

Love, lust and loss

Local indie band Benjamin's Brother asks important questions on 'Field Trip,' their sophomore album

• By JENNIFER GREENBERG

Passover is a time for asking questions. No matter the language or size of the Seder plate, on the first night of the eight-day holiday, the youngest child of every family stumbles awkwardly through the same Four Questions of their Haggada. They repeat the opening refrain in timid, mousy voices: "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

For Joseph Bach, the leader of Tel Aviv-based pop/folk band Benjamin's Brother, that question takes on a different meaning.

"On this night, I lie in bed, hugging my [then] girlfriend. On this night, she bursts into tears. On this night, I ask her what happened, and she replies, 'This is exactly how he held me when he attacked me,'" says Bach.

This galvanizing moment in the Jerusalem-born singer-songwriter's relationship was the catalyst that jolted him into creative action, after a four-year hiatus from the studio due to the collapse of his original band, the birth of his child, and life "just happening."

The members of Benjamin's Brother may be new; the trending subject of sexual harassment in their's freshly released album *Field Trip*, however, is a recurring one.

Having already worked

through his feelings about sexual harassment in his freshman album in songs like "Room 505," one cannot help but ask: Why on this album has Bach returned to this topic? And what does he feel a male perspective will add to the conversation?

"I have a son and I have a daughter and the only thing that I can think about is trying to form some sort of legacy to make it right for him and right for her. To try and teach them that the terms of wrong and right is fluid to people, but some things should not be that fluid at all." He pauses to compose himself.

Bach carries on to explain that when singing about difficult topics, he purposely tries to write from a perspective that he may not have experienced personally. "That's not to say that I don't struggle," the seasoned musician adds. "I have arguments with my wife. I have days when I'm down. I have days when shit happens. I'm not the story though, I'm only part of it."

For Bach, writing about trauma is a means of trying to find his place in it all. Trying to understand that men shouldn't be quiet just because, but rather try to affect change any way they can – something he equates with "honesty."

Though currently residing in the secular bubble that is Tel Aviv, he owes more than the



BENJAMIN'S BROTHER, with Joseph Bach (center). (Jude Mosco)

biblical nod of a band name (Benjamin's Brother is a play on his name, Joseph), to growing up in an Orthodox home in Jerusalem. Bach's upbringing as a Bnei Akiva kid taught him to question everything, and not exclusively during Passover.

He shares, "Judaism got me to a point where I can feel free to question everything in my life and the lives of those around me. All we can do is ask, then try to find a better answer, if one exists. Sometimes you deal with the answer and that's it; other times, there are no answers,

and that's OK too."

Born from this deeply intimate, deeply jarring moment with a past lover, *Field Trip* grapples with a multitude of unanswered questions. Arguably, the most controversial issue covered in the album is "His Majesty," a politically-charged response to the 2016 event in which an already "neutralized" Palestinian assailant was shot dead by IDF soldier Elor Azaria in Hebron.

"Here's a disclaimer: I'm a right-wing guy," Bach states. "I have voted for Right parties my entire life, and I imagine I'll continue to do so. The way

the government treated the Azaria incident encouraged me to stop for a second and scream, 'This is wrong!' I don't feel that we're heading toward a place where anything good can come from what happened."

Bach feels that in addition to pain and abuse, love is a focal point of *Field Trip*, but "not just love between a man and a woman, or two men or two women or whatever. It's not just about people; it's about the love for your country, the love for yourself, the love for politics."

As a 31-year-old Israeli with

young children, he could not just sit back and passively watch such inherent hatred unfold without responding. While the song itself is strong, the music video that accompanies "His Majesty," set near the Monument to the Negev Brigade in Beersheba, is particularly poignant. The re-enactment is especially hard, yet especially necessary to watch, even upon second or third viewing.

Ironically, Azaria is putting out a book at the moment, in which he assigns complete blame to the Israeli government that chose to support Azaria at the time of the offense, after which the soldier proceeded to exclaim that he had zero regrets.

"It's bigger than Azaria and Israel," Bach continues. "This song relates to the United States at the same time. They're in the same position. Calling Trump 'His Majesty' is the same as calling Bibi 'His Majesty,' is the same as calling the Syrian prime minister 'His Majesty.' There are some people who take the throne and try to change the world according to their perspective, without any care for the people."

With singles like "Glory" and "Not Easy" getting praise and airplay on Israeli radio stations, all Bach and the other members of Benjamin's Brother can do now is continue to play their honest music and

hope it affects some sort of change for their generation, and more importantly, generations to come.

"Bob Dylan did it. We miss this nowadays, people who actually write about things that are wrong with the world, not only to change it, just to get it out of our system. If *Field Trip* leads to change – in any terms: politically, socially, emotionally – I'd be more than happy."

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Why is this night different from all other nights? On this night, April 17, Benjamin's Brother will lay their souls on the stage of the Barby Club in Tel Aviv along with special guests Idan Rabinovici (Acollective), Rotem Or (Totemo), and Loren Noyman. For tickets: barby.co.il.