

er to come join him. But, like many of his other ideas, he dropped it and returned to Paris, where popular lore has it he was then the lover of film star Ingrid Bergman.

IT WAS IN PARIS THAT CAPA HAD “invented himself,” arriving in the French capital from Berlin in 1934 after the Nazi takeover. Capa, whose parents had a small fashion house in Budapest, had come to Berlin to get away from prevalent anti-Semitism in his native Hungary, and after getting into trouble for leftist student activities. As a youth, he attended Hebrew classes, apparently in preparation for his bar mitzvah, but his family was not particularly observant. He does not seem to have had connections with the relatively active Jewish youth movements in his native country.

It was also in Paris that Capa, then still Andre Friedmann, met German-born photographer Gerda Taro, who was to be the love of his life. She accompanied him to Spain where she died, run over by a tank at age 25, leaving Capa grief-stricken.

The two young free-lance photographers, then unknowns, realized when they began working in Paris that they could hardly fetch high prices for their photos, no matter how talented they were. So they invented an imaginary figure, a “famous” American photo-journalist named “Robert Capa” and announced that they were employed by him, respectively as his secretary and as his darkroom assistant.

The young couple went round Paris publications selling their own photos, which they said had been shot by their imaginary employer, who would only accept high fees because of his experience and talent. The word Capa, chosen because of its similarity with the name of American film director Frank Capra, happens to mean “shark” in Hungarian.

Visitors to the Paris exhibit can only remark on how enormously Israel has changed since Capa took pictures of new buildings going up in then-relatively small Tel Aviv, and of huge tent camps set up to receive confused but determined immigrants.

Some things don't change, however. Part of a text Capa wrote in 1949 recounts his encounter near Rehovot with an aged Yemenite rabbi deep in meditation while sitting on the dirt floor of an abandoned Arab house.

The old man scarcely lifted his eyes as Capa photographed him. “But when I left, saying goodbye with the traditional ‘Shalom,’ the old rabbi looked up and murmured, ‘Shalom, shalom — ve'eyn shalom!’ (“Peace, peace — but there is no peace!”). ●

Sound of His Soul

His virtuosity is legendary, his versatility stunning. And as always, Andy Statman's roots are showing.

Sara Eisen

HAD THERE BEEN A PLANETARIUM in 19th-century Galicia, or a kosker deli in Depression-era Kentucky, Andy Statman's music might have been playing in the background. Meandering through time, geography and culture in a few passionate, organic gusts of music, neither the man nor his inimitable hybrid sound has a very clearly defined “before” or “after.”

In Israel in October for a series of free solidarity concerts with fellow musicians Peter Himmelman and Steve Hancock, Statman, one of his generation's premier mandolinists and clarinetists, told *The Report* that he thinks of his compositions as “a spontaneous, American-roots form of very personal, prayerful hasidic music, by way of avante-garde jazz.” This small, modest man, who seemed to have all the time in the world while talking backstage at the Jerusalem Theater, takes for granted that a performer might embody several worlds in his art, and seems not to recognize that his music, like his story, is extraordinary.

Statman's musical soul journey began early, when he was a child in Queens, not far from Flatbush, the largely ultra-Orthodox section of Brooklyn he, his wife, and three of their four children call home today. Born in 1950 to a family with a long line of cantors (“dating back to the time of the Vilna Gaon”) and some well-known professional musicians in the family tree, young Andy grew up singing hasidic *nigunim* in the afternoon Jewish school his otherwise secular parents sent him to, and listening to show tunes, klezmer, classics — and every other variety of music playing within earshot.

And that was a lot. “Andy has always had what musicians call ‘big ears’ — he is aware of all kinds of musical forms, has encyclopedic knowledge of them,” says long-time friend and associate David Sears, a New York-based author, illustrator and, “for Andy only,” music producer. Sears has worked on several of Statman's Jewish-oriented albums, including 1998's “Hidden Light,” and the highly praised “Between Heaven and Earth: Music of the Jewish Mystics” in 1997.

Indeed, Statman the boy had ravenous ears, absorbing the early sounds of rock

and roll and the beginnings of the folk revival. But after his brother brought home a vintage country record by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Andy's obsession became bluegrass, which he would tune into from West Virginia via shortwave radio. He sent away for a method booklet he heard advertised, and picked up the guitar and banjo on his own. In a number of years, his fervent fingers would walk this boy — briefly — to Nashville.

A possessed Statman found mandolin master David Grisman in 1965, in a Greenwich Village teeming with young musicians at the heart of the resurgence of folk culture, and asked him for lessons. Grisman, with whom he would record and coproduce “Songs of Our Fathers” 30 years later, says that Statman was the best student he has ever had. “The kid just gobbled up everything,” Grisman, a many times Grammy-nominated bluegrass-folk-jazz musician, told *The Report*, by phone from his home in Northern California. “I always tell people that if the only thing I ever did was give Andy his first mandolin lesson, it would have been a life well spent.”

Statman's virtuosity and passion led the teenager into a progressive bluegrass band and into the company, as a session man, of folk superheroes like Bob Dylan and lesser but still celebrated performers, such as folkie David Bromberg and bluegrass fiddler Vassar Clements.

“I'm very lucky,” says Statman. “The guys I've studied with have treated me as an apprentice in the Old World sense. I'm probably from the last generation that had a chance to learn from the greats.”

And in fact, his next significant mentorship after Grisman, with little-known jazz-saxophone virtuoso Richard Grando, turned out to be life-changing. After feeling a tug away from bluegrass during his late teens (he didn't connect with the Southern heritage the way he felt he must to fully experience the music), Statman, stirred at the time by John Coltrane's experimental jazz, found himself compelled to master the saxophone.

