartment building collapsed on 6 February, but they have since been rescued, a spokesperson for the Turkish Jewish

community told JTA. The nearby city of Adana, which has a Jewish community of fewer than a dozen people, was also badly hit by the quake, but none of the local Jews are reported missing or injured. The region is also home to many sites of Jewish heritage, from historic synagogues to Harran, a city mentioned in the Bible. Whether any have been damaged is not yet known.



Photo: Ali Kemal Zerenli/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

The overwhelming majority of Turkey's Jews live on the western side of the country, largely in Istanbul, with a smaller community in Izmir. Both cities were unaffected by the quake. "The embassy is reaching the Jewish communities across Türkiye and is searching for Israelis if there are any in the affected region," Nadav Markman, the deputy chief of mission of Israel in Turkey, told JTA. Turkey has experienced deadly earthquakes before. In 1999, during the infamous Izmit Earthquake, the ground shook for less than 40 seconds but nearly 20 000 people died. That disaster registered a 7.6 on the Richter scale compared to Monday's 7.8. Since the seismic event around 04:17 local time, there have been more than 100 aftershocks, many with magnitudes topping 4 or 5 themselves. The shocks are expected to continue for several days. A second 7.5 magnitude quake struck the region later in the afternoon. Other Israeli groups, including United Hatzalah of Israel; Mashav, Israel's national aid agency; the nonprofit SmartAid; the nongovernmental organisation IsraAID; and the Magen David Adom organisation also mobilised teams to travel to Turkey.

The vision of Jethro

Torah Thought

Rav Ilan Herrmann – Soul Workout Shul
This Torah portion is named after Jethro, the chief idolatrous priest of his time, who eventually joined the ranks of the Jews. Rashi says it was the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the attack by Amalek immediately after that that brought Jethro to the Jewish people. What is it about these two events that convinced Jethro to come forward?

The first was the precision of the cosmic stroke of justice that brought about the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. Jethro recognised that there was an unparalleled formidable force in existence. This force had control over the mighty seas, winds, even control over time, as was seen in the salvation of Israel and the execution of her enemy. But more-so, Jethro saw that this force was awake to all events in history. How so? The drowning of the Egyptians wasn't a randomly selected means of elimination. The Egyptians had drowned Jewish baby boys by throwing them into the river Nile. The very same fate had now befallen them. It meant that this force monitored history, held actions accountable, and did so with perfect control of all elements. Jethro hadn't encountered such a force in all the idolatrous gods he had worshipped and studied. The second impetus to join the Jewish nation was the realisation that one can have something clearly stare one in the face, yet not only can one miss or deny it, one can fight against it vehemently. Jethro came forward when he heard of the attack of Amalek on the Israelites. The supernatural salvation of

Israel was so blunt, that no-one in their right mind would try challenge it. Amalek did just this, and *nagal*, immediately after the divine manifestation in all its blazing glory. Jethro realised that man can be so blind to his own desires, hatred, jealousy, or pursuit of honour, that he's closed to the truth even if it stares him in the face. Jethro had a moment of true self-reflection, and didn't allow self-prejudice to get in the way. His conclusion was that this was the truth, and if was true, he must acknowledge it and go towards it, even if it was

inconvenient, demanded change, or if he had to move out of his comfort zone for it. The lessons are clear. First, to open our eyes and notice the strokes of the Divine Hand in our lives and in history, and to respond by coming forward as Jethro did. Second, to reflect on the blindness of Amalek and its trapping, and conversely, the courage of Jethro to see the truth and not allow his ego to obstruct this vision, ultimately leading him to come forward to the gates of truth, to Hashem and the Torah.

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Gqeberha	18:15	19:50
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East London	18:15	19:39
Jerusalem	16:45	18:00
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Seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai for the giving of the Torah. G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments. The people cry out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.



Israel and Africa get closer – SA out in the cold

TALI FEINBERG

In the space of less than 24 hours on 2 February, there was a sea change in relations between Israel and two predominantly Muslim African states after Chad opened an embassy in Ramat Gan and Sudan confirmed that it would sign a peace agreement with Israel.

“Sudan previously fought alongside Arab countries in the 1948 War of Independence and in the Six-Day War in 1967, when it also hosted the Khartoum Conference of the Arab League which established the ‘three nos’ – no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and no peace with Israel. This treaty will be an official peace treaty, recognised on par with the treaties with Egypt and Jordan,” said Professor Glen Segell.

Segell is visiting professor and research fellow at the University of the Free State, research fellow at Haifa University, and an associate of the Think Tank for the Research of Islam and Muslims in Africa.

But South Africa continues to swim against this tide, and experts say the country will ultimately be left “at sea” while other African countries benefit from closer relations with the Jewish state.

Chad’s president, Mahamat Idriss Déby, opened his country’s embassy in Israel four years after the countries renewed ties. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the embassy’s inauguration “an historic moment”. Meanwhile, Israel has said the peace agreement with Sudan will be signed in Washington, D.C. in a few months’ time.

“We’re strengthening our friendship and our common interests in pursuing peace, security, and prosperity,” Netanyahu said at the opening of the Chadian embassy. Israel recognised Chad when it declared independence from France in 1960. But relations broke in 1972 amid pressure from Muslim African nations. In a 2019 visit to Chad, Netanyahu and Déby announced a resumption of diplomatic relations.

Israel’s foreign minister, Eli Cohen, said the text of the agreement with Sudan was finalised

during his one-day visit to see Sudanese leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. “Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, is remembered as the city where the Arab countries decided on the historic ‘three nos’. We’re building a new reality with the Sudanese in which the ‘three nos’ will become ‘yes’ to negotiations between Israel and Sudan, ‘yes’ to recognition of Israel, and ‘yes’ to peace between the states and between the peoples,” said Cohen.

Sudan agreed two years ago to normalise relations with Israel, the latest Arab League country to establish ties. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco have officially normalised relations with Israel as part of the Abraham Accords.

“Israel saw the restoration of relations with Chad in 2019 as an important stepping stone that paved the way to convincing neighbouring Sudan and Morocco to join the Abraham Accords,” said Segell. “It’s hoped that such progress will unlock relations with other Muslim African states, especially Chad’s neighbour, Niger. This will generate a geo-strategic corridor of friendly states from the Indian to Atlantic oceans, including Sudan, Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria.

He pointed out that many of these states also have French ties. “Niger is the source of French uranium, and Chad is a Francophone state. Bibi [Netanyahu] also headed to Paris for an official visit.” He also noted that “two days ago [before 2 February] Sudan leaders were in Chad, just before Chad leaders came to Israel”.

Hussein Solomon, senior professor in the department of political science at the University of the Free State, agrees that “Chad and Francophone Africa are more receptive to Israel than, say, Algeria and South Africa. So I expect more Francophone countries to follow the Chadian example. South Africa has made it clear that it’s opposed to these developments. It’s on the wrong side of history.

“Israel has observer status at the African Union,” Solomon said, although this continues to be challenged by some African countries, including South Africa. “When he was previously prime minister, Netanyahu did much to advance bilateral ties with African states, visiting several of them.”

Local political analyst Steven Gruzd said, “I give credit to Netanyahu for re-energising African relations. They went into a lull with the previous government. This forms part of

– it shows commitment, and paves the way for better relations and for Israel to help a poor country like Chad. At the moment, Israel has relations with more than 40 countries in Africa. Chad is a Muslim majority country and that’s significant.

“It shows that South Africa is out of step in its Middle East policy,” said Gruzd. “South Africa seeks to isolate Israel, but it’s a fruitless endeavour because in the end it’s going to be South Africa which suffers from not having access to Israel’s technology, knowhow, and experience.”

“The Chadian embassy and Sudanese agreement indicate that there’s definite momentum amongst many African states to restore, revitalise, and even start afresh with diplomatic relations with Israel,” said local political analyst Daniel Silke.

This is particularly significant, Silke said, “given the drift to the right within Israeli politics, the predominance of religious nationalism in Israel, and heightened tensions with the Palestinians. Israel’s diplomatic service has been able to pull off quite a substantial coup in terms of its relations with Chad and Sudan. This shows a deepening understanding and commitment from many African countries that there are a number of sides to the Middle East story, and the approach to Israel is much more mature than our one-sided approach here in South Africa.”

These events will “further drive a gulf within African nations, and could also lead to diplomatic tension between South Africa and other African countries”, Silke said.

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Chairperson Rowan Polovin said, “The SAZF celebrates Israel’s growing ties in Africa. During a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem last week, Chadian President Déby said that Chad and Israel were at a decisive turning point in their relationship. In addition, the peace agreement with Sudan indicates an irrefutable move to promote peace, dialogue, and increase economic co-operation between Africa and Israel in 2023.

“The SAZF is moved by this encouraging political development, and calls on the African National Congress government to follow suit and reinstate South Africa’s ambassador to Tel Aviv without delay, or risk being left behind by the latest diplomatic developments between Israel and the rest of the continent,” said Polovin. “The consistent increase in co-operative engagements between Israel and Africa indicates that the stance of the African National Congress government to oppose Israel’s participation at the African Union remains misguided and should be abandoned with immediate effect.”



“The odd one out for Israel’s efforts is South Africa, which is stuck in a time warp, and that prevents the sort of fruitful co-operation seen in Israel’s relations elsewhere across Africa,” said Segell.

his strategy to break up automatic bloc votes from African states against Israel in the United Nations and other multilateral forums.”

He thinks these events are “an important achievement. It’s significant to open an embassy

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Why it won't pay to wear our heart on Hotspur's sleeves



HEIDI BRAUER

South Africa experienced a perfect storm last week when a marketing campaign with a “gigantinormous” price tag collided with a situation in which there appears to be a conflict of interest, in a climate of general government mistrust, within a nation living on broken promises.

Of course, I’m talking about the proposed (signed?) R1 billion deal for South African Tourism to sponsor football club Tottenham Hotspur over three years as a means to market South Africa and bring in much needed tourism.

