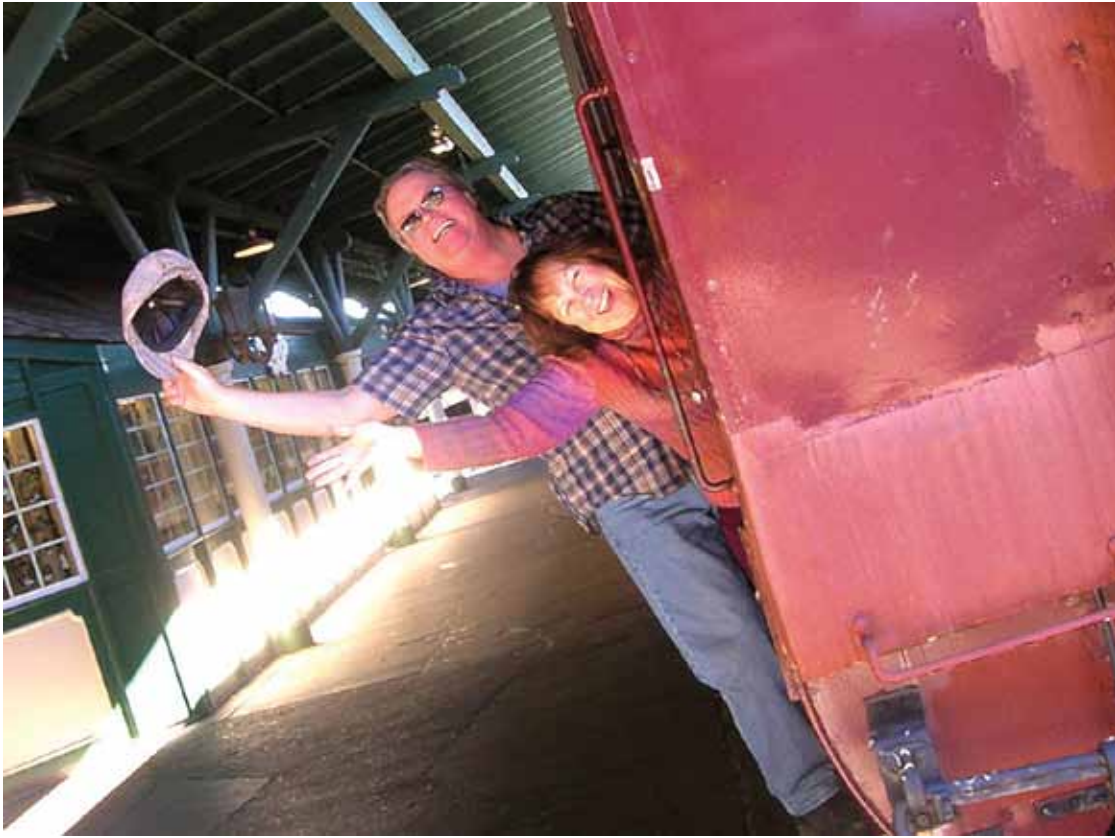


All Aboard: If You Love Yeshua

by Leah Feldman



Left: Garon and Joy Richey

Below: Garon plays inspiring worship music while Joy paints

Step into Music City's only Messianic congregation, Kol Dodi, and you're sure to spot the Richeys. Look for Garon behind the piano, infusing ancient Hebrew songs with the same seamless jazz he brought to collaborations with renowned artists David Clayton-Thomas of *Blood, Sweat and Tears*, and Carol Kaye. If the praise and worship is in full swing, you'll find Garon's wife, Joy, dancing with the women—blue eyes sparkling above a wide smile. "It's quite special to watch because she just gets *lost* in it," remarks a friend who teaches Hebraic dance at the congregation. "I think of her when people ask, 'Can I come to Kol Dodi even if I'm not Jewish?' I tell them, 'Oh, if you love Yeshua, please join us! We're one in Messiah.'"

A Gentile couple with a 30-year history in the evangelical church may seem like an unusual fit for a Messianic congregation. Not so, insists Larry Parker, assistant congregational leader at *Kol Dodi* (Hebrew for "voice of my beloved" from Song of Songs 2:8). "Not everyone who traveled with the Israelites was Jewish," he laughs. "The Richeys sought a stronger connection with Yeshua and found it by pursuing their Hebraic roots. When they came here, they came home."

