how humiliating it is to go into Tower Records and ask for this music.")

As someone who wears his politics on his sleeve, Fox might be a bit hard to take, if he weren't also non-dogmatic. He sees a parallel between the Holocaust and the Israel-Palestine conflict, in that he fears that the next generation of Palestinians will grow up with the same hatred toward Israelis that he was raised to feel toward Germans. "The question is not," he insists, "can you compare the Holocaust to the occupation. But these kids are growing up with terrible, terrible hatred. How are we going to overcome that, to make these people believe that we really want to be their friends? That we want to be their neighbors, to live side by side?"

Fox says that during his recent visits to Germany, "people would ask me, do you really believe there's a chance of these Israeli men changing — Barak and Netanyahu and Sharon? And I say, look at Rabin, he changed. He's the guy who [as defense minister] told me, in the first intifada, 'Break their bones.'"

Is he suggesting that it's only Israelis who have to change, that all the responsibility for today's violence lies with them?

"The responsibility is more ours, because we are stronger and bigger. It's like a family, and we're like the parents or the older brother. And they are like the children, or the weak, young, crippled brother, whom we have to take care of. Plus, I really believe that if you look at history, that we are very much to blame for what happened. We didn't realize what was happening [after 1967], how things were slipping out of our control, out of our hands."

NEAR THE BEGINNING OF "Walk on Water," Eyal and Axel are sightseeing when they learn that a suicide bomb has gone off in Haifa. The German asks the Mossad agent if "you ever think why they are doing this?" Eyal responds: "There's nothing to think about." By the end, his heart has softened, and we have reason to believe that Eyal would be capable of understanding the Palestinian point of view.

Eytan Fox thinks that such a change of mentality is necessary if Israel is to save itself, and he believes that it's possible too. He says he's been attacked by critics for being "too mainstream, too slick, too Americanized. And that may be the case. But I want to tell you — and this is why it doesn't bother me so much — it's not from a manipulative place. That's who I am. I am in many ways an American at heart.... We want a happy ending because we believe in happy endings: in our lives and in our movies." ●

Sara K. Eisen

The music of Jewish jam-band SoulFarm is all over the map

THE CARLEBACH-INSPIRED tunes beloved among Israel's neo-hippies share more than just spiritual vibes and a funky dress code with the just-below-the-radar alternative music scene in the U.S. Both genres are marked by young, loyal, musically conversant fans, and unpredictable melodies that are best experienced live. And they both encourage artists to express themselves in terms of unconventional, hybrid sounds, adding far-flung ethnicity to Deep South Americana, then serving up the strange-but-pleasing new dish to college kids for whom it's "all love."

SoulFarm, a fusion band with a bare foot firmly planted in both bluegrass and Jewish sensibilities emanating from both the Middle East and the hasidic world, rides the rainbow between the "Singing Rabbi" Shlomo Carlebach's Moshav Modi'in and San Francisco, Jerusalem and New York (where the band is based) with a kind of effortless comfort that is rare when so many natural borders are being crossed. As it matches Hebrew lyrics with a groovy blues jam and again with furious African bongos, it leaves all preconceived notions of what's "Jewish" behind in the dust.

"We want to do for Jewish music what Santana did for Latin music," says lead vocalist and guitarist-mandolinist Noah Solomon Chase, 33, with quiet intensity. He seems to mean it. Solomon Chase is the son of Jewish music pioneer Ben Tzion Solomon (a founder of the hasidic-folk rock Diaspora Yeshiva Band), who was part of Shlomo Carlebach's early soul revolution on Modi'in, between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, in the 60s. (The "Chase" comes from his birth father, whose roots were in Ireland.)

We're drinking mint tea at a café in Beit Shemesh, a bedroom suburb of Jerusalem, during a recent Israel tour by the band. Lead guitarist C Lanzbom, 36, nods and smiles in agreement: This is not just some artists dreaming, but more like an actual plan. One gets the sense that if anyone will break the parochial barriers, it may just be these two — traditional Jews with anything but a traditional approach to music.

Lanzbom (he won't say what the "C" stands for), a New Jersey native deeply inspired by the musical teachings of the late Carlebach, who aimed to bring all Jews closer to God through love and music, met the soulful and eclectic Solomon Chase in the late 80s at Modi'in, where young Noah, who was born in California, had been living with his parents since he was a small child.