If I said everyone had an opinion on this, it wouldn’t be hyperbole! In the blink of an eye, we’ve all become destination marketing gurus, sports marketing strategists, “opinionistas” on the allocation of public funding, and more. So with my hat on as a marketer who has worked with sponsorship properties (even football), fought for budgets, missioned to deliver return on marketing investment, and with my heart on my sleeve as a South African who loves our country and someone who is unequivocal about good governance, here’s my take on the situation.

We’re cross. How can the government spend so much money on this when we have no lights and no roads, no decent healthcare, no reliable water? We’re tired of smelly deals and irresponsible spending. I’ll stop there.

But marketing a product, business, or country is as essential as any other role in business or government. If a product isn’t positioned and marketed to potential customers, how do they know to buy it? Or visit?

So, my first point is to stop thinking that it’s either/or. It’s both/and. We need decent roads, lights, and water, and to market South Africa as a tourist destination. All of it needs to be done well. Budgets need to be spent responsibly, efficiently, and effectively, like in any other business.

Whether or not sponsoring this particular soccer team – I’m not qualified to opine on this – is the right way to market our product is another question entirely. And having been pitched numerous properties, having bought and leveraged another bunch (including a soccer team), a few things leapt into my mind when I first read

about it. The first is that sponsorship is a sexy game. Deals are often presented by brands with more glam and glitz than your own, and to whose star you’d love to be hitched. Indeed, that’s what it’s all about.

A friend who ran the sponsorships division of a large beer business in South Africa described sponsorships as “borrowing equity” from another brand. And borrowing that equity, getting that light to shine on your brand, can be a winning partnership. Think about Sunfoil and cricket, just off the top of my head. Sponsorship is a huge business.

It usually promises exciting events, hospitality, and entertainment, exposure to luminaries, and such. Most often, I’ve been presented with quite vanilla proposals where I have to “order off the menu” and pick the silver, gold, or platinum package and the accompanying “value” such as tickets to the events, my logo in various places, the privilege of giving a branded gift(!), and so on.

If I asked you to name the sponsors of any number of events, you’d battle to recall them because usually there are a plethora of logos plastered everywhere and the average consumer neither cares nor pays attention. That’s why fit is so important. Does the property being offered for sponsorship “match” the brand in terms of values, positioning, and target markets for starters? The people too! It’s usually a long-term relationship, and a great connection, vibe, and working energy is a critical ingredient. Sometimes we’ve been offered really cool stuff, but an alcohol brand doesn’t go with an airline, and motor racing isn’t a fit for an insurance company. Even when there’s a match, and eyes are all sparkly, the price tags are the most misleading part. You see, the conventional wisdom is that for every R1 you invest in the property, you need about R3 more to leverage (or market) that property. That reality has taken the stars out of my eyes many times.

It costs money to set up the hospitality at the cycle

race, or to fly guests to the cricket match, or to make the adverts to create awareness about the partnership in the market (or else you’re winking in the dark). It costs money to brand gazebos, signage, and suites. And more money to give gifts to your guests, who often send their second cousin and his kid (because they forgot they

had a golf game) and your relationship building is then down the proverbial. Then, you need to hire agencies to do all this work. So, R1 billion for the property needs another R2 billion or R3 billion to market it!

Sponsorship lesson nearly over, save to say that it’s always part of a mix of marketing approaches and I’d never put all my eggs in one basket. And while I should never judge another marketer until I’ve walked a mile in their moccasins, I reckon my numerous trips around the block allow me to have an opinion. To spend a third of my budget – and I’m not clear if what’s been quoted in the media is marketing budget or operating budget

– on one target audience (some say a saturated market) via one “campaign” isn’t something I’d do. Huge exposure – huge risk.

And I’m not going to lecture you on communication objectives – are you creating awareness of the brand (like Rwanda needed to build via its soccer deal) or trying to make leads and sales, which is what we need? Converting awareness, which I don’t think we need, to actual visitors is going to take some nifty attribution skills and maybe some magic, never mind even more campaign work and spending to make it happen. A sponsorship which raises awareness but also seeks to convert to bums on planes needs to show the country’s assets – I call them proof points – in rich, gorgeous, and hardworking communication. Logos on sleeves and around stadia aren’t enough.

Whether you do what I do all day or not, smart and savvy (and sick and tired) Saffers have a sense of all this. It’s just off. But that’s not why we’re cross. Because in the mix there’s also something smelly in the form of a conflict of interest between the acting chief financial officer and the agency (unknown in the sports and sponsorship marketing field but apparently good at what they do otherwise, by the way) who stands to profit big time from “brokering” the deal. And for the record, declaring a conflict doesn’t mean the conflict goes away. We have an irate acting chief executive officer who fumes at South Africa at press conferences, an invisible chief marketing officer, a minister who’s taking it all very personally, and three board members who resigned in disgust and are apparently themselves being smeared. Government bodies, much like any department in a business, need to operate in service, not in arrogance, and not in apparent desperation.

If it quacks like a duck, and waddles like a duck, well...

- *Passionate about South Africa and the power of brands and humans, Heidi Brauer has for more than 25 years been working with, researching, writing and teaching about, and adjudicating brands and marketing, as well as leading brands like Kulula.com, SLOW, and Hollard.*



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‘Spineless’ Rugby Union cowers to anti-Israel threats

>>>Continued from page 1

movement, and so it was in this case, with SARU members even reportedly receiving death threats. Such thuggish tactics are a direct attack not on how rugby is administered in South Africa, but on democracy itself.”

The Board accused SARU of “capitulating immediately” instead of “taking a firm, principled stand”. It said SARU’s claim that it was acting in the interests of maintaining “social cohesion” was “preposterous”, saying that the decision has caused “divisiveness and ill-feeling”.

Tel Aviv Heat said it was “surprised and disappointed” at the decision.

The team’s head coach, ex-South African Kevin Musikanth, said, “I and the players are devastated.”

“The bulk of our playing and management squad are South African from all races and religions. Most of them are now without playing and earning opportunities for this period. The players in our squad were relying on the income they would have received for their livelihoods, and are now significantly under pressure in their personal lives.

“It’s sad that we were welcomed into the competition,

added to the fixture list, and then dumped because we’re an Israeli franchise. Our squad has the most diversity, with all races and religions. We’re proud of the diversity that’s part of the Tel Aviv Heat DNA, and now that the South African door is closed to us, we’re unable to show this amazing aspect of our club.”

The decision to block Tel Aviv Heat from participating “will only sow further division in South Africa and beyond by bolstering voices dedicated to vilify, demonise, and censor those who don’t share their views”, it said in a statement.

The South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) said the decision was a result of “political interference”, and the decision was made “simply because they reside in Israel”, according to SAFI spokesperson Pamela Ngubane.

“It’s saddening to see that SARU has allowed ANC politics and a BDS agenda to define who’s welcome to participate in sporting events in our beautiful country,” Ngubane said.

“We’ll regroup and focus on getting ready for the Super Cup, where we’re official participants, are welcomed by Rugby Europe, and have been over the past two seasons that we’ve played,” said Musikanth.

The Mexican Rhinos have been earmarked to replace Tel Aviv Heat.



Photo: Facebook



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SA Tourism misses the mark with Hotspur “own goal”

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been a week of high drama and headlines at South African Tourism (SAT) following leaked information about a controversial proposed multi-million rand deal with Tottenham Hotspur Football Club – a deal now shelved following public outcry.

Daily Maverick last week exposed how SAT proposed a three-year sponsorship deal with the English Premier League side worth £42.5 million (about R900m), starting at the beginning of the 2023/2024 season and ending at the end of the 2026/2027 season.

In exchange for the investment, SAT would receive kit branding, interview backdrop branding, match-day advertising, partnership announcements, training camps in South Africa, and free access to tickets and stadium hospitality.

The information which was leaked to the news site was greeted with derision by the public at a time when the nation is beset with seemingly insurmountable problems, not to mention lack of trust when it comes to how public money is spent.

It was further alleged that SAT’s interim chief financial officer, Johan van der Walt, had been linked to an agency identified in the controversial sponsorship proposal.

The publication reported that Van der Walt was a director of several companies linked to the WWP Group. This, even though SAT Chief Executive Themba Khumalo stated at a media briefing on 2 February that there was “no involvement of an agent or middleman in this proposed partnership”.

Michael Goldman, a sports marketing expert and professor of sport management at San Francisco University, said the social context in which the proposed deal was being considered was deeply problematic considering the immense difficulties experienced by South Africans daily.

However, from a business point of view, R300m a year over three years was a “miniscule” amount of public expenditure relative to the trillions spent. It was also money that had been allocated to marketing South Africa internationally in order to attract foreign tourists.

“The potential returns in terms of media exposure and actual tourist spend would outpace the money spent. For every rand we spend marketing South Africa, we get at least R30 back in international money spent here. We need to spend money to make money. So, it was potentially a good deal and an affordable one, but the way in which people



Tourism Minister
Lindiwe Sisulu

“There’s no sense in buying a Porsche if you don’t have money to buy petrol.”

whatever money was going to be spent there needed to have a similar budget to leverage the sponsorship. “There’s no sense in buying a Porsche if you don’t have money to buy petrol,” he said. In other words, attract tourists, and make it worth their while to come here.

Steven Mervis, the head of strategy at MSC Sports, said, “From a public relations point of view, spending so much money on one very high-profile sponsorship was always going to be difficult for the South African public to accept. SA

Tourism must have seen this backlash coming when the country’s socioeconomic and Gini co-efficient is considered.” He said it was difficult to determine the impact (both positive and negative) of the deal from a sponsorship point of view.

“What struck me initially was how much we didn’t know about the sponsorship. Why has SA Tourism chosen this sponsorship? What audience data has it based it on? How does it fit into its wider plan? What has it spent its previous marketing budgets on?”

