

Mishy Harman (narration): So you might remember that our last episode, Part One of our Mixtape mini-series, ended with quite the cliffhanger. We were in 1968, and Uri Avnery, the young and provocative left-wing politician, suggested replacing *HaTikvah*, the national anthem.

Mishy Harman: Uri, what led you to suggest changing the Israeli anthem?

Uri Avnery: Well, I detest the Israeli anthem, because the anthem has nothing to do with Israel. It was composed by an unimportant poet, and it is about Jews somewhere abroad, who are longing for the Land of Israel. It has nothing to do with people in the Land of Israel. I don't turn to the east, because I live in the middle. The east I am looking at Jordan, or India or China. It is a completely irrelevant song. Irrelevant to a state in which we have two different populations, the Jewish and the Arab. And I am for many many years I am thinking about the need to get rid of this anthem, and have a real Israeli anthem.

Mishy Harman (narration): And his proposed *new* anthem was pretty surprising, coming from a leftie like himself. It was the unequivocal anthem of the Six Day War - *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*.

Here's our Mixtape band's rendition of it.

[Band plays Yerushalayim Shel Zahav]

Mishy Harman (narration): Hey, I'm Mishy Harman and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by PRX, and is produced together with Tablet Magazine.

Today, we bring you Part II of our Mixtape mini-series, **Iron and Gold**.

In this mini-series, we're telling the stories behind some of Israel's most iconic tunes. Stories that reflect the intricacies of Israeli society, the complications that are inherent in it. And in this episode, we go back in time more than half-a-century, to a month that - in a very real manner - shaped the way Israel looks till today.

OK, so Naomi Shemer's *Yerushalem Shel Zahav*, or Jerusalem of Gold, which you just heard, was the song Uri Avneri wanted to fashion into the national anthem.

Uri Avnery: So I proposed it, and the Speaker of the Knesset told me that before he brings this bill which I proposed to the Knesset plenum, I need to have the agreement of the author, of Naomi Shemer.

Mishy Harman (narration): Uri met with Naomi to discuss the matter, but his proposal never made it to the Knesset floor. *HaTikvah* was spared. Still, even today, and despite his objection to much of its content, Uri is convinced that...

Uri Avneri: *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* is an anthem!

Mishy Harman (narration): And in a way, he's right. The song is probably the most recognizable and beloved Israeli tune ever. Time and again it's voted the most important song in Israel's history.

Here's Lely Shemer, Naomi Shemer's daughter.

Lely Shemer: Maybe it sounds like a prophet that comes before the king, it's something very very majestic about it. I don't know. It's all over the world, it's not only Jewish people. I can't explain it. It's... There's something about this song that is magical.

Mishy Harman (narration): It's a song that built two musical careers, of two modern-day Israeli prophets - one a prophet of hope and optimism. The other a prophet of gloom and despair.

And if *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* has reached such an iconic standing, so has its creator, Naomi Shemer.

Moti Ze'ira: For me, Naomi Shemer is part of, you know, of my being Israeli.

Mishy Harman (narration): That's Moti Ze'ira, Shemer's biographer. He, and many others really, feel that Naomi is a personification of a certain kind of Israel, a desired- and longed for- Israel, of *Eretz Israel Ha'yafa*. Innocent, beautiful and simple.

Naomi was born on Kibbutz Kinneret, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Lely Shemer: Her parents were pioneers and very very idealistic people.

Moti Ze'ira: And she represents something that is very from here. Her writing gives a very unique melody, or sound, of Israeliness. You can smell the, you know, the fields of Kinneret. It's the... It's the ideal *sabra*.

Mishy Harman (narration): By early 1967 Naomi was already a well-known songwriter. She was thirty-seven years old, and – having left both the *kibbutz* and her husband – she and Lely were living in Tel Aviv.

But in the small, relatively poor state of the mid '60s, it wasn't easy for a single mom to pay the bills.

Lely Shemer: And as a girl I knew it. She explained it to me. It was part of my life – that it's not easy.

Mishy Harman (narration): Which is why Naomi was very happy when, in February '67, she received a commission for a new song from Gil Aldema, the musical director of *Festival Ha'zemer Ve'ha'pizmon*. This annual festival slash pop music competition took place on Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, in Jerusalem. It featured an accompanying symphony orchestra, and it was a *big* deal.

There was no TV yet in Israel, but the festival was broadcast live on the radio, and the winning songs often became national hits.

Gil told Naomi that Teddy Kollek, Jerusalem's then-first term mayor, had approached him with an exciting idea: While the votes for the songs participating in the competition were being tallied up, the audience would hear a few bonus tracks; new ones, written specifically about Jerusalem.

