



Music in the Desert

Part 6 of the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#) (Vision for the future)

by [Brigitte B. Nussbächer](#)



The virtuoso duo Shaul & Julia. Photo private

While many places on the Gaza border are in ruins and ashes, Shaul and Julia's house is a fortress of hope. They have preserved their visions, and their songs tell of the future, of the possibilities that lie ahead. A quiet voice that is nevertheless so much louder than the detonations of war. This music comforts and gives a sigh of relief - it is a triumph of life.

Out of Nowhere

We are standing in the western [Negev Desert](#), where in the past there were only sand dunes. Back then, there was not a bush, not a tree, not a person to be found here. Mark Twain described this stretch of land as a “desolate, deserted wasteland”, devoid of any potential. Perhaps Bedouin caravans sometimes travelled through, happy to leave the barren, forsaken area behind them.



But then something happened from 1950 that is almost the creation of a small world on a different scale. Following the vision of state founder [David Ben-Gurion](#), to make the desert bloom, Israeli pioneers began to settle here and look for ways to reclaim the land. With success - the desert in Israel shrank, which is unique in the world. Plantations, green and wooded areas were created, which today are kept alive by drip irrigation via countless poly-pipes.

[Drip-irrigated date plantation in the desert. Private photo](#)



A Touch of Heaven in April 2025

On this day, a warm spring sun kisses our forehead and a gentle breeze caresses our cheeks. The eucalyptus trees whisper mysteriously in the wind, like a silvery rustle. Only in the far distance do heaven and earth meet on the horizon. A wide field stretches out before your eyes, a green grove.

And here, in the shade of the eucalyptus tree, stands a pair of musicians: Julia and Shaul Ben-Har are giving a concert. The grass is their stage, the vault of the sky their concert hall, the sun the spotlight that illuminates everything. They give it for us - they give it for the invisible world as an expression of their vision.



[Open air concert in April 2025. Private photo](#)

Because they dream of setting up an open-air stage here, where ensembles from all over the world create musical universes and take you on this sound journey of the soul.

We listen and are mesmerised, enchanted. We have the feeling that we are witnessing a prophetic moment. Through the songs they play here in the wind, these two virtuosos bring this vision to life as if everything had already been accomplished - here in Hevel Shalom, the so-called "peace area", just four kilometers from Gaza and Egypt.

And although we hear in the background the sounds of bombs detonating from the nearby Gaza front, although their moshav has to be protected by a barbed wire fence, a heavy metal gate and soldiers, our souls fly far beyond all these borders with the sounds of their melodies.



It is a [song of hope](#) that they play and it softens the horrific cries of the massacre on October 7, as well as the desperate weeping of the bereaved. It tells of the future, of the possibilities that lie ahead of us, if we reach out for them; of God's creation and omnipotence, of forgiveness and love and of the joy of life. It comforts, it lets us breathe a sigh of relief, the soul begins to dream - it is a triumph of life. It is a quiet voice that is so much louder than the detonations of the explosive charges.

[Hope & joy of life are louder than detonations. Private photo](#)

And while they play, this dream is already reality. Their wonderful voices, the sounds they elicit from their instruments soar upwards and we allow ourselves to be transported to another world. We see this stage, we hear the heavenly music, we feel the power it creates.



One Year Ago

We met Shaul and Julia in April 2024, when we were travelling along the Gaza periphery [to help affected families](#) and report on the situation.

Yated is four kilometers from the Gaza border. This means that the people here had a few minutes more time to brace themselves than in the kibbutzim that were the most devastated by the terrorist attack. It therefore didn't hit the community quite as hard. Shaul played music during the attack to shield themselves against the spirit of death they felt - it gave everyone in the house a sense of protection and security. They were evacuated by the Israeli army because there were terrorists everywhere and the area was not safe for a long time. The unbelievable suffering they saw around them really affected them. They were speechless for a week. Not being able to be at home, worrying about their son, who was serving in the army, and their home, which they had worked so long to build, took its toll on them.

But in all the suffering, they also began to hear about miracles that had taken place in the midst of despair and the inner emptiness slowly began to recede. After three months, they were among the lucky ones, who were able to return to an almost intact home.