He said out of context, the deal sounded overpriced and concerning, but without full understanding of how SAT operates its international marketing and its objectives and targets for the next three years, it would be hard to determine the potential impact.

An interesting comparison had been made with the “Visit Rwanda” campaign, Mervis said, that country having a similar, multi-year partnership with Spurs’ closest rival, Arsenal.

“Some might think that the money spent by the central African country vindicates SA Tourism’s decision. But it’s important to

understand the context. Following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the country needed to make tourists aware that visiting the landlocked nation was a viable and attractive option. This, however, isn’t the case with South Africa.

“Our country has long been famous as a top holiday destination, ranking in the top-25 most popular destinations in the world, according to the World Tourism Organisation, and the challenge isn’t awareness, it’s further down the sales funnel at consideration and conversion. As a nation, we need to keep convincing tourists to come here in spite of all the issues we have, not make them aware we exist. With a partnership that focuses so heavily on exposure, SA Tourism, in my opinion, has missed the mark.”



Tottenham Hotspur Stadium

It has been a saga with many moving parts. Fingers have been pointed at Tourism Minister Lindiwe Sisulu, who denied knowledge of the deal and countered that it was a smear campaign. It has also placed Khumalo in the spotlight over his irascible handling of the matter.

On 7 February, the portfolio committee on tourism resolved that the deal was no longer on the cards.

However questions remain about what all the fuss was about and whether this deal had any merit to begin with. Some industry insiders say it all comes down to social context and how things are communicated. Most agree that the backlash was understandable considering what South Africans are experiencing.

experience their lives and the substantial mistrust that has plagued South Africa made it a difficult proposal to consider.

“If we didn’t have a daily reminder of the failures of the state, we might be able to swallow this kind of thing more easily. Also, if the proposal wasn’t leaked but communicated in a different way, it may have played out differently. These are some of the lessons for the future.”

Neil Jankelowitz, the chief executive of MSC Sports, said he understood why the deal was so emotive and elicited such a level of uproar, given the context.

Though a sponsorship with the English Premier League was potentially an effective platform to market South Africa, reaching a massive global audience, it was vital that

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Israel a “flawed democracy” in an undemocratic neighbourhood

STEVEN GRUZD

Israel’s supporters have long claimed that it’s “the only democracy in the Middle East”. But a new study by the United Kingdom-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has put paid to that, classifying Israel as a “flawed democracy”, albeit in an extremely undemocratic neighbourhood. South Africa, too, is slipping down the democratic rankings.

The focus of the EIU’s “Democracy Index 2022” (published in 2023) is on the global fallout from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 on the back of the damage caused by more than two years of COVID-19 restrictions.

The EIU has been publishing its Democracy Index since 2006, so it’s a useful tool for tracking trends over time. The index measures five main criteria: electoral process and pluralism; functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties. All 165 countries are then ranked based on their scores to subsidiary questions as either a “full democracy”, “flawed democracy”, “hybrid regime”, or “authoritarian regime”.

The report says the Middle East and North Africa is “the worst-performing region in terms of its absolute score and its year-on-year score change. Tunisia, Iraq, and Jordan all register sharp declines in their scores.” The regional average dropped from an already low 3.41 out of 10 in 2021 to 3.34 in 2022, worse than the regional average of 3.43 in 2010 before the short-lived Arab Spring.

According to the EIU, the region has no “full democracies”, just one “flawed democracy” – Israel, two “hybrid regimes”, and 17 “authoritarian regimes”. Israel thus lives in the world’s least democratic region.

Israel scores 7.93 out of 10, making it the most democratic in the region by some margin, and 29th overall in the world. It’s the only Middle Eastern country in the top half, while five states in the area are in the bottom 20 places of the index. But Israel is below eight, which would have made it a “full democracy”. Israel is classified as a “flawed democracy”. Israel has very high scores for electoral process, pluralism, and political participation, no doubt a result of its frequent but credible elections.

Israel thus lives in the world’s least democratic region.

would undermine the separation of powers and possibly imperil civil liberties in future.”

South Africa scored 7.05 out of 10 in 2022, to place it 45th in the world. It scored only 5.00 out of 10 for “political culture”. In 2006, it scored 7.91 overall, indicating a steady democratic decline. The only specific commentary offered on South Africa by the EIU is that it has witnessed increased public protests. The country is unfortunately not moving in the right direction. Years of state capture have damaged democracy, but the fightback by civil society, the media, and the judiciary saved the country from a much worse fate.

South Africa is also categorised as a “flawed democracy”. African states ahead of South Africa in the global rankings have much smaller

populations: Mauritius (8.14, 21st position), Botswana (7.73, 32nd position), and Cabo Verde (7.65, 35th position). Sub-Saharan Africa has one “full democracy”, six “flawed democracies”, 14 “hybrid regimes”, and 23 “authoritarian

For comparison, the top 10 most democratic countries are Norway, New Zealand, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Taiwan, all with scores of 8.99 and above. Democracy clearly seems to thrive in cold, rich places.

The bottom 10 are Equatorial Guinea, Laos, Chad, Turkmenistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Central African Republic, North Korea, Myanmar and Afghanistan. Four are in Africa. The global average score is 5.29, also down from 5.52 in 2006.

The country with the biggest decline over the year was Russia, which managed a score of only 2.28, down from 3.24 in 2021. It scored 5.06 in 2006 in the early years of Vladimir Putin’s rule. This precipitous fall is largely attributed to its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the curtailment of civic space and civil liberties in the country.

So, though Israel and South Africa are among the top performers in their regions and in the world overall, they both have some work to do to raise their scores above eight to be classified as “full democracies”.

Middle East 2022									
	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Algeria	3.66	113	6	3.08	2.50	3.89	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Bahrain	2.52	142	14	0.42	2.71	3.33	4.38	1.76	Authoritarian
Egypt	2.93	131	12	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.75	Authoritarian
Iran	1.96	154	18	0.00	2.50	3.33	2.50	1.47	Authoritarian
Iraq	3.13	124	10	5.25	0.00	6.11	1.13	1.18	Authoritarian
Israel	7.93	29	1	9.58	7.86	9.44	6.88	5.88	Flawed democracy
Jordan	3.17	123	9	2.67	3.21	3.89	3.13	2.94	Authoritarian
Kuwait	3.83	111	5	3.17	3.93	4.44	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Lebanon	1.64	155	18	3.50	0.79	6.67	1.11	4.13	Authoritarian
Libya	2.06	151	17	0.00	0.00	3.89	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Morocco	5.04	96	3	5.25	4.64	5.66	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Oman	3.12	125	11	0.08	3.93	2.78	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Palestine	3.66	110	4	2.92	0.14	8.33	4.38	3.53	Authoritarian
Qatar	3.65	114	7	1.50	4.29	3.33	5.63	3.53	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	2.08	150	16	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Sudan	2.47	144	15	0.00	1.43	4.44	5.00	1.47	Authoritarian
Syria	1.43	163	20	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00	Authoritarian
Tunisia	5.51	85	2	6.17	4.64	6.11	5.63	5.00	Hybrid regime



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Jewish community leaders missing in Antakya after earthquake

DAVID I. KLEIN – JTA

After initially sounding the all clear in the hours after a devastating earthquake on Monday, 6 February, the Turkish Jewish community now says that two prominent members remain missing in Antakya, a city near the Syrian border with a long Jewish history. The leader of the Jewish community of Antakya, Saul Cenudioğlu, and his wife, Fortuna, have been missing since their apartment building collapsed in the first of two quakes on Monday morning, according to Cenudioğlu's niece, Ela. Ela Cenudioğlu described her uncle as "a visionary leader committed to the Jewish community and the values it represents". She said he had, since birth in 1941, lived in Antakya, where the family operated a textile business. Saul "did everything in his capacity to have the small Jewish community of Antakya thrive and connect with the rest of the communities in Turkey and the world", she told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "I hope

that he and his wife [who has always been a mother to me] come out of this safely, for all I wish is to see his kind smile and hug him again." A grim toll is continuing to mount in Turkey, where the official death toll has passed 11 000 (on 8 February) and which the World Health Organization warns could surpass 20 000. More than 1 200 buildings were destroyed in Antakya's province alone, and more than 6 000 are estimated to have been destroyed across southern Turkey. Rescue teams are racing against time to identify people who might be buried alive under the rubble. Saul's brother, Azur Cenudioğlu, was in Antakya during the quake but managed to get out safely, according to Ynet. About his brother and sister-in-law, he said, "I'm going back there to look for them and fear I may not find them alive." Antakya's 100-year-old synagogue was also heavily damaged. Video circulated on social media showing community members retrieving Torah scrolls that



Saul Cenudioğlu (pictured above with his grandchildren) and his wife Fortuna are missing

to an end with this great pain," the Turkish Jewish community tweeted, with a picture of the synagogue's Torah scrolls being removed from a severely damaged room. Israeli aid workers from a variety of organisations have landed in Turkey, and plan to assist in search, rescue, and recovery in the devastated south eastern portion of the country. Many expect to be in the region for weeks to come. "We're headed to Gaziantep with emergency relief supplies including water filters, water filtration systems, hygiene kits, mental health, and resilience kits," IsraAid's spokesperson told JTA. "In the first two weeks, we'll assess the needs on the ground and explore a wider range, longer term response." An immediate concern is providing safe shelter for those displaced by the quakes. "We woke up at 04:00, and the house was shaking," Azur told Ynet. "We left in our pyjamas and slippers, and were unable to take anything with us. Our prayer shawls and tefillin are all buried under the rubble, and we're left with nothing."