Gil asked Naomi whether she wanted to give it a shot.

Moti Ze'ira: And she thought it will be very very easy for her to do it, because she loved Jerusalem. Jerusalem is part of her biography.

Mishy Harman (narration): But when she actually sat down at the piano, she struggled. How, she wondered, could she possibly capture the holiness of a city that generations upon generations of poets and bards had been writing about for nearly two thousand years?

She even went up to Jerusalem, a divided Jerusalem, and took in its sounds and smells. That didn't help either.

But just before she gave up, she remembered an old Talmudic tale she had studied as a schoolgirl. The tale of a piece of jewelry that Rabbi Akiva had given his wife, as a way of saying thank you for encouraging him to study *Torah*. The piece of jewelry had an etching on it, of Jerusalem.

Lely Shemer: Jerusalem of gold. *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*.

Moti Ze'ira: In twenty-four hours or something, she wrote it and she gave it to Gil Aldema.

Mishy Harman (narration): Gil Aldema died in 2014, but he was supposedly so moved just by the sheet music Naomi had sent in, that he burst into tears.

Lely Shemer: She wrote a song very very personal. About her childhood, about her memories, about what she remembered from school about Jerusalem of Gold.

Mishy Harman (narration): She continued to tinker with the song, and when she was finally satisfied, she invited some of her closest friends over to her apartment to hear it.

Lely Shemer: And one of them was Rivka Michaeli, her friend.

Rivka Michaeli: We were close friends. Really close friends. My name is Rivka Michaeli, I was born in Jerusalem, from my mother's mother's side I am ninth generation in Israel, in Palestine.

Mishy Harman (narration): Rivka is a famous entertainer, actress and singer. At the time, though, she was one of the country's leading radio broadcasters.

Rivka Michaeli: It was very moving when she sang it. And then I said, "you know, both my parents were born in the Old City and my father, he dreams about the Old City all his life, every night he is in the Old City."

Lely Shemer: Rivka told my mother, "Naomi, the song is not complete. Something is missing! What about the Old City?" And then she added the important part. *[In Hebrew] Aicha yavshu borot ha'mayim, kikar ha'shuk reika. Ve'ein poked at har ha'bayit ba'ir ha'atika.*

Mishy Harman (narration): "How have the cisterns dried up," the line goes, "the marketplace is empty. And no one frequents the Temple Mount in the Old City."

Moti Ze'ira: It's talking about the emptiness of the Old City.

Mishy Harman (narration): Now remember that this is all before the Six Day War. And while Jerusalem's Old City certainly wasn't empty, as many critics of the song have since pointed out, it was empty of Jews. It was part of Jordan.

In any event, once the song was ready, Naomi and Gil began looking for someone who could sing it at *festival ha'zemer ve'ha'pizmon*.

Lely Shemer: And that's how I'm in the story again.

Mishy Harman (narration): A few months earlier eleven-year-old Lely had been listening to a young talent show on her transistor radio.

Lely Shemer: And then I hear a voice like bells, like Joan Baez with a guitar. And I called my mother, "*Imma, bo'ee*, this is the sound that you like. Look how she sings she... how beautifully, how like something from abroad, but so Israeli." And my mother said, "take a paper and write her name down, please." And I wrote Shuly Natan.

Mishy Harman (narration): Naomi kept that little note with Shuly's name. Just, really, in case.

Lely Shemer: Maybe she will need it someday.

Mishy Harman (narration): And now, that day had come.

Lely Shemer: And my mother told Gil Aldema, "I have a name of a singer. She's very very young, I think she's a soldier in the army. She's maybe nineteen. Please find her for me."

Mishy Harman (narration): Dutifully, Gil did just that. He found her. Sergeant Shulamit Natan, who was serving as a *mora-chayelet*, a Hebrew-teaching soldier, near Kiryat Gat.

Shuly Natan: Well, my name is Shuly Natan, I was born in London, and arrived in Israel when I was two-and-a-half years old.

Mishy Harman (narration): Needless to say, Shuly was completely unprepared when - on a cold winter day of February 1967 - she was summoned to the offices of the regional council, where her mother was on the line. She was sure something terrible had happened.

Shuly Natan: And the first thing my mother said, “Shuly don’t worry, nothing terrible happened at home but sit down on a chair.” And she said, “Naomi Shemer wants to meet you.” *[Laughs]*. Luckily I sat on a chair because I was so shocked.

Mishy Harman (narration): On her first vacation from the army, young Shuly went to see the balladeer from Tel Aviv.

Shuly Natan: And there she sat, on her piano and she played strongly a song for Jerusalem, and she said, “I don’t want the orchestra to play with you. Just you and the guitar.”