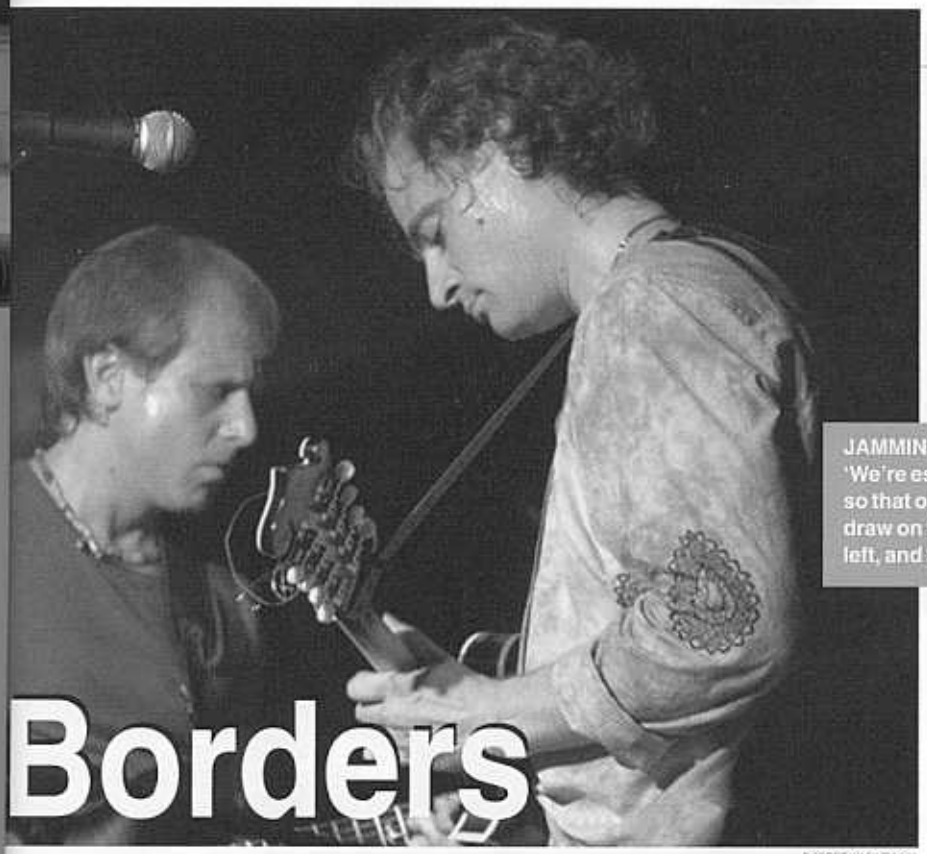
Lanzbom picked up his older brother's guitar at age 7 and has been known for his clever fingers ever since. (Producer Jonty Zwebner says that the first time he saw the band, "I was told to bring binoculars, so I could watch C's fingers move.") While he worked as a session man for Israeli artists like Yehoram Gaon, Shalom Hanoch and Dudu Fisher, the two started writing and playing together in the club scenes of Jeru-salem and Tel Aviv.

It soon became clear to the pair that there was true artistic synchronicity between them — they are known for their spontaneous, blues-inspired guitar "conversations" — so they took off for New York to put together a rock band, which they called Inasense, that would play original music sprinkled with a bit of Carlebach. Their first record deal came in 1995, and since then, the band, whose name they subsequently changed to SoulFarm, and which was joined by two more members, has formed its own label, Desert Rock Records. The company has produced several of their albums (their latest, from 2003, is "Unwind") and a few solo discs for Lanzbom; collectively, they have sold some 150,000 copies.

The past three years have been replete with gigs at clubs like the Bitter End and the late Bottom Line, in New York's Greenwich Village, and with mainstream college gigs and alternative music festivals — including big events like Central Park's Summer Stage and Vermont's Ben and Jerry's Festival (opening for artists including Bruce Hornsby and Shawn Colvin).

Lanzbom, son of Holocaust survivors, cites the 2000 Jewish Cultural Festival in Berlin as a career high point, saying he felt that it contributed to German-Jewish reconciliation, and notes that Europe, where culture watchers "respect skill over celebrity," is the band's next frontier.