Photo: Ela Cenudioğlu; Haray: Firat Ozdemir, Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Helping Boksburg victims long after the explosion

OPINION WENDY KAHN

One month after the gas tanker explosion on 24 December that rocked the lives of the Boksburg community, I went with our team working on the ground to assist the victims of the tragedy on a follow-up visit to the town. While there, we met the Philander family. The mother and father had suffered extensive burns and were experiencing pain that kept them awake and screaming through the night. Of the 11 people in their vicinity who were taken to hospital following the explosion, they were the only ones who survived. The Philanders had spent the past month attending funerals of friends and neighbours. Their children hovered around them, looking bewildered and frightened. I spoke to their five-year-old daughter, Kate, who told me that her mommy and daddy had been burned in the fire and it made her really sad. The food supplies that we provided were welcomed, but it was the support of Clive Mashishi and his team that was really appreciated. Clive transported them to hospital for their visits, and Pastor Tshepo Mosala provided spiritual guidance and comfort.



We had arranged that they receive counselling that weekend with the phenomenal Arielle Susman, a social worker at King David Victory Park who has been a fixture in Boksburg, giving trauma therapy to those who need it most. The Philanders are one of many families that the Jewish community has been supporting in the wake of the catastrophe. From the time that the explosion occurred until today, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has been working closely with The Angel Network, Clive Mashishi, Fingertips of Africa, Arielle Susman, Pastor Mosala, and Prince Tamane (from Khula Khanya Holdings construction company). We have done whatever we could to assist the people of Boksburg – physically, financially,

psychologically, and spiritually. And we have continued to do this critical work long after the politicians and media disappeared. Immediately following the explosion, Clive visited the site so that he could ascertain what was needed. Sadly, much of this involved helping with funeral arrangements. We were able to assist bereaved families to find the bodies of their loved ones and where required to do so, arrange for them to be released from mortuaries. Clive and his team assisted with the arrangement of 12 funerals, providing tents, chairs, and whatever else was needed. Pastor Mosala conducted the funerals, bringing comfort to the bereaved, while Yehuda Lazarus and Jackie Morwalle from Fingertips of Africa cooked through the night to give hot meals to the mourners. We assisted with serving the food and whatever was left over was packaged for the families to carry them through this difficult time. Clive also helped injured and burned people to get to hospital, and we were able to get supplies to those who really needed help. Prince Tamane and his team set about repairing the broken windows of nearby houses and an old-age home that was damaged. One of the most heart-wrenching of funerals was the burial of the four Brits siblings, whose caskets stood side by side. Another was the burial of a grandmother and her 14-year-old grandson, Simakele Molo. Simakele saved his 10-year-old brother before succumbing to the flames himself. I met his little brother and was so pleased that we could be there to support them and all the other families at this horrific time. The most resounding request we had, however, was for trauma counselling and we were extremely privileged to have Arielle on our team. Arielle became invaluable to the Boksburg community, spending weeks talking its members through this crisis. She has assured them that she will be available for them as long as she's needed, and has also counselled our team members who were grieved and deeply shaken by what they saw. It made me proud to reflect how in the wake of this horrific tragedy and its painful aftermath, South African Jewry have helped so much to bring healing and comfort to the people of Boksburg. • Wendy Kahn is national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

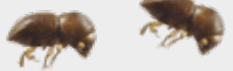
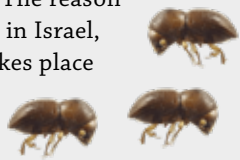


Israel could help SA tell forest from trees

OPINION JESSICA CONNÉ

Tu B'Shvat translates in English to the 15th day of the Hebrew month Shevat, and is the day we celebrate the birthday of fruit trees. The Torah states that the first three years of fruit that a tree gives cannot be eaten, and the fruit of the fourth year must be offered to priests in the Temple as a gift of thanks. The fruit from the fifth year onwards, however, can be used and commodified. This Torah obligation raises the question of when, exactly, a tree has its birthday. The rabbis decided on the 15th of Shevat to mark the date of a tree's life, regardless of when the tree was planted. The reason for this date was that in Israel, the 15th of Shevat takes place after mid-winter, when most of the annual rain has already fallen, leaving healthy soil that's full of water, thus the perfect date for a tree to be planted. I like to think that trees were also given a birthday because they're good at blowing out birthday candles. Tu B'Shvat is also considered to be Jewish Earth Day, in which we discuss environmental concerns and our shared responsibility to look after the earth. In this light, there's an environmental issue that threatens a quarter of all trees in South Africa – that's 65 million trees – and is being caused by something the size of a pomegranate seed. The Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) beetle is a tiny black beetle that originates from Southeast Asia. The beetle first arrived in South Africa in 2017 as a result of international trade of plant material. Starting in Pietermaritzburg, it has since spread to all provinces in South Africa except Limpopo. The PSHB beetle, together with a type of fungus called Fusarium euwallaceae, works to invade and eventually kill trees. But how does a pomegranate seed-sized bug and a mushroom threaten the biosphere of an entire country? In summary, female adult PSHB beetles burrow into trees and establish an area to lay eggs. When doing so, the beetle also

introduces the Fusarium euwallaceae fungus. This fungus acts as a food source for the larvae and adult beetles, and later invades the tree's vascular tissue, which essentially stops all water and nutrients from being transported around the tree. Subsequently, this leads to the deterioration of the tree from the top down, and its eventual death. Fairly brutal. As problematic as this sounds, according to Cape Town's Invasive Species Unit, the problem is being dealt with through the identification and removal of highly infested trees in order to decrease the beetle population. South Africans are being asked for their assistance in identifying infected trees, and are encouraged to report any sightings to the city. In 2009, the PSHB beetle was found in avocado orchards in Israel, and has since had an impact on Israel's avocado industry. Israel's reputation of being at the forefront of environmental innovation is exemplified by its water-management plans, community forests, and Jewish National Fund-funded research concerning agriculture and the wider environment, and by leading scientific and academic institutions around the world. With Israel being at the forefront of so much environmental innovation, and with it going through the same issue, it would surely be beneficial to hear what advice could be offered to South Africa in order to prevent this natural disaster? In spite of public participation being an optimistic method of saving one quarter of our trees and our subsequent biosphere, perhaps a method that includes public participation but doesn't solely rely on it would be more appropriate for the level of urgency needed. More information about the PSHB beetle and what to look out for can be found at: <https://www.capetown.gov.za/City-Connect/Activities-and-programmes/Nature-and-environment/invasive-species-programme> • Jessica Conné graduated from the University of Cape Town with a Bachelor of Social Science, majoring in environmental and geographical science, media, and sociology.



SA artists give BDS the beat

TALI FEINBERG

In spite of a possible backlash from the anti-Israel lobby, two South African artists have decided to share their genius with Israeli audiences in 2023.

Former radio personality DJ Themba (also known as Euphonik, whose real name is Themba Mbongeni Nkosi) played at the Matta Club in Tel Aviv on 26 January. And, comedian Kevin Fraser, previously known as Spindocter, announced on 26 January that he would be touring Israel, Dubai, and Doha from 1 to 12 March. Nkosi has 61 000 followers on Facebook and 103 000 followers on Instagram, and Fraser has 315 000 followers on Facebook and 130 000 followers on Instagram.

"2023 LETS GO! #MiddleEast2023" Fraser wrote excitedly on social media. The poster for the tour proudly includes an Israeli flag. The news of the tour was warmly received on social media. Though one fan wrote, "Maybe don't put Doha and Tel Aviv on the same flyer," it's clear that Fraser didn't see that as an issue. This is significant in light of the fact that Israelis and their supporters were subjected to continual persecution during the recent FIFA World Cup in Qatar. But to Fraser, Israel deserves a show as much as Qatar. The exact date of his gig in Israel is yet to be announced.

"Excited to return to a handful of my favourite cities over the next two months," Nkosi wrote in a post ahead of his visit to Tel Aviv, which was listed along with gigs in Doha, Dubai, London, Barcelona, Singapore, Hong Kong, Bali, Mexico, and Miami. Israeli fans can be seen rocking to his beats, and shaking his hand in social media footage of the gig.

His Israel gig followed a show in Tulum, where he shared the stage with DJ Black Coffee, who is known for playing packed-out performances in Israel even after he was harshly criticised by the anti-Israel lobby and South African media. The two South African DJs have performed and recorded albums together.

This isn't the first time that Nkosi has played in Israel. He performed there as recently as October 2022, even though the South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) coalition pressured him not to take part. And in December 2022, his gig in Italy was opened by Israeli artist Roy Komashov, who is based in Tel Aviv.

Fraser also has a DJ background, and has entertained at more than 100 venues and festivals across South Africa, Miami, Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Indonesia. His comedy has gone viral, and brings a unique fusion of music and comedy to the stage.

"Unfortunately, we continue to see artists pressured, bullied, and scapegoated when they perform in Israel," says Ari Ingel, the director of Creative Community for Peace (CCFP), which works to promote the arts as a way to encourage peace, to counter antisemitism in the entertainment industry, and to oppose the cultural boycott of Israel.

"In spite of this, we're constantly inspired by artists from around the world who understand that they have the ability to effect positive change by coming to Israel and performing for audiences of all backgrounds. This is especially true for DJs and dance music, which is a particularly unifying genre. The Israeli scene has DJs that are Arabs, Jews, Christians, Muslims, black, white, you name it. And the international DJs who come to spin in Israel are just as diverse, from Iranians and Arabs throughout the Middle East, to South Africans and Chileans.

"As an organisation dedicated to building bridges through the arts, CCFP will continue to support artists around the world who want to come and play in Israel," he says.

Lana Melman, the author of *Artists Under Fire: The BDS War against Celebrities, Jews, and Israel*, says, "The BDS campaign wants artists to believe that if they perform for their Israeli fans their reputations will be soiled and their careers ended. It tosses around emotionally manipulative sound bites and demands allegiance. Artists drowning in the tidal wave of the onslaught can feel isolated and overwhelmed – a pawn in someone else's political agenda."

That's why it's so admirable that South African artists continue to perform in Israel, which many have described as "ground zero" of the BDS campaign.

