



Finetuned

Meet Rosh Kollel and pianist Rabbi Dovid Lipson

It is unusual to see a Rosh Kollel performing as a piano maestro, but there is one individual who converges the two — Rabbi Dovid Lipson, a noted talmid chacham. As a concert pianist, Rabbi Dovid Lipson performs in what appears to be long black tails, but what is actually the Rosh Kollel's black kapote.

Seated at the piano, he sways with intensity, moving to the powerful feelings and his incredible interpretation of the beautiful music he skillfully plays.

And what is the goal of Rabbi Lipson's concerts? To help fund his kollel in Ramot, Kollel Aliyos Shlomo.

"It was never my own idea to use music for Torah," explains Rabbi Lipson. "I was pushed into it by friends who argued that since there are those supporting the Kollel, why not give something tangible back?"

And that is how Rabbi Lipson's concerts began.

BY YEHUDAH MARKS



An Unqualified Pianist

Rabbi Lipson was brought up in Detroit — with a piano.

“I took to the piano like a fish to water; I could not be separated from it,” he says.

“By the age of 16, I was studying under the top teacher, the Russian virtuoso Mischa Kottler of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, who has given rise to many stellar careers.”

When his parents could no longer afford Mischa Kottler’s expensive lessons, they told their son that they would agree to continue the lessons only if he would use the piano as a profession and it would be his life.

“I knew that there was more to life than piano, so I rejected the offer.”

Not qualifying under Mischa Kottler nor studying in a music school meant that Rabbi Lipson was never officially trained. Yet the quality of his playing is like that of a top pianist.

“My playing improved over the years as I developed a deeper understanding of music,” he explains. “Being in contact with top symphony musicians had a dramatic positive effect on my playing — I saw how they were playing and I picked it up. The top musicians whom I perform with have only compliments, and none have ever complained. On the contrary — they always ask when we will be able to give another concert together.”

Encouraged by His Rebbi, Harav Shlomo Freifeld, zt”l

Rabbi Lipson is a *talmid* of Harav Shlomo Freifeld, zt”l, and learned in Yeshiva Sh’or Yeshuv for seven years — for two years until his *chasunah* in 1975 and afterward until 1979.

“Harav Freifeld had a powerful influence on me, as he did on everybody else,” Rabbi Lipson says. “He gave me an unending *cheshek* for Torah and *avodas Hashem*.

“Harav Freifeld,” he adds, “served as an amazing *dugmah* of what a Jew should be — the way he talked, the way he behaved... everything about him was spectacular.”

Following his *Rebbi*’s instructions, Rabbi Lipson studied speech pathology, which he practices privately up to the present day,

“I NEVER DREAMED I WOULD END UP USING THE PIANO TO RAISE MONEY FOR A KOLLEL NAMED AFTER MY REBBI.”

Rabbi Lipson at the piano.





“when not learning Torah or at concerts.”

“My *Rebbi* encouraged me to develop my piano skills and even found places for me to practice on the piano,” Rabbi Lipson says, adding, “I never dreamed I would end up using the piano to raise money for a *kollel* named after my *Rebbi*.”

And at yeshivah weddings, Harav Freifeld introduced a practice: In the middle of the wedding the band would stop playing and a Steinway piano — “a Steinway is the Rolls Royce of pianos” — would be wheeled into the hall for Rabbi Lipson to play.

“I would play a classical piece; half were sitting on the edge of their chairs, the other half of the crowd fell asleep,” he quips.

Rabbi Lipson and his *Rebbi* shared their admiration for classical music. And Harav Freifeld, although he understood and enjoyed all classical music, was especially fond of Beethoven’s music.

“I understood from the *Rebbi* that Beethoven’s music is Heavenly,” Rabbi Lipson says, “and that Beethoven merited to bring down from Heaven music that belonged there.”

Rabbi Lipson explains: Bach, for example, was a religious man, which can be felt in his music that is spiritual and deep. But Beethoven was known to be arrogant, had terrible *middos* and had no control over them, yet this is not felt in his music.

“Beethoven’s music is so clear, so pure — a true spiritual phenomenon.”

Rabbi Lipson relates that one of the boys in Sh’or Yoshuv was once heartbroken when he learned of the death of his “hero” rock singer. Harav Freifeld invited the boy to his home, asking him to bring a record with his hero’s songs. Together they listened intently to the compositions.

Afterward, Harav Freifeld played a classical recording, a rousing symphony designed to lift up one’s spirits, which it did. The contrast was obvious to both.

After this, the *Rebbi* gave his personal evaluation of the former recording, saying he understood why that star was so popular: “The music defined a generation in turmoil,” he said. “You should know that it is disturbing music, indicative of struggles and discontent.”

Music took a central part in the *tefillot* at Sh’or Yoshuv, Rabbi Lipson continues. “There was a lot of singing in the *davening*, especially on Simchas Torah when every part of *Hallel* was sung to a different tune.”