Mishy Harman (narration): Plucked out of total anonymity, Shuly began practicing for what could be her big break - her brief moment in the national spotlight.

Shuly Natan: I thought it would give me some exposure, but no more than that. So I had no expectations and everything came as such a surprise.

Mishy Harman (narration): The period leading up to the festival was extremely stressful. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt, was amassing troops in the Sinai, and Israel, too, began mobilizing forces and calling up its reservists. A *menacing* scent of war was in the air. And in the middle of all this *balagan*, three thousand people gathered in *Binyaney Ha’uma* in Jerusalem... To listen to pop songs.

The songs that actually competed in the festival were a let down. The paper the next day would describe them as “third rate imitations of the 1953 Sanremo Festival.” But when the votes were being counted, Shuly, with her long black hair and white knitted dress took the stage with her guitar.

Yizhak Shimoni: *[In Hebrew] Shuly Natan, u’shmo shel ha’shir ‘Yerushalayim Shel Zahav.’*

Shuly Natan: I was very very nervous, like a leaf in the wind, you know, I was very nervous. My main fear was that I will have a blackout and will forget words, but I didn’t.

Mishy Harman (narration): Shuly sung of holy places. Of Jerusalem’s glorious past and golden future.

Shuly Natan: It was like a prophecy.

Lely Shemer: It was different. It was shocking. It sounds like the bells of Jerusalem. It's almost a holy song.

Rivka Michaeli: It's a prayer. It's expression of hidden, mutual, longing for something you can't touch.

Shuly Natan: And I think there wasn't a dry eye in the audience. When I finished to sing first of all there was a quiet, and then there was such applause. Unbelievable.

Moti Ze'ira: You could hear from the clapping hands and from the applause and everything, that something is happen. It was like blowing the mind of everybody.

Shuly Natan: It's hard to explain magic, but it's true, that there is magic in it.

Mishy Harman (narration): At the end of the evening, Teddy Kollek, the beaming mayor, took the microphone.

Shuly Natan: And he said, "and I want, the soldier girl," (he didn't remember my name even), "who sang the song for *Yurushulayim* to come back and sing it again!" Wow, and I was way back in the dressing rooms and I ran with my guitar, which wasn't even completely tuned, and I ran on the stage. My heart beating and I sang it again. And this time the whole audience, the whole crowd, joined me and sang together with me the refrain. The next day, it like flooded the country. It was played nonstop while they were recruiting the reserves.

Lely Shemer: My mother started to get letters and calls like nothing she experienced before.

Moti Ze'ira: Thousands of letters. Thousands.

Mishy Harman (narration): One of those letters, Moti - the biographer - told us, was addressed to...

Moti Ze'ira: Naomi Shemer, *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*, Tel Aviv. And she got it! I mean even the post, they knew where to send it.

Mishy Harman (narration): The immediate impact of the song, the excitement around it, it was all unparalleled.

Moti Ze'ira: She was the sound of something collective. I mean, people didn't know what will happen. The reserve soldiers were already, you know, on the borders. The associations were, all over, about the *shoah*, about the Holocaust. I mean the question of whether Israel can still exist after the war was not so... people felt that it's not sure.

Mishy Harman (narration): In a nation preparing for war, Naomi's uplifting words struck a chord.

Moti Ze'ira: And it became the song of everybody. Everybody.

Mishy Harman (narration): Among the thousands of reservists waiting around for war to break out was a twenty-five-year-old paratrooper called Meir Ariel. Here's his widow, Tirtza.

Tirtza Ariel: They didn't stop putting 'Jerusalem of Gold,' 'Jerusalem of Gold,' 'Jerusalem of Gold.' You couldn't hear anything else in the radio except this song.

Mishy Harman (narration): Meir was from Kibbutz Mishmarot, near Pardes Chana.

Tirtza Ariel: Just another boy who born on a *kibbutz*. Tractor driver.

Mishy Harman (narration): And a few weeks earlier, on a Saturday afternoon, he had been called up for reserve duty.

Tirtza Ariel: I just remember it was just another day. And everybody jumped to the uniform, and me and Meir didn't have a baby yet, and Meir's parents came to our apartment, and I wanted them to leave. I wanted Meir to myself. I had to try to have a baby before he's going to the war. I cannot lose him, and his looking. His looking was something like you can never meet in this world. Maybe there is some few that look not bad, but for me he was everything money can buy, OK? I think I was a queen of beauty, and he was the King David. That's what I have to say, what was the question?

Mishy Harman (narration): When the war broke out, on June 5, 1967, Meir's brigade had a historic task.