Looking back, the couple sees that signs pointing them to the Messianic movement appeared soon after they came to faith in the early 1980s. At that time, they were working in California—Garon as a jazz musician, Joy as an art teacher and painter. Eager to grow in their faith, they attended different denominations. Everywhere they went, they

served; Garon led worship, and together they taught Bible studies and ministered to couples. But something wasn't clicking. "I felt a certain emptiness and longed for more fullness in our spiritual lives," Garon recalls.

In the mid-1990s, they met a Messianic believer who "introduced us to the Jewishness of who Yeshua was," recounts Joy. "She spoke with us about how the Holy Days relate to Yeshua, about prayer shawls, the Shofar, and the centrality of Torah. We came to believe that our lives were incomplete, because the expression and experience of Jewishness was not in the Christian church at all. As far as I could remember, the word *Torah* was never even used."

A stirring to pursue their Hebrew roots and a deepening love for Israel intensified as Yeshua spoke to them through their art. "A love of the Jewish people was pouring out of me and I didn't even see it," muses Joy, who occasionally lead worship with Garon by painting a blank canvas while he played piano. "I found myself creating images from the Old Testament, such as Ruth gleaning in the fields and David playing his harp." Garon, a songwriter, began using the Hebrew names for God in his lyrics. "People at the church hadn't heard that before and it seemed to minister to them in a different way," he notes. "I was bringing not only a jazz element to worship but also to teaching."

Although they longed to visit Israel—a desire born of their newfound realization that "to love Yeshua means to love His people," says Joy—Nashville was their next destination. In

2006, they moved. "It was a total step of faith," recalls Garon. "Our friends thought we were crazy."

With no job and few possessions (except Garon's piano and Joy's easel), they drove their camper across the country, landing in Tennessee during a summer of record heat. "It was scary," Joy admits. "I felt like we were standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon. Yet we knew the Lord was with us. He showed us over and over that He was guiding us—we just didn't know where or why."

Turning to the Yellow Pages to find a church, they sifted through more than 1,000 listings, finally settling on The Vineyard in Nashville. Little

did they know that the church shared their passion for the Messianic movement, and that the pastor's recent trip to Israel had inspired him to hold Friday night Shabbat services.

Six months later, when Kol Dodi's Messianic Rabbi Ken Alpern spoke at The Vineyard during Shabbat, the Richeys realized their church was a stepping stone. They decided it was time to join a Messianic congregation. "In moments like that, the Gospel shines," maintains Rabbi Ken. "The Kingdom is much bigger than just one congregation, and when the larger Body appreciates one another and works together, the world sees that Yeshua is Messiah. The Lord bestows a blessing when brothers and sisters dwell in unity."

That blessing fell on the Richeys the moment they walked into Kol Dodi. "We sensed a oneness with God's people like nothing we'd ever felt before," remembers Joy. Blue, gold and purple flags quickened her artistic spirit, as did the ebullience of Hebraic dance. Garon also felt deeply confirmed, especially when he saw the Torah at the front of the sanctuary. "I've always believed that if you're not hungry for the Word of God, you aren't hungry for Him. The Word of God was lifted up higher than anything

else," he enthuses. When I saw that, I knew this was *my* congregation."

Since that day, they've been a steady presence at Kol Dodi. Garon organizes special music and Joy assists wherever needed. "They're incredible servants," says Larry Parker. "When anything needs to be done, they do it with a loving, sweet spirit—whether it's welcoming newcomers, passing out programs, or tidying up after service."

Meanwhile, they hone their crafts professionally. Garon performs locally and publishes music through his company, Instant Relief Music, and Joy sells her paintings commercially.

"Ironically, while reading a copy of *The Messianic Times*, we learned about Leah Ross, a Nashville talent agent who represents Messianic and Christian artists," says Garon. "We clicked immediately," adds Joy. "Leah told us how much she loves the concept of blending art and music together, and signed us on. Thank the Lord, she's helped us expand our ministry to an audience beyond our congregation."

"And now that we've discovered our Messianic roots, we feel free to serve Yeshua and His people like never before," Garon rejoices. "Finally, God is out of the box." **MT**