"In spite of claims to the contrary, very few artists cave to BDS pressure," says Melman. "As Alan Parsons of the Alan Parsons Project succinctly stated when I interviewed him in 2017, BDS is 'a campaign for a boycott, not a boycott'. Every year, some of the most in-demand artists in



the world such as Jennifer Lopez, Lionel Richie, and Lady Gaga perform in or visit Israel and speak glowingly of the experience. American singer Mariah Carey describes her relationship with Israel as a 'love affair'."

In addition, "Israeli audiences are some of the most appreciative of culture in the world," says Melman. "The Jewish population in pre-state Israel nurtured the arts. The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, partly created as a refuge for Jewish musicians facing boycott and imminent death during the rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, is a national

treasure. Pandemics and major conflicts aside, well over 100 acts perform each year in Tel Aviv, often selling tens of thousands of tickets in a single concert.

"Artists perform in Israel for the same reason that they perform everywhere else: to provide for their families, connect with their fans, and build cultural bridges," Melman says. "We all know that people are much more likely to like one another when they feel they have something in common, and art and music can provide that commonality."

"Proponents of the cultural boycott against Israel want to bar films from festivals, silence instruments, and take canvases off walls," says Melman. "One by one, each artist under attack by BDS has an opportunity to prevent that. Whether they are filmmakers or music makers, artists can help to provide the bedrock for peace."

"The South African Zionist Federation [SAZF] sends its best wishes to local comedian Kevin Fraser for his upcoming trip to Israel to perform in Tel Aviv," says SAZF National Chairperson Rowan Polovin. "He will be welcomed by adoring fans, many of whom are South African who have made aliya to Israel."



South African *olah* Lili Kovler is one such immigrant. "I'm excited to go because I find him hilarious – and he's South African," Kovler says.

Polovin notes that "Fraser will also tour to the United Arab Emirates, which form part of the Abraham Accords alongside Israel. This wonderful occasion highlights the importance of increasing cultural engagements across the region, which contributes meaningfully to open dialogue and peace talks across our borders."

"DJ Themba also concluded a recent tour in Israel, where his music was received with great fanfare," he says. "The SAZF encourages all South African performers, entertainers, sportsmen, musicians, and academics to visit Israel. They'll find that it's home to a multicultural society where the rights of all religions, minorities, ethnicities, and beliefs are protected and where cultural and intellectual pursuits are promoted inclusively."

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The SA piano that inspired a Grammy-winning maestro

TALI FEINBERG

When Steven Feifke's parents emigrated to the Unites States (US) from South Africa three years before he was born, they took their piano with them. It was that instrument that he was drawn to as a baby, tinkering on the keys. Today, at the age of 31, he's an award-winning pianist, composer, conductor, educator, and one of the most in-demand artists of his generation, and he won a Grammy Award on 5 February.

"It's surreal," says his thrilled father, Derek Feifke, from their home in Boston, Massachusetts. "He's been dedicated to his craft since a young age. We used to have to pull him away from the piano to do his homework! At the Grammys, he was up against icons of jazz, so that moment truly felt unbelievable. I've always joked, 'Maybe one day you'll win a Grammy,' but I never knew that one day he would actually realise that dream."

Steven was at the awards with his parents, fiancé, and brothers – one of whom flew in from Berlin to surprise him. The award, for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album was given to his Generation Gap Jazz Orchestra (GGJO). He formed it with Bijon Watson to bring together a big band featuring some of the most well-known names in jazz as well as less established and younger musicians. Their objective is to strengthen the tradition of mentorship that has defined jazz since its earliest beginnings. The Grammy is the pinnacle of a lifetime dedicated

to music, and also credit to family and educators who backed Steven every step of the way. "My father, Sidney, played the piano, and Steven, who never met him, was named after him," says Steven's proud mother, Carole Feifke. "My father could sit down and play anything by ear. I also played the piano, and it was a shared passion with my dad, and then with my son. My parents loved all music, especially jazz."

That generational link has come full circle in Steven, and Carole became his first piano teacher when he was a few years old. "He took to it like a duck to water. He then started lessons, and at the age of 10, said he wanted to learn jazz. I was like, 'What does Steven know about jazz?' but that was that," she says. "And just like my dad, he can sit down and play anything."

Steven's aunt, Belinda Assaizky, in Glenhazel, Johannesburg says, "We're in awe. He's so humble, and so deserved it. I had a feeling he would win. Steven is such an accomplished artist and so dedicated. He didn't expect to win, and was up against six top-class nominees. When I spoke to them after he won, they were at the theatre, with the blue lights and the gold palm trees. Steven also performed at the after party."

In a previous interview with *avid.com*, Steven

recounted the value of educators. "When I was about eight, I had a teacher named Susan Capestro, who immediately started coaching me in composition. I didn't realise that's what it was at the time, but during our very first lesson, she asked, 'Play me a waterfall.' Like any little kid, I ran my thumb down the piano. She's like, 'Okay, what happens when the water hits the ground?' and I crashed my hands to the keys! Susan recognised before I did that I had an affinity for composition in addition to improvisation. She really nurtured that element of my musicality."

His father also comes from a musical background. "I've always loved music," says Derek. "I was in a band in high school in Johannesburg, playing at weddings and Barmitzvahs. And my late father also loved jazz."

Growing up in Lexington, Massachusetts, Steven had access to a top-class jazz programme in the school system. He also attended the New England Conservatory preparatory school in Boston, and would book shows for himself to feature his compositions. "That experimental and adventurous writing process is something that has never really left me. I always make sure that I have time to just sit at the piano, write, and play. Playing and writing are very connected for me," he told *avid.com*.

He went on to pursue an undergraduate degree at New York University in 2009, minoring in economics and majoring in music. "I would ask him, 'How are you going to make a living playing music?' but this was his passion," says his father. "He never had a plan B. It's wonderful to witness his creative process. He's worked so hard in a tough industry."

Steven then did a Master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with luminaries of composition and orchestration. Being in New York throughout his studies, he was in the "mecca of jazz", and was taught by or played music with people he had always admired.

International tours across Europe, Africa, and Asia and more than 30 albums all before turning 30 have established his name as a global presence in jazz. He

has performed at venues like Club Coca-Cola, in Times Square, and at the Rockefeller Center.

He has also written commissioned works for notables like the Manhattan School of Music Jazz Orchestra, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Malmo Big Band, and the New Generation Festival, and is the recipient of numerous awards. His compositions and orchestrations have been featured on hit TV shows like *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* on Netflix, *Impractical Jokers* on TruTV, *Animaniacs* on Hulu, and the 2016 award-winning animated short *Solo*.

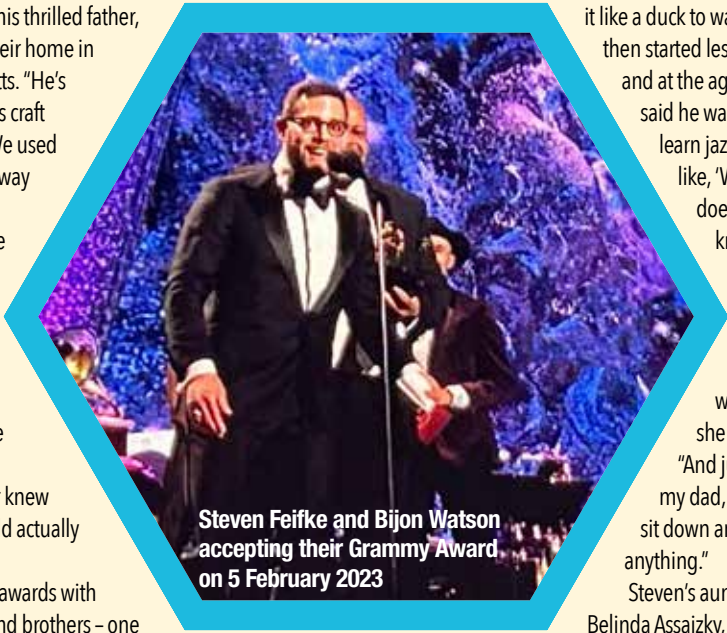
His 2020 album *Kinetic* marked his studio big-band debut, featuring an 18-piece ensemble made up of players from the frontline of the contemporary jazz scene.

A respected educator, Steven is assistant professor at the Berklee College of Music, the largest independent college of contemporary music in the world. He also sits on faculty at The New School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, and has appeared as a guest lecturer and guest artist at educational institutions around the US. He's co-founder of A Step Ahead Jazz, an online music-education platform for musicians of all ages and abilities.

Reviewing the GGJO album, Jack Bowers of AllAboutJazz.com wrote, "Regardless of any age discrepancy within its ranks, the GGJO is a truly remarkable ensemble, and its debut album – the hope is that many more will follow – is sharp and radiant from start to finish. As for listeners, may they never be too young or too old to appreciate high-calibre jazz that swings as hard and as often as this."

The family remains tied to its South African roots. "The South African Jewish community is so remarkable, united, and impressive, setting an example for the rest of the world in unity and the values which were instilled in us," says Derek.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I think Steven would win a Grammy, but he's committed, passionate, and in love with music," says Carole. "Let your kids follow their path, even if it's not what you envisaged. They'll find their way."



Steven Feifke and Bijon Watson accepting their Grammy Award on 5 February 2023

Why ChatGPT can be a teacher's best friend

HANNA RESNICK

When teachers arrived back to school this year, they found "their world had been turned upside down" with ChatGPT having infiltrated their classrooms, according to Shaun Swartz, chief executive of Learnalot and GED Africa. However, Swartz says teachers need to accept this new technology and use it to enhance learning. Swartz, whose company has worked with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education for many years, spoke to teachers at Yeshiva College on 2 February to help them navigate the technology and understand how to use it to enhance their teaching. He believes teachers needn't fear this highly advanced software, which they can take advantage of within their classrooms. "Half of [the students] are already using ChatGPT, and half of them will be soon, so you have to accept it," Swartz told the more sceptical teachers.