But his first lesson, as he tells it, was in fact a discussion, one about whether or not God exists. Grando was something of a renaissance man, as interested in spirituality, anthropology and psychology as he was in

music. Statman's sponge-like qualities did not stop at his ears; he started soaking up Native American mysticism, the I Ching, and Jung's theories on synchronicity and the "miracles in coincidence." Musically, Statman relates, he was at the time attracted to all things ethnic — Balkan, Native American, Japanese, Latin and African root music, and at one point even recorded with the likes of Jerry Garcia. In the spirit of Jung, it was a kind of quest for what the collective unconscious might sound like.

That's when lightning struck: "I realized that I was born a Jew," says Statman, "and that it wasn't by accident. I needed to find my own spirituality in my music and in my life — my own roots, not someone else's."

STATMAN'S HUNT FOR HIS heritage progressed slowly, met by small, incremental changes in his everyday practice — laying of *tefillin* and a prayer service here, a traditional Sabbath there. And there were those prayers again, those *nigunim* from his childhood.

It all made Statman wonder: Why was no one playing (professionally, at least) the instrumental music to accompany this living hasidic tradition? Whatever happened to that great Old World Jewish music he had heard as a kid at home? He took it as a personal challenge: Unearthing this musical tradition — what we now call klezmer — would help him to unearth his own roots.

So, true to character, the young apprentice, now in his early 20s, went off to seek another master. The mentor he found was no less than klezmer clarinetist Dave Tarras, "the most successful immigrant-era Yiddish musician," in the words of music writer Seth Rogovoy.

While Statman the musician was blowing into the instrument, Statman the Jew was inhaling his history, rejoicing in the sound and the feel of his self-discovery as a person with a rich ancestral past. He felt revived — as did Tarras, who was rediscovered and recorded once again. Tarras (who died in 1989) later bequeathed his clarinets to his greatest protégé, and made him the next link in the chain.

And so Statman became known primarily as one of the key klezmer revivalists of the 70s and early 80s, the musicians who launched a great wave to reclaim the music of the Old World that had been fumigated away 50 years before at Ellis Island.

To Statman, the *alt-neu* klezmer music was about much more than reclaiming cultural roots. It was about ecstatic devotion,

recreating the transcendent prayer of the founder of hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov — prayer he was engaging in more and more regularly as he grew closer to Orthodox life. Grisman, who is himself Jewish, notes that "it was the music that led Andy into observance. And then he got deeper into the music by going deeper into its source."

In fact, Statman says that he began to see klezmer as a living form of music mostly in the context of a religious life. But the



'THEY ALL COME TOGETHER IN ME':

Statman has played rock, folk and bluegrass with Dylan, Garcia and Vassar Clements, but is no less at home with jazz and his own people's klezmer

irony here is rich: Once he became religious — today he lives as a conspicuously devout (white shirt, black pants and velvet yarmulke) "fusion" hasid who takes his inspiration from the Bratslaver, Bostoner and Modjitz courts — he didn't feel the need to play the music anymore. By the time his roots were both deeply planted and fully exposed, Statman felt pulled back toward jazz and the ways that it offers to indulge in contemplative, wandering, deep-space spirituality.

Since its divergence from mainstream klezmer in the mid-90s, Statman's journey has taken him, once again, to new places he's somehow been before. He's recorded a number of traditional Jewish-inspired albums, including "Songs of Our Fathers" (which sold over 60,000 copies without advertising) with Grisman, who says that the

emotional Jewish connection he feels with Statman ("my rabbi") is as strong as the bond he feels with him musically, and the classical klezmer sensation "In the Fiddler's House," with Itzhak Perlman, in 1996. He's also done some more bluegrass-inspired work — like "Andy's Ramble" in '94, a klezmer-overlaid progression over his previous mandolin work.

But the albums most representative of today's Statman are "Hidden Light" and "Between Heaven and Earth" — The Andy Statman Quartet's mystical, free-flowing fusions, inspired from everywhere he's stopped along the way.

It's a journey Statman says he now revisits with his trio (no longer a quartet) when they perform: "We're creating an experience between the audience and us," Statman explains — he now performs his distinctive, unconstrained meditations on jazz, klezmer, bluegrass and the human soul with bassist Jim Whitney and percussionist Larry Eagle, frequently at the Charles Street Shul, in the West Village. "At a certain point, we're just talking, just having a three-way conversation."

Much freer even than the trio's recorded music, this "conversation" changes each time they have it on stage, no melody sounding quite the same as it did before, and none bearing the definitive stamp of the genre that spawned it. A totally unself-conscious performer, as Sears observes, Statman does not mind that many audiences leave slightly befuddled as to what kind of music, exactly, they have just heard.

It is unabashedly American music, Statman would tell them, proud of his U.S. roots, and the spirit of individuality, creativity and compassion that country embodies. And it's jazz, he'd say, on its lonely search for the spirit of lost worlds. Or it's deeply religious hasidic prayer, he'd explain in his kind, soft voice, intended to embrace my brothers and bring them back into the fold. It's deeply Jewish because I am, and it's honest, because I am. It's all of those things, because, although they may seem worlds apart to you, "they all come together in me."

"If you're in touch with your Judaism," Statman is saying, his voice cracking, "you experience things..." He is misty by now, and it is clear that this is a man who still and always speaks, and plays — whatever it is he's playing — from the very roots of his soul. ●