“All Band Members Should Be *Roshei Kollel*”

In 1982, Rabbi Lipson and his family moved to Eretz Yisrael, where he learned for 12 years in several *kollelim* — among them *Kollel Chazon Ish* of Bnei Brak, Me’or Eliyahu of Telzstone, and Birkas Ohel Shimon of Ramot.

He also continued his musical path.

“Not forgetting my love for music, I played the keyboard at weddings in Eretz Yisrael. But after opening my *kollel*, I didn’t know if it was suitable for a *Rosh Kollel* to do this. I thought perhaps *es pas nisht* for a *Rosh Kollel* to play the keyboard.”

So he asked a leading *Posek*.

“*L’chat’chilah*, all the band members should be *Roshei Kollel* or *Roshei Yeshivah*,” was the Rav’s reply, “although *b’di’eved* it is okay if they aren’t.”

“On another occasion, I asked a *Gadol b’Yisrael* if I should continue playing the piano to raise money. ‘If I were able to play the piano, I would do so!’ was the reply I received from him.”

A Kollel That Demands

Before opening Kollel Aliyos Shlomo, Rabbi Lipson taught for six years at an American yeshivah in Yerushalayim and was very successful with the *bachurim*, instilling in them *ahavas haTorah*.

"I felt I was accomplishing something for *Klal Yisrael*, but sadly, the yeshivah closed down."

Before the yeshivah closed, he discussed with a colleague the idea of opening a *kollel* with unique principles, in order to continue serving *Klal Yisrael*.

"We decided on a *kollel* that would have upgraded challenges and demands, a *kollel* that is *tove'a* from its *avreichim*, resulting in high-level *talmidei chachamim*. We wanted to set goals that are almost above capabilities, with

the *avreichim* helping one another to reach these goals."

As the idea of the Kollel developed, Rabbi Lipson traveled to the Catskills and approached a wealthy man for help in establishing it.


When the man heard of his intention to open a new *kollel*, he exploded in uncontrollable laughter.

"Another *kollel*? Who needs a new *kollel*? Aren't there enough of them around?!"

But Rabbi Lipson isn't one to be put off by mockery.

"I don't manufacture *kollel yungeleit*. I am establishing a *kollel* where *yungeleit* who already exist can *shteig* even more. If I don't come to collect for them, somebody else will be knocking on your door!"

"When founding the Kollel, the only fund-raising tool



Rabbi Dovid Lipson giving a benefit concert for his *kollel*, Kollel Aliyos Shlomo, located in Ramot, Yerushalayim.

I had was my deep, sincere and powerful belief in the worthiness of the cause,” he says.

This was similar to the teaching of his *Rebbi*, who told a close *talmid*, “I faced many obstacles, and I triumphed over all of them. I faced difficult hurdles, but they never overtook

me. Do you know why? It’s because I had one *chassid* who never stopped believing in me: Myself.”

Rabbi Lipson continues: “This strong belief in the necessity of the Kollel helped to connect with people, which helped raise money for it.”

KOLLEL ALIYOS SHLOMO, A KOLLEL THAT DEMANDS

After the *petirah* of Harav Freifeld 19 years ago, Rabbi Lipson founded Kollel Aliyos Shlomo in his memory.

Aliyos Shlomo is an advanced and dynamic *kollel* created to meet the needs of especially talented *bnai Torah* for whom the traditional *kollel*, geared to a more general audience, does not provide enough of a challenge.

“There is a need for highly structured and demanding *kollelim* with sufficiently high expectations to enable capable *yungeleit* to both develop and produce, thus avoiding stagnation,” Rabbi Lipson explains. “The achievements our members have attained, and the huge amount of Torah energy generated during the learning sessions, attest to the remarkable success of Aliyos Shlomo.”

The English-speaking Kollel Aliyos Shlomo is distinguished by its highly structured curriculum, which combines depth, pace, and accountability.

All learning is *b'iyun*, including *Gemara*, *Rashi*, *Tosafos*, *Rosh*, *Rif* and *Ran*, with a set pace of five to six *blatt* a month, a pace that all *yungeleit* must adhere to. The program includes mandatory monthly *chazarah* and a monthly test.

“With this intense study, the *talmid* emerges after each month with lucid comprehension of the relevant issues and *halachos*,” he says.

Rabbi Lipson says that the Kollel emphasizes and encourages sharing of ideas among the members of the group, and weekly *shiurim* — or *chaburos*, as they are known in the yeshivah world — are prepared by students and faculty, allowing each participant to share his ideas and deliberate the ideas of his fellows.

In addition to the Torah studies, at Aliyos Shlomo there is a weekly roundtable discussion of *ruchniyus* goals, based on the classical *sifrei hashkafah*.