Teachers are concerned about the software's use to write essays. Swartz explained that AI has the ability to comb through all the data and information made available (in the case of ChatGPT, the entire internet) and formulate a relevant response to a specific prompt by synthesising that information. As a result, the work cannot be seen as plagiarism. However, to the relief of many teachers, Swartz explained that, though traditional plagiarism checkers are unable to detect the use of ChatGPT, there are programmes that check specifically for the use of AI in writing, and these programmes would become more advanced as AI writing became more widespread. This kind of software isn't always 100% accurate, he said. Instead, his solution to the problem of students letting ChatGPT

do all the work for them is to give students assignments that will necessitate them having to ask ChatGPT specific questions to produce the desired answer, which enhances critical thinking skills. "Getting the right answer and the right information from the system is all about asking the correct questions," he said. "Instead of giving them the questions, [teachers should] tell the students what they need to achieve. We don't care what the paragraph looks like at the end, because that's something that ChatGPT can write for them, but if you ask the student to tell you what they asked ChatGPT to do in order to produce the answer, that's something that they can't do without thinking". Swartz then gave a series of test prompts to ChatGPT based on what the group of teachers wanted to observe. In doing this, they were able to see the kind of answers the AI could produce, and what its shortcomings were. Swartz asked it to generate a paragraph in English, and then translate it into Afrikaans, and then from Afrikaans to Hebrew. The teachers observed that, though there were imperfections, the grammatical structure was more correct than if they had been using something like Google Translate, which is already popular with students. A couple of other areas where the software seemed to fall short were prompts that required humour and those that discussed current affairs after 2020, which ChatGPT is restricted from discussing. When it came to subjects such as maths and science, teachers were concerned about students inputting various equations and formulas into ChatGPT and being able to generate an answer without showing the work done in figuring it out or any effort on the students' behalf. "Before this, it was calculators," said



Swartz. The advantage of AI, he explained, is that students can obtain the answer, as well as all the relevant steps taken to get to this answer. "Though some students struggle to understand the methods given in their syllabus, ChatGPT can give 10 different explanations as to how the answer was obtained," allowing students to understand things in a way that better suits them. Teachers haven't considered how they can use ChatGPT to assist them to teach, Swartz said. He described just how many tedious tasks can be "handed over" to ChatGPT in order for teachers to spend less time planning and more time interacting with students. For example, just as a student can get answers to their maths questions, teachers can use the software to generate hundreds of questions, as well as model answers and working-out. The teacher can specify



Shaun Swartz

the questions to the specific skill they want to test. The same thing goes for any other subject. A teacher can ask for a set of questions and answers for a science exam on light waves, a list of creative writing prompts for Grade 9, or any other assessment they wish to set for their class. There are some things that a computer

is just able to do a lot more efficiently than us, Swartz said. For example, a person can spend hours working on computer code, just for the whole thing to be corrupted by a tiny human error. In the past, one would have to go back and scan the entire block of code to find out where the error took place. Now, one can simply copy and paste that code into ChatGPT, which can locate the problem in seconds. "It's vital for teachers to view ChatGPT as a tool that can assist in learning rather than an impediment," said Swartz. "Microsoft is investing billions of dollars into this application, which means that it's only going to get better, easier to use, and it's going to be integrated into its search facilities. We must start accepting that students will use it, and we have to rethink the way we ask questions and assess them."

Weizmann Institute’s breakthroughs take fiction out of science

STEVEN GRUZZ

Who would have thought it possible to detect cancer with just a drop of blood? Or to make sense of the sequencing of the genome of the entire population of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (1.3 million people)? Or even to create an embryo entirely from stem cells?

This isn’t science fiction or a storyline from *The Big Bang Theory* TV show. This is the work of Israel’s Weizmann Institute of Science, which strives to make the world better for humanity. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to the institute’s president, Professor Alon Chen, on his recent visit to South Africa.

The Weizmann Institute has developed groundbreaking new medicine, algorithms, and devices, including the drug Copaxon® for treating multiple sclerosis and several other so-called “blockbuster drugs”. Its scientists invented encryption for credit cards and discovered fungi in cancerous human tumours.

In the pandemic, the institute was at the forefront of generating academic knowledge about the novel coronavirus. Its scientists analysed critical data to convince the American Food and Drug Administration and European authorities to provide the COVID-19 booster.

The institute was founded by Israel’s future president, Chaim Weizmann, in 1934. Originally named the Daniel Sieff Research Institute, its name was changed in 1949 to honour Israel’s great statesman and scientist.

Why did Chen take the job of president? “At first, I said ‘no’, believing that concentrating on my own scientific career

was the right trajectory,” Chen said “But I was convinced to be nominated. Looking back now, I have this amazing opportunity to shape the application of science. We push where science needs to go. You can’t stand still in science – we’re driven by technology. But you have to invest in it, have strategic planning, and flexibility.”

Chen was born in Israel in 1970. “From an early age, I knew I wanted to work in science and nature,” he said. As a paratrooper in the Israeli army, he became intrigued by human behaviour, especially the effects of stress and trauma. He specialised in neuroscience, and after some years in the United States, returned to the Weizmann Institute in 2005. In 2013, he was appointed a director in the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry and head of the joint Weizmann-Max Planck Laboratory for experimental neuropsychiatry and behavioural neurogenetics. Chen is head of neurobiology and brain sciences at Weizmann, and became the institute’s president in 2019.

The institute’s philosophy is to recruit the most outstanding scholars and give them the best environment and infrastructure, driven by modern science. About 70% of the faculty live on campus in Rehovot, just south of Tel Aviv.

“We focus on human talent. We look for scientific excellence,” Chen said. The Weizmann Institute only offers postgraduate degrees. About 70% of its post-doctoral students are international, hailing from 40 different countries. “Those scientists become the best ambassadors for Weizmann and for Israel,” he said. At Masters and PhD level, about 30% are from outside Israel.

“The concept is to foster collaboration, to

give scientists the opportunity to interact,” Chen said. “We encourage academic freedom and curiosity. People must go with their dreams and think out of the box. In Israel, people are daring. They take risks. They challenge dogma and textbooks.”

Chen highlighted five key areas where he believes a critical mass of scientists is needed.

The first is the brain, the organ we know the least about. The Weizmann Institute studies neurological disorders – Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, depression – through more than 40 interdisciplinary research groups encompassing 600 people.

The second is Artificial Intelligence. This has changed the world already, Chen said, and will continue to do so. “It can do bad or amazing things,” he said. All departments at the institute use AI.

The third area is environmental sustainability – including studying global warming and climate change, biodiversity, food, and water security and pollution. There are 60 working groups in this area, from developing biodegradable plastic to studying marine bacteria that can eat plastic, to new strains of grain, fruit, and vegetables.

Fourth is infectious diseases and immunology. There are 40 000 viruses in

animals that could affect the eight billion humans on the planet, and they will test our ability to cope with pandemics, Chen said.

Finally, a key area is astrophysics and particle physics. Weizmann works closely with various space agencies.

“The Abraham Accords have so many advantages for both sides,” Chen said, referring to the normalisation agreements that Israel has signed with four Muslim-

1.3 million over the next two years. The Weizmann Institute is negotiating to make sense of all this data. We hope the Saudis will soon join the accords. It could really change the Middle East when countries see the benefits of working with Israel rather than fighting it.”

Chen and his team came to South Africa first and foremost to recognise and thank a longstanding supporter and friend of the

Photo: Axel Griesch



Professor Alon Chen

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Time running out to find Kindertransport rescuers

TALI FEINBERG

When Susan Clapper (nee Eichmann) was a little girl, she was sent away from her parents, never to see them again. That journey saved her life, and as an adult, she eventually settled in Durban.

She was one of the children sent on the Kindertransport, the rescue of children from Nazi-controlled territory during the nine months prior to the outbreak of World War II. The United Kingdom (UK) took in nearly 10 000 predominantly Jewish children.

The suitcase that Clapper carried on that journey was miraculously preserved, and is now housed at the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre in Nottingham, England. On a piece of paper taped to the inside, her parents meticulously listed the items she carried, and her father, Hans, wrote his name – one of the last remaining remnants of a loving parent – killed along with his wife in the Holocaust. Clapper was their only child.

An unknown person or family gave Clapper safe haven, but little is known about the families and individuals who opened their doors to the *kinder*, as they are known.

Now, a new project has been launched to find the details about these unsung heroes before time runs out. South African expat Janine Wiener Kohan, who lives in the UK, is working with Mike Levy on this project. Levy is the former chairperson of the Harwich Memorial and Educational Trust, the author of *Get the Children Out: Unsung Heroes of the Kindertransport*, and a researcher with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

“We’re trying to track down and interview the families that took in *kinder* when they arrived in the UK,” says Kohan. “As many *kinder* eventually moved to South Africa, we wanted to put out the word that we’re looking for further information about their experiences.”

“This project is to identify and record testimonials of these unsung heroes,” says Levy. “These families played a pivotal role and served to change the course of history for these children. By recording their stories, we can gain a better understanding of the bravery of both the families and children.”

Levy has already traced 25 former foster siblings of *kinder*, mostly in their 90s. In most cases, they describe the former Jewish *kinder* as “my sister” or “my brother”.

Clapper’s story epitomises how the Kindertransport saved lives and the roles of the saviours whose names have been lost to history. Born in Germany in 1926, her father’s farm was taken by the Nazis and he was forced to work in a factory before being arrested on Kristallnacht and sent to a concentration camp for 10 weeks. He came home “a different man after that”, according to his daughter’s memories.

Clapper’s parents managed to get her on to the Kindertransport via the Netherlands to England, following the same path that many other *kinder* took. At the train station, a man told her to “wave goodbye to your father”. It was at that moment that she realised the full implication of what was happening.