Tirtza Ariel: Meir was a *tzanchan*, parachuter. He was fighting in Jerusalem.

Mishy Harman (narration): Meir participated in the battle of Ammunition Hill, in which thirty-six of his fellow paratroopers were killed. He continued through Sheikh Jarrah, took over the Rockefeller Museum. And on the morning of June 7th, the third day of the war, he entered the Old City, and reached the Western Wall.

It was a moment of solemn jubilation. After nearly two thousand years, the *Kotel* was once again in Jewish hands. An almost uncanny fulfillment of the dreams Naomi had expressed in her song. And there was really only one way to capture the magnitude of the moment.

Moti Ze'ira: The paratroopers in the *Kotel* started to sing *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*.

Mishy Harman (narration): Meir was probably one of those soldiers singing.

Tirtza Ariel: When they conquered Jerusalem, the whole country like had an orgasm from happiness.

Mishy Harman (narration): But Meir was also hurting. He'd seen blood and pain. His friends had been injured, and killed. And somehow, Naomi's optimism, her romantic descriptions of returning to Jerusalem's Old City, didn't fit what he had seen on the ground.

Tirtza Ariel: Meir was a soldier, just finished to see all his friend get killed and wounded in fucking gold Jerusalem. And he was thinking to himself, 'what gold you are talking about? What the hell?' The song was wrong, the situation was a completely different chaos.

Mishy Harman (narration): As a way of killing time, really, he took out a small notepad he used to keep in the front pocket of his uniform, and wrote down new words to the melody of *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*.

Meir's version was called *Yerushalayim Shel Barzel*, Jerusalem of Iron. And it talked about all the things that Naomi's anthem didn't - grieving mothers, mortar shells, thick smoke and spilled blood.

To Meir, Jerusalem was no longer just a place of gold, bronze and light, but also one of iron, lead and darkness. Naomi's Jerusalem was a fantasy, Meir's was a battlefield.

Moti Ze'ira: He wanted to give expression to what he experienced in the war. And this was the vehicle to express it.

Tirtza Ariel: But he didn't think to do anything with it. He just... It was for the soldiers friend he had, when they finished something and they got together around a fireplace, they used to sing.

Moti Ze'ira: It was very easy, I mean everybody knew the melody of *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*, and when he performed it in his unit so people... it expressed something that they felt.

Mishy Harman (narration): Shortly after the war there was a big official gathering of paratroopers at the newly-liberated amphitheater on Mount Scopus. There were speeches, skits and performances, all celebrating the unimaginable achievements of the war. And then, sort of like that scene in *Forrest Gump*, a soldier with a guitar on his back was pushed onto the stage. It was Meir. And this is what he sang.

[Band plays Yerushalayim Shel Barzel]

Mishy Harman (narration): For centuries upon centuries alchemists have tried to turn iron into gold. And then came along a curly-haired *kibbutznik* and, with a few lines, turned gold into iron. When Meir sang, the same thing that had happened three weeks earlier at *Binyaney Ha'uma* happened once more.

Moti Ze'ira: It gave expression to something that they felt as soldiers that just finished the war.

Mishy Harman (narration): Here's Meir's son, Shachar.

Shachar Ariel: The families that lost somebody in the Six Day War are forever in a way in debt to my father for just saying that out loud, because nobody else did, you know? No politician, no general, chief of staff. Nobody was talking about the fact that the price was so severe.

Mishy Harman (narration): Rivka Michaeli, Naomi's broadcaster friend who had suggested adding the stanza about Jerusalem's Old City, was at Mount Scopus recording the event for the radio.

Rivka Michaeli: And after I heard this song, 'Jerusalem of Iron,' I was astonished. Suddenly, the view of the war changed. And you saw it's not victory,

it's blood, and it's smoke, and it's black. We knew there were young people that sacrificed their lives, but we weren't aware of it. We were so happy as a nation, and it was like popping the balloon when Meir came out with this song. How? Oh. Ouch.

Mishy Harman (narration): Rivka recognized Meir's talent. She went up to him and asked...

Rivka Michaeli: "What's your name?" He said, "Meir Ariel." "Can you wait, and I'll record this song?" And I recorded the song, and I broadcast it next morning.

Shachar Ariel: It became a very strong hit, and it marked him as a protest singer.

Mishy Harman (narration): Meir, the tractor driver from Kibbutz Mishmarot, was nicknamed *Ha'tzanchan Ha'mezamer*, the 'Singing Paratrooper,' and thrust into the limelight.

Tirtza Ariel: Right away they make a record out of this song, and for a while, it was running in the radio even.