They've also played a number of benefit concerts, such as Jam If You Can, a New



JAMMING: 'We're establishing roots so that other people can draw on them' (Lanzbom, left, and Solomon Chase)

ROBERT WASILEWSKI

Borders

York food drive, and in Israel at the Hebron Festival, hosted by the small Jewish settlement in the predominantly Palestinian city. Lanzbom and Solomon Chase maintain that the concert had "no militant vibes," and was intended to make no statement other than their belief in music's ability to heal. Music in its purest form, they believe, is a universal language that should be used neither to support nor resist ideologies, but simply to humanize. One gets the sense that these guys really do see no borders between people, or, more to the point, in their music.

This is actually what sets SoulFarm apart from the melange of other bands, such as the Carlebach-infused Moshav band or Jewish grunge rockers Blue Fringe, melding world sounds with Jewish tone and content: They do not see themselves primarily as a Jewish ensemble — SF's bassist, Jeff Langston, and its drummer/engineer, Mark Ambrosino, are not Jewish — so much as trailblazers for a more universal approach to music, whereby nomenclature becomes irrelevant, and pigeon-holing distasteful.

A single song can be a spree that meanders through Carlebach and Allmanesque folk rock by way of African drums, Celtic mandolin, Deep South blues picking, guttural mantras, and klezmerized guitar, and then back again. (Ambrosino calls it "tribal groove music with modern instruments.") This trip — in both senses of the word — through such a vast body of melody is both signature SoulFarm and representative of the jam-band genre, whose founding fathers were the Grateful Dead, and whose more recent idols include Phish and the Dave Matthews Band.

"We're establishing roots so that other people can draw on them," says Solomon Chase. That Lanzbom's and Solomon Chase's roots are Middle Eastern, Eastern European, hasidic, Celtic and American, and that Noah, whose voice is unusually haunting and powerful, is studying Sufi chanting, goes to the heart of what the band is about: taking music from divergent but deeply personal sources to new levels of virtuosity.

JESSICA HERMAN WEITZ, WHO, until its January demise, was a talent buyer for the Bottom Line nightclub in New York, says that she championed SoulFarm because of the high quality of its musical talent, and regularly chose the band for the club's "Required Listening" shows, which showcased lesser-known acts. Weitz notes that while its fan base is still primarily "young, hip, and [practicing] Jewish," SoulFarm was not presented at the club as a Jewish band.

In an industry where crossing over and breaking through is very tough, Weitz feels SoulFarm has mainstream potential. "They bridge the best of a few worlds," she reflects. "The Jewishness becomes part of the beat."

But three challenges face the band as its members attempt to translate virtuosity and diversity into the big time. The first is inherent: Huge popularity and exoticism only very rarely cross paths, especially in an entertainment business that tends to veer to the middle of the road.

The second is endemic to the genre they play: The spontaneous improvisational dynamic at the core of SoulFarm's heat is by definition a live phenomenon, and it's hard to burn onto a disc from a studio. Says drummer Ambrosino, who has played for artists like Olivia Newton-John and Whitney Houston: "That's the biggest obstacle we've had to overcome... A fire gets generated during the live show and people can't sit still." He says they've been experimenting with ways to reproduce that same energy in the recording process, and that the band's efforts have been paying off as they record their latest (as yet untitled) album. Two of the band's seven albums are also live recordings.

The third, and perhaps greatest challenge for a band, like SoulFarm, that sees no borders, is that most people do. The problem with trying to mainstream songs with Hebrew words is obvious: The language alienates people, and although songs in Spanish may not have precluded a Latin music crossover, there is no real comparison here, if only because the natural audience for Spanish music in the United States is vastly larger than that to whom Hebrew speaks.

In the meantime, SoulFarm's main success is in its immense appeal to younger, musically savvy — and Jewish — fans. It fills venues like the B.B. King Blues Club in New York to capacity at its annual Hanukkah concerts, and is a regular at Makor, the 92nd St. Y's Jewish cultural center on the Upper West Side. Stephen Hazan Arnoff, Makor's director of arts programming, says that SoulFarm stands out in the field of bands that meld Jewish identity with world sound simply in terms of musicianship; as one of Makor Café's original acts, the band sets the standard for other artists in its genre. He adds that Lanzbom and Solomon Chase serve as role models to college-aged Jews as approachable and clean-living rockers (both are married, Lanzbom has one child) who, although their music goes in all directions, remain grounded in Jewish tradition.

Whether or not this tradition, layered though it is in so many skillful textures, can win over a broader audience will depend on people's readiness for a sound they can perhaps never fully grasp, but nevertheless find too captivating to ignore. ●