This has been captured in a new memorial, in Harwich, Essex, where many of the children stepped off the ship, signifying the start of their new lives but the loss of their parents. The memorial, *Safe Haven* by Ian Wolter, was unveiled by *kinder* Dame



stress]. I guess once we’re in England it will stop [indicating that she hoped to follow her daughter]. My little girl has been to the cinema three times already,

that’s so nice! Have you found a friend in Bromwiel already? If you struggle dressing your long hair by yourself, please ask Miss Hayes [assumed to be her rescuer] to help you. Is my little girl helping with housework? Is Miss Hayes’ brother and his wife willing to take dad and mom as a servant-couple? Or do they know somebody who could take us? We want to work just for food and drinks if they took us. We think about you always, sweet dear Susi.”

In 1941, Clapper received a letter from her grandmother informing her that her mother had died at the Ravensbrück concentration camp. She tried to trace her father’s whereabouts at the end of the war, but it would be only in the 1990s that she

would learn his fate. He had been murdered in Latvia.

In 1947, Clapper left England to join her aunt who had survived and settled in Zimbabwe. There, she met Max Clapper, her future husband. The couple moved to Durban in 1952, where Max worked as a Hebrew teacher. By 1957, the couple had three children but in 1960, Max passed away.

Susan was left alone to raise her young children, Paul, Michael, and Trudy (named after her mother Gertrud). She felt that it was not natural for children to grow up in this way with no father, aunts, uncles, cousins, or grandparents. She related her battle to relate to her children in their teenage years as a result of having been separated from her own mother at such a young age. But she was a beloved mother, as can be seen from her gravestone. She died in 2001.

List of items inside Susan Clapper’s suitcase compiled by her father Hans Eichmann

“The search for families that took in *kinder* is a race against time to record their testimonials,” says Kohan. “If you are one of these families that took in a child that arrived on the Kindertransport or know of any families that helped, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Mike Levy at kindertransport4@gmail.com”

Hatzolah responds to measles with vaccination drive

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Hatzolah has confirmed a measles outbreak in a school “in the area” amidst a nationwide outbreak. To date, 441 laboratory-confirmed measles cases have been reported across five provinces, including Gauteng, prompting a nationwide vaccination campaign as well as a Hatzolah booster drive.

Hatzolah said it was unable to comment further as, “the school and relevant departments need to make their announcements”.

Nonetheless, parents are being urged to take the outbreak seriously. In line with a nationwide measles-vaccination campaign that began this week, Hatzolah kicked off its own drive on Wednesday, 8 February. Free boosters for children between the ages of six months and 15 years will be provided at Hatzolah’s pop-up vaccine site at the KasherWorld centre. Vaccination teams will also be dispatched to the community’s schools.

“Hatzolah is collaborating with the health department’s measles vaccine drive based on the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) advisory for measles boosters,” says Hatzolah’s Yudi Singer, who is spearheading the drive. “This will hopefully help curb the spread of the measles outbreak in the community. The intention of the measles vaccine is to boost immunity. On our first day, we already had many bookings for boosters. Some schools have also already booked days for us to vaccinate children on their premises.”

One of the most contagious viral infections we face, measles can be particularly dangerous for children under the age of five, pregnant mothers, and immunosuppressed individuals, says Johannesburg general practitioner Dr Sheri Fanaroff. “It’s most commonly seen in the five to 14-year age group,” she says. It can, however, affect anyone of any age without immunity to the disease.

An airborne respiratory disease, measles is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It’s so contagious that if one person has it, up to nine out of 10 people around them will also

become infected if they aren’t protected, which is why vaccination is vital. Once a person has contracted measles, they are immune to the virus.

“Symptoms that should make you suspect that your child might have measles are a high fever – above 38.5 degrees Celsius – together with a rash, and any signs of a cough, conjunctivitis [red eyes], and a runny nose,” Fanaroff says. “Complications in children include encephalitis [swelling of the brain], ear infections, eye damage, diarrhoea, and pneumonia.”

In rare cases, the resulting encephalitis or pneumonia can cause death.

“The NICD recommends that the measles vaccine be administered irrespective of prior childhood vaccination to all children between the age of six months and 15 years old,” says Singer. A booster, even in children who have already received the vaccine, is for the benefit of individuals and the community, says Fanaroff, for two reasons:

First, there’s concern that the vaccines received may not have been effective. “For example,” she says, “the cold chain of vaccines may not have been maintained, rendering the vaccine inactive, or the child may not have mounted an adequate immune response. The extra dose is to close this gap in immunity.”

Second, less than 80% of South Africa’s population is immunised against measles, making us vulnerable to the disease. “We

need to achieve 95% vaccine coverage in order to stop the outbreak, a kind of ‘herd immunity’ in which there aren’t enough vulnerable people for the virus to spread to so it dies out.” Therefore, the more people who vaccinate or get boosters, the lower the risk.

Hatzolah welcomes walk-ins at its pop-up site. To make a booking for a specific time and skip the queue, email vaccinations@hatzolah.co.za or follow the link: <http://www.hatzolahvaccines.co.za/>



A nurse administering the measles vaccine at Hatzolah’s pop-up vaccine site at KasherWorld

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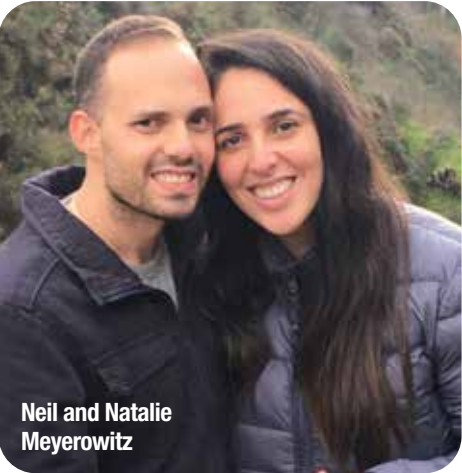
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When falling in love is stranger than fiction

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

They grab the same tomato at the supermarket, she crashes into him, he goes to the wrong table on a blind date. Typically occurring in movies, the meet-cute is when a future couple meets in a funny, charming, or unusual way. But in the month of love, we discover that when it comes to finding the one, truth is often stranger than fiction.



Neil and Natalie Meyerowitz

For Monica and Steven Solomon, meeting under a table about 55 years ago proved to be a recipe for lasting love. “I went with my then-boyfriend to a club which was called The Troubadour. It’s long-since closed, but it was a folk-singing club that was very popular in the 1960s and 1970s,” Monica says. Someone who finds it difficult to sit still for long, Monica, who was 18 at the time, decided to assist the harried staff serve coffee to the patrons of the crowded club.

Having recently upset her mother by losing two contact lenses, she panicked when she realised that she’d once again misplaced a lens during her labours. “I thought, ‘My mother is going to freak!’ so I dived under a table I’d served to look for it. Two minutes later, I was joined by a guy under the table saying, ‘Can I help you, what are you looking for?’ And that was my husband.” Their connection was immediate. “I absolutely knew just by the way he spoke to me and the way he was, that this was a guy I really wanted to get to know better,” says Monica. “We’ve been together ever since.” The two will celebrate 54 years of marriage this month. For Karie Goldin, a holiday crush turned into happily ever after. Holidaying with her parents in Israel in 1977, 17-year-old Karie was immediately attracted to the bell boy, Benny, an Israeli ex-South African who carried their luggage to their Tel Aviv hotel room. “This gorgeous, blue-eyed boy who was 21 was the bell boy in his powder blue shirt and brown pants uniform, I remember it like yesterday,” she says. “After he helped with our suitcases, my father tipped him a dollar.” Seeing him each morning as they left the hotel, Karie was always too shy to speak. “One afternoon outside the hotel, I saw



Benny and Karie Goldin



Timor and Marc Lifschitz with their children

him sitting with a beautiful girl and he asked me to join them for a walk. She was also South African. He asked us both if we’d go out with him on a bus if he came to South Africa and she said definitely not, and I said, of course! That was the only conversation we had in Israel.” On the last day of her holiday, Karie lost her sunglasses and left her address with hotel reception in case they were found. “Six weeks later, I received a letter from Benny. We corresponded by letter every three weeks, as that’s how long they took to get here.

“Ten months after we first met, he phoned me and later that day, arrived at my parents’ house. I remember watching him walk up our long driveway from the bus stop. The next day was officially our first date, and I was in love hook, line, and sinker.” Three daughters and six grandchildren later, the Goldins are to celebrate their 42nd wedding anniversary. Israeli Natalie Meyerowitz met her Johannesburg-born husband, Neil, in Durban when she was working there as part of a delegation through the Jewish Agency. But unbeknown to her, their paths had crossed before. “I was invited with my group of volunteers for a Shabbat at Izinga shul,” she says. “My husband flew with a religious friend to Durban for a running race, and

fainted, and Marc, a paramedic, came to her rescue, that sparks flew. “He was called as he had just left the mall with his girlfriend, so he rushed back to me with his equipment,” Timor recalls. “He put me in the recovery position, did my vitals, and waited until I woke up to see my Prince Charming’s face above mine. I dumped my boyfriend, he dumped his girlfriend, and about 10 days later, we started dating. We were high school sweethearts. We’ve been together for 17 years, married for six and a half, and have four beautiful children.”



Ann and Adam Rabinowitz

After a series of disastrous dates following her divorce, “born-and-bred Yid” Ann Rabinowitz decided to stay single. “It got to the stage where I was done with men – particularly Jewish men and more specifically, their mothers!” she laughs. Yet, when her then 12-year-old daughter asked if she could add her to a dating site, Ann reluctantly agreed, as long as her suitors weren’t Jewish. There, she met a man called Adam from Jukskei Park. Safe in the knowledge that Jews don’t live in that suburb, she corresponded with Adam for six weeks before agreeing to meet for a cup of coffee. Her friend, Shelley, saw his photo and told Ann she would marry him, to which Ann swore she’d never wed again.