Mishy Harman (narration): What ensued was a copyright battle between Naomi and Meir, which was ultimately resolved, mainly in Naomi's favor. Meir was an unlikely hero. You see, he wasn't the anti-occupation, rabble-rousing prophet he was later made out to be.

Shachar Ariel: He loved Hebrew, and he loved this place, he loved Israel, and he loved the people.

Tirtza Ariel: He was just a member of a *kibbutz*. Nobody.

Mishy Harman (narration): But suddenly, with this song, he was no longer nobody. Just like Naomi and Shuly, Meir had become a symbol.

And he didn't like that.

Tirtza Ariel: We ran out of the country because of this song, because they start to calling him the 'Parachuter Singer,' and he couldn't stand it!

Shachar Ariel: He didn't like people tagging him to this or that movement. He wasn't a left-winger, he

wasn't a right-winger. He was talking about people. It was always about the people. And about feelings.

Tirtza Ariel: And we went for almost three years to United States, just so they forget the 'Parachuter Singer.'

Mishy Harman (narration): But in the early '70s Meir came back and launched a long career as a singer-songwriter.

In 1999, he died of a tick-bite-induced fever. Nowadays, he has an almost cult-like following.

Shachar Ariel: Many consider him to be a prophet. He definitely saw beyond his time. A lot of people call him the Israeli Bob Dylan, and now some people call Dylan the American Meir Ariel, you know?

Mishy Harman (narration): Naomi died of cancer in 2004, feted and celebrated in every possible way.

Lely Shemer: My mother is, I think, one of the very important figures in the Israeli culture. Her life were parallel to the life of the country.

Mishy Harman (narration): So while neither Naomi nor Meir are around with us today, their two songs live on. And even now - half-a-century after the dramatic month that birthed them both - they represent two different Israels. There's the idealized one, the one that hopes and yearns. And then there's the realist one. The one that says 'no, things here are tough, and painful.' It isn't exactly right or left. Both Naomi and Meir somehow eluded those political labels. But it does say something about who we want to be - pragmatists or dreamers.

Mishy Harman (narration): And that's our episode. Part Two of our Mixtape mini-series. Were going to pick up next episode with the 1978 version of the same festival that made *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* such a hit, *Festival Ha'Zemer Ve'Ha'Pizmon*. There, exactly eleven years after Shuly mesmerized the crowd, it was this guy's turn.

Yizhar Cohen: Alright, I'm Yizhar Cohen. Eh, what do you want my age, my shoe size, what do you want me to say? You just open the internet, you write

Yizhar Cohen and you read everything about me
[laughs]. It's easier.

Mishy Harman (narration): So by all means, go ahead and Google him, but be sure to tune in next time for an episode which is all about the Oriental, or Mizrachi music scene.

Till then, you can catch up on all our past episodes - in both English and Hebrew - on our site, on iTunes, and on any of the other main podcast platforms. Also, if you want help us grow and reach new listeners, please spread the word: Share your favorite episodes and stories on social media, tell your friends, your family and sign them up to our feed. As always, you can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. And, if you want to sponsor episodes of Israel Story, simply drop us a line at sponsor@prx.org.

Thanks to Pamela Lavitt, Dana Pruchno, Lori Ceyhun, Michael Garnett and Daniel Vital from the Seattle JCC. And to Elaine Cohen, Eric Segal and Esther Mazor at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades in Tenafly, New Jersey. Thanks also to Sheila Lambert, Hanoch Piven, Naomi Schneider, Esther Werdiger, Wayne Hoffman, Shiraz Ariel, Moti Zada, Abie Levy and David Broza.

This episode was recorded by Russell Castiglione and Josh Piel at the Subway Studios in New York, and by Adrian Lau at the Off Record Studios, also in New York. Yochai Maital and Shai Satran edited this episode, and our favorite Sela Waisblum mixed it all up.

All the original music throughout the episode, alongside the covers of *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* and *Yerushalayim Shel Barzel* were written, arranged and performed by our wonderful Mixtape band - Dotan Moshanov and Ari Wenig, together with Ruth Danon, Eden Djamchid and Ronnie Wagner-Schmidt.

Israel Story is brought to you by PRX - the Public Radio Exchange, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Our staff includes Yochai Maital, Shai Satran, Maya Kosover, Roe Gilron, Zev Levi, Ari Wenig, Hannah Barg, Rotem Zin, Judah Kauffman and Abby Neuschatz.

A very warm welcome to our newest cohort of interns, who began last week: Pola Lem, Yoshi Fields and Joel Shupack.

I'm Mishy Harman, and we'll be back very soon with Part Three of our mini-series... So till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

[End Song]

--- END ---