Aliyos Shlomo concentrates the equivalent of a full day’s curriculum into an intensive four-hour study session. This unique arrangement allows the *talmid* time to devote to independent research, or to participate in and benefit from other less-demanding Torah programs. There is also an optional afternoon program for those who wish to devote a full day to the project.

Some of the *avreichim* teach in the afternoons; one has been delivering a *shiur* in *Kodashim* for *baalei batim* in Ramot for over a decade, while another is a *shoel umeishiv* in an American yeshivah in Yerushalayim.

Rabbi Lipson says that by systematic adherence to the highest standards and demands, Aliyos Shlomo continues to attract talented and serious *talmidei chachamim*, some of them world-class *lamdanim*, and this in turn raises the level of the program exponentially.

Relating to the fund-raising power of music, Rabbi Lipson notes that nearly half of the Kollel's budget comes from the concerts. In addition, "even more than money, the concerts help me make friends and, as Harav Avraham Chaim Feuer, *shlita*, says, 'friend-raising precedes fund-raising.' This means that once you have friends, there is no end to how much they will help you. Also, it is a lot easier to approach people with music."

Rabbi Lipson knows of one *chashuve* Rav who recently opened a *kollel* and went on a fund-raising tour in America. However, he didn't meet his expectations and was frustrated at the lack of interest. He asked one of the *gevirim* why he wasn't as successful as others, and the reply was: "Why don't you give us a concert, just like that other *Rosh Kollel* who often comes here?"

Finding Concert Locations

Rabbi Lipson travels three times a year to America to collect for his *kollel*, playing at concerts in three different locations each time.

"The concerts are for those who understand classical

music, yet refrain from going to public concerts," he explains. "Here, they can enjoy music of the quality of top concerts. For them, it's a holy way of enjoying music without having to go to the Met opera hall."

Rabbi Lipson has performed in many Jewish homes in cities across America, including Lawrence, Detroit, Miami, Baltimore, Lakewood, Manhattan, Los Angeles and Monsey.

He is often accompanied by a violin and cello in a harmonious symphony of musical beauty, amazing the audiences with his talent and the beauty of his music. Before every composition, Rabbi Lipson gives a few introductory words, and usually a Rav is also invited to say words of Torah.

No tickets are sold for the concerts, but "everybody understands what we're really here for. I often quip that although it was declared that there is no entrance fee, I didn't say anything about an exit fee..."

Rabbi Lipson has no tactic for finding new locations for concerts. They just "happen" — with obvious *hashgachah*.

"I was once in Miami collecting for the Kollel, and my host told me that he knows of an excellent cellist, Dr. Jonathan Rubin, who *davens* in the nearby shul.



“On Shabbos morning I *davened* at that shul, and at the *kiddush* that was held after *davening* I introduced myself to Dr. Rubin as a pianist. The doctor looked at the Rabbi dressed in his Shabbos attire, and exclaimed, ‘You must be kidding!’

“‘No, I’m not kidding. And I hear that you’re a good cellist.’

“‘Thank you.’

“‘So let’s meet on Motzoei Shabbos.’

“Motzoei Shabbos arrived. We played a Beethoven piece — and Dr. Rubin was astounded.

“‘Come back in another few months, and I’ll have arranged a concert!’ he ecstatically declared.”

And since then, there has been each year a concert in Miami.

The Musical Shoshanas Yaakov

The concerts in Monsey also came about “by chance.”

“I was in Monsey one Purim following our first concert in Miami, where I met with the son of a close friend. During our schmooze, the friend asked to hear one of our pieces. I happened to have on me a cassette tape of a concert in

Miami, and we listened to it. The friend was so excited that he asked if he could copy the tape, and I willingly agreed.

“We went upstairs to his *frum* landlord, who had a cassette tape copying machine. And as we worked the machine, the door burst open and a group of *bachurim* entered, singing *Shoshanas Yaakov*. We both joined the circle, as did the *baal habayis*, and the atmosphere was really *leibedig*.

“Noticing a piano in the corner of the room, I dashed to it and started accompanying the singing, which added to the *simchah*. As I was playing, I saw that on the piano was the score for Rachmaninoff’s second piano concerto — it’s an unbelievable piece of music — and noticed the concerto was in the same key as the *Shoshanas Yaakov* being sung.

“I therefore interposed the concerto into the *Shoshanas Yaakov* and, when the *bachurim* had no more *koach* left to dance and were sprawled over the couches, concluded the piece with Rachmaninoff’s finale.

“‘That was truly amazing!’ the *baal habayis* exclaimed. He then asked what I was doing there, and after hearing about the Kollel and the concerts, asked if I’ve ever performed in Monsey.

“‘No.’

“‘Why not?’

“‘Because I don’t have an organizer here.’

“‘Now you do...’” ■

Rabbi
Lipson
playing



To reach Rabbi Lipson, please contact Inyan Magazine.