The Long Journey to Israel

Shaul and Julia were both born in Moldova. Shaul's grandparents were murdered during the Holocaust at Babyn Yar, Kiev in what is now Ukraine. During his childhood, he was unaware of his Jewish roots and only later began to discover them. This changed his life forever and ultimately led to their immigration to Israel in 1996 - and to the building of a new life.

The two have now been performing for over 20 years in Israel and around the world, two virtuosos with a wide range of styles, instruments and special vocal abilities! They have also performed repeatedly in Germany and have delighted their audiences (here is a short sample of their music: [Video](#)).

After the birth of their children, they built their home in the Havel Shalom neighbourhood, this three-country corner in the western Negev desert, and settled there permanently.

Even today, they still seem so full of youthful energy that it is hard to believe that their children are now grown up and married.



A Fortress of Hope



Oasis of hospitality. Private foto

We experienced their home in Yated as an oasis of hospitality and a fortress of hope. While many places on the border periphery with Gaza lie in ruins and ashes, they welcomed us with warmth and optimism.

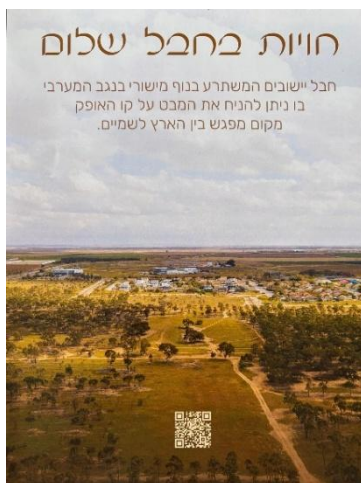
Miraculously, they were spared on October 7 and also miraculously, they have managed to preserve their visions and dreams.

Although they live in an area where they have heard the noise of war and explosions from the nearby front almost constantly for over 600 days, the songs they carry inside them have not been silenced.

This is remarkable, especially when you consider how little space there has been for music in recent years: firstly due to the harsh restrictions during the corona pandemic and then due to the Hamas massacre.

But Israelis cannot live without music for long. There were even orchestras in concentration camps. In the founding years of the young state, when no music halls had yet been built, legendary concerts were held in the open air and the audience sat on the ground or in the branches of the surrounding trees.

And so the demand is growing again and they are performing concerts all over Israel, the last one just the night before our visit, up on the Golan Heights. They have an incredible amount to share. The strength, the warmth, the beauty of their souls has found a perfect means of expression in music. They bring confidence and joy of life to their listeners and are an impressive example of the resilience of Israelis, who never give up but continue to rebuild their homeland in Zion.



The Music Grove. Poster

Shaul and Julia have a great vision in their hearts, namely the dream of a music grove, a green space in the desert, not far from their moshav, where an outdoor music center is to be built. Their aim is to establish a creative meeting place with the [‘Field of Music’](#) cultural project in the Shalom Grove - a lively center for artists, visitors and cultural exchange.

In April 2025, they travelled there with us at our request and gave the [small, wonderful concert](#), mentioned at the beginning, for us. It is almost supernaturally beautiful and the seed of their vision grows in our hearts. We feel that we are allies, who want to spread light and hope with songs and stories.



We are deeply touched and grateful to be able to witness this glimpse into the future - and will do our utmost to support them in realising this vision with a great deal of commitment, perseverance and creativity.

Because we are convinced that just as the pioneers' dream of greening the desert was realised with great dedication, resilience and innovation, this vision will also become a living reality in the years to come! This is the character Israel is made of. This is the inner strength that has kept this nation alive for over 2000 years. This is the secret of why Israel was not wiped out and ultimately remained undefeated despite all the losses.

So don't forget to plan a visit to Julia and Shaul's music grove in Yated for your next trip to Israel.

The story of Julia & Shaul is part of the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#).

[Brigitte Nussbächer and her husband Harald Bottesch](#) regularly visit Israel. Their current focus is on supporting families who were directly affected by the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023:

Widows and orphans, traumatized people and evacuees. During their last mission to Israel in April 2025, they visited those affected again and established links with specialist organizations on the ground in order to provide specific, long-term and sustainable help.



More articles from Brigitte B. Nussbächer under: www.arc-to-israel.org/en/artikel