On the day of the coffee date, Ann had a particularly exhausting day at work and decided not to go. Yet at the consistent urging of her friend and colleague, Yasmeen, she dragged herself out, feeling annoyed and looking the worse for wear. “As Adam and I started talking, I asked him for the first time what his surname was.” When he replied “Rabinowitz”, Ann was gobsmacked. “I met my person, the love of my life, my everything, when I least wanted to and least expected it – and he’s Jewish,” she says. “We’re about to celebrate our 10th anniversary.” In a bittersweet twist, both Shelley and Yasmeen passed away shortly after the couple they helped bring together were married.



Steven and Monica Solomon

asked the rabbi if they could come for dinner. When I arrived at the dinner, I saw a cute guy and we had an intense conversation. But, at the end of the night, we didn’t exchange numbers. A day later, I saw a message on Tinder from a guy who I had ignored before, saying, ‘Now I know why you looked familiar...’ Timor and Marc Lifschitz knew each other from school where they were two years apart. Yet it was only when she

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Rugby runs for refuge

Of all the international Jewish organisations with which the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has had close working relationships over the decades, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) is one of the most venerated. For most of its history, HIAS focused on assisting Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution, while today, it acts as a humanitarian and aid agency that assists all displaced people throughout the world. On 7 February, we met a delegation from HIAS, including its chief executive, Mark Hetfield, on a visit to South Africa to assess the situation regarding refugees in the country. The Board's political and social justice liaison, Alana Baranov, assisted with arrangements for their visit, including facilitating meetings with relevant local refugee organisations.

Tribute to Dr Lydia Meshoe

Last Friday, 3 February, SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn attended the funeral of Dr Lydia Meshoe. We were saddened to learn of Dr Meshoe's untimely passing. Together with her esteemed husband, Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, she was in both her public and private life, a warm and loyal friend of the Jewish community. As a deeply committed Christian, she was unwavering in her love of and support for the state of Israel, and never deviated from this regardless of whether or not it was fashionable to do so. We extend our sincerest condolences to Reverend Meshoe and the Meshoe family at this sad time.

SA Rugby Union disappoints

A backlash from activists of the local Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) coalition was inevitable once it was learned that the Tel Aviv Heat would be participating in the upcoming Mzansi Challenge. The South African Rugby Union (SARU), indeed, was warned of possibly violent protests and disruptions, and reportedly even received death threats. That's par for the course for BDS, which routinely resorts to threats and intimidation to get its way. We remember,

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ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

for example, its failed boycott against Woolworths, and equally unsuccessful attempt to prevent then Miss South Africa, Lalela Mswane, from participating in the Miss Universe competition in Israel. Sadly, unlike Woolworths and Mswane, SARU caved in immediately, and withdrew its invitation to the Israeli team. We can only endorse the statement of the Anti-Defamation League, which observed that by its "unsportsmanlike and an unprincipled capitulation", SARU "missed an opportunity to model sport as a vehicle for inclusion and understanding". Our national vice-president, Zev Krengel, was interviewed by several mainstream TV channels, putting forward the community's point of view with passion and eloquence, and our press statement featured prominently in many news reports. Inter alia, we reject SARU's preposterous claim that it acted in the interests of maintaining "social cohesion" when in fact by its very nature, its actions caused divisiveness and ill-feeling – doublespeak at its worst!

Earthquake tragedy

The reported death toll from the disastrous earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria earlier this week continues to rise. We've written to the Turkish ambassador and leadership of the Jewish community in Turkey to express solidarity and extend our condolences in this appalling tragedy. To assist, donate to the Turkish Chief Rabbinate Foundation, Vakıfbank Istanbul Courthouse Branch, TL account TR 31 0001 5001 5800 7296 0611 88; USD account TR 19 0001 5001 5804 8020 7546 10; Euro account TR 78 0001 5001 5804 8022 2899 31, reference: "Donation for Earthquake".

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.



International pianist dazzles Jaffa residents

Jaffa residents, community members, and friends were on 6 February treated to a morning of music with internationally acclaimed pianist Professor Albert Mamriev. Mamriev was in Pretoria to adjudicate the University of South Africa International Piano Competition this past week, where he was also invited to perform and do workshops. A former three-time winner of this competition, he's regarded as one of the most accomplished pianists of his generation, noted for the power, dexterity, and musicality of his playing. Born in the former Soviet Union, he studied in Moscow, Tel Aviv, and Germany, and has won many international piano competitions and adjudicated more than 50. He now lives in Israel, and among his many awards is a special award from (then) Israeli President Ezer Weizman.



In spite of having to perform on a small, old upright Bechstein piano at Jaffa, Mamriev managed to entice the most beautiful notes from the keys, and his 45-minute performance lasted almost two hours to the delight of all. His patience and kindness to residents as they queued for his attention after the performance shows the calibre of his personality.

WHAT'S ON

Sunday 12 February

• Second Innings hosts a talk by Marlene Bethlehem on *To Serve with Love*.
Time: 10:00. Venue: Golden Acres in Sandringham Gardens.
Cost: R40 (R20 for members). Contact: greciagabriel1@gmail.com or 082 561 3228

• Chev Bereavement Services hosts its *Growth from Grief* support group. Time: 10:00. Venue: Sandringham Gardens.
Contact: sheilaf@jhbchev.co.za or 011 532 9653

Monday 13 February

• Yeshiva Mizrahi presents Shai Abramson in concert. Time: 19:30. Venue: Yeshiva Mizrahi

Tuesday 14 February

• The Jacob Gitlin Library hosts the book launch of the Rhoda Kadalie biography by Joel Pollak. Time: 18:30. Contact: admin@gitlinlibrary.co.za or 021 462 5088

Wednesday 15 February

• The South African Zionist Federation hosts a talk on Facilitating Financial Aliyah. Time: 19:00. Contact: https://www.sazf.org/financial-aliyah or admin@sazf.org

Shul. Contact: concert@yeshivamizrahi.org.za or https://yeshivamizrahi.org.za/shai/

Rugby used to be a game of courage

This should probably contain a trigger warning. Sensitive viewers might be offended. But honestly, when did rugby players become such wimps? Such cowards? What happened to the days when rugby players were real men? When the only thing that would stop them was a serious concussion or a chewed-off ear? When they laughed in the face of danger?

What happened to the days when the South African Rugby Union (SARU) had more than oval rugby balls? Full disclosure. No one ever mistook me for a rugby player – or pretty much a sportsman of any kind. Further disclosure, I was pretty much the second-to-last kid picked for any sports team at school, and that was because I was better at motivating than the last guy who was an asthmatic who had lost his inhaler. To this day, I'm not someone who cares much about rugby. Unless South Africa is in the finals, and it's more about being South African than it is about being an expert at the game. What I do know is that no sport is ever about the sport. It's always about something more. Which would be the ethos and values of the game. Otherwise, why bother? This is the reason that I googled the "the ethos of rugby". I wanted to understand if, perhaps, SARU was missing the point when it disinvited Israel to participate in a tournament in South Africa. The reason it did so was because it didn't want this focus to be political. Which is

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



ironically what it did when it allowed politics to dictate its decision. According to "World Rugby", rugby is about "integrity, passion, discipline, and respect". It's also said to be, amongst other things, about "moral courage". That's ironic in the case of this particular decision. According to The Tel Aviv Heat, they were surprised and disappointed to learn of the decision taken by SARU to withdraw its invitation to the team to compete in the upcoming 2023 Mzansi Challenge. And so they should be. Especially if one considers that the decision isn't based on anything other than the fear of reaction. Israel participates in global sport. Aside from real human rights abusers like Iran, it has never had an issue or challenge in this regard, and there is no sanction, no directive, or precedent for this. Add further that Zimbabwe, one of the greatest human rights abusers on the African continent, is still included, and it becomes embarrassing. And indefensible. The decision is clearly a cowardly one, one based on fear, which flies in the face of the ethos of the game. It's shameful and embarrassing, and should be condemned not only by the lovers of the game but all who value everything it stands for. Like balls.

Torah Academy discovers power of stories

Torah Academy seniors held juniors rapt on Read Aloud Day on 1 February, promoting literacy, creativity, and building bonds between younger and older grades through the power of stories. Senior Torah Academy primary school students reading to junior students



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THEATRE ON THE SQUARE

Israel embassy plants seeds in community

Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky presented Israeli tomato seedlings to pensioners and school packs to students on behalf of the Israeli embassy at an event at the Jewish National Fund Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre in Mamelodi on 5 February.



Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky giving school packs to students



The Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNFSA) partnered with Prime Trees to plant 12 shade and fruit trees at Cape Town restoration centre Camp Joy. The partnership is part of the JNFSA's 75 minutes of environmental awareness campaign, launched in honour of Israel's 75th birthday this year. Adam Kepkey from the South African Friends of Israel parliament group suggested Camp Joy, a skills development and rehabilitation centre, as a recipient of the initiative. The organisation does critical work with communities battling the scourge of substance abuse. It focuses on rehabilitation and restoration as a guideline to quality of life, healthy living, and re-integration.

Trees for Africa on Tu B'Shvat

The Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNFSA), in partnership with the South African Friends of Israel, celebrated Tu B'Shvat by planting trees at Hope Restoration Ministries' community field in Gauteng.

They were assisted by students from King David High School Linksfield, King David High School Victory Park, and Yeshiva College, with Shmuli Brill adding a special touch with his music.

Trees offer numerous benefits including

improving air quality, providing shade, reducing carbon dioxide levels, and creating habitats for wildlife. The JNF believes that celebrations like these help to bring people together and create a positive impact on the world.

In KwaZulu-Natal, the community did its bit to help the JNFSA achieve its goal of planting 7 500 trees. A 75-minute community event was held at Beth Shalom, where the youth planted seeds and flowers to celebrate Tu B'Shvat.



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