

# Rabbi, minister hit the right notes with their music

By Kim Kimzey

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Rabbi Yossi Liebowitz and the Rev. Paul Harmon play and sing together during a rehearsal at Temple B'nai Israel in Spartanburg Sunday afternoon. The duo, which go by the name "The Cap & The Collar," will perform in celebration of Israel's 60th anniversary at the synagogue on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

Between sarcastic jabs and gulps of soda, Yossi Liebowitz and Paul Harmon make music.

Harmon describes himself as moderate, independent and Christian, while Liebowitz, he says, is liberal, a Democrat and Jewish.

"He says dreidel. I say top," Harmon said.

"Opposites attract. I'm normal. He's Paul," Liebowitz said.

Liebowitz, rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel, and Harmon, former pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church, are a folk duo known as "The Cap and The Collar."

The community is invited to hear them play at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Temple B'nai Israel, 146 Heywood Ave. The Rev. Kirk Neely, senior pastor of Morningside Baptist Church, is the special guest.

The benefit concert is presented in celebration of Israel's 60th birthday by Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.

Donations go to Hadassah University Medical Center in Israel.

Admission is free. Iced tea, coffee and desserts will be served.

The Cap and The Collar have performed in several churches before Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist and Baptist congregations, but this is Harmon's first performance in a synagogue.

They rehearsed in Liebowitz's cluttered office Sunday, singing about subjects great and small over their acoustic guitars.

They often burst into laughter at each others' light-hearted barbs, and when Paul realized well into a tune that they were playing in different keys. But for the most part, they're in harmony. And so is their message.

The Cap and The Collar's song, "Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace," illustrates how their music helps bridge faiths and people.

Lyrics are the words of St. Francis of Assisi and Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Liebowitz arranged the music for the Assisi part and combined it with an adapted melody and lyrics from a recording by Schachter-Shalomi.

The Cap and The Collar perform a mixture of serious, comical and spiritual songs. Some were written by Liebowitz and Harmon.

They met in 2003, each learning the other played guitar, and performed together for the first time at a Rotary Club Thanksgiving event.

That concert led to more invitations to perform.

"Since then, our career has gone absolutely nowhere," Liebowitz quipped.

"We get a gig about every three months," Harmon said.

They plan to record a CD next month.

Liebowitz suggested the duo's name.

"We argued a lot about that," he said.

"It was his idea. I still like Rev and the Rabbi," Harmon said, laughing. "He said his Jewish people wouldn't know what Rev meant."

"Right," Liebowitz said. "So we argue."

"I said, 'well my people won't know what collar means, 'cause I don't normally wear a collar,'" Harmon said.

Harmon grew up playing the guitar and singing on a hay farm in Lexington County. In college he earned money by singing in bars.

Harmon was pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church for four years, before taking over pastoral responsibilities at Washington Street United Methodist Church in Columbia three years ago.

Liebowitz started playing guitar as a teenager and began singing in college.

Like Harmon, he has long been a fan of folk music.

"Folk songs care about the lyrics. They have something to say," Liebowitz said.