



**JEWES ON BIKES:** From left: Joe Silver, Richard Parkus, Nigel Kersh, Gary King, Natalie Jaque, Richard Adler, David Kersh and Rabbi Anna Gerrard

## Eight get on their bikes for journey of discovery

BY JASON STEIN

A SIX-part documentary series, following a group of Jewish bikers crossing Canada and America in remembrance of the Holocaust, began on Sky Atlantic last night.

*Jews on Bikes* (Thursdays, 8pm) follows eight British bikers as they joined Jewish biker clubs from across the America, Canada and other countries for 'The Ride to Remember', as well as embarking on their own five-week adventure.

Rabbi Anna Gerrard, Gary King, David Kersh, Richard Adler, Richard Parkus, Joe Silver, Nigel Kersh and Natalie Jaque took part in the cross-country voyage in June 2012.

"We shared experiences that an individual could never dream of taking part in," Rabbi Gerrard said.

The outreach director for Liberal Judaism was an integral part of the journey, but she didn't actually ride a motorbike.

"The producers were keen to have a rabbi alongside the bikers so I was perched behind Gary on his bike," she explained.

"I think the idea coming from the producers was that I would rekindle the Judaism in certain bikers and encourage their religiousness, but that notion of being 'reborn' is quite a Christian idea.

"Most of the riders identified as cultural Jews, which is a valid identity in itself"

The voyage begins with the riders meeting in Ottawa before they travel to Toronto for The Ride to Remember.

From there, plans to bike towards Niagara Falls were scuppered by adverse weather, so a lengthy bus journey was forced upon the weary travellers.

The gang-of-eight made it to the famous tourist attraction, but not without some fall-out along the way — something that Gary, a safety trainer for London Underground, puts down to "one or two differences of opinions".

New York followed for the annual 'Celebrate Israel' parade.

"The scale of Jewish life in America was mind-blowing," Rabbi Gerrard, who is also head of the Gloucestershire Liberal Jewish Community, recalled.

"Fifth Avenue was shut down for the parade, which is incredible when you really think about it.

"The diversity and high-profile nature of the religion is very different to the UK."

And Gary was in agreement with the rabbi. The 54-year-old Londoner said: "I was surprised by how cool it was to be Jewish.

"The American people discuss the religion in a much more open manner and we would ride around with the Star of David on us. I was really proud to be Jewish."

Following the sojourn in New York was a trip down the East Coast that ended in Florida via Washington and North Carolina, as well as more inward Bible Belt states, such as Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia.

Rabbi Gerrard left the gang in Washington, but not before a personal journey of her own in North Carolina.

"Each of us had a personal portion of the documentary where we left the group and were filmed on our own," she recalled.

"Mine was when I visited my father, Peter, in North Carolina.

"The experience was one I will never forget and, thankfully, I have stayed in great touch with the rest of the gang.

"We watched the first episode with our families, but we will be having a group viewing next week."

Gary's personal journey came to a head at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Holocaust Memorial of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

"I was in tears after going through some of the exhibits," he said. "I've been to Yad Vashem, but I was incredibly moved by what I experienced in America, especially the giant outstretched arm monument in Miami."

These kinds of moments were interspersed with more light-hearted happenings including a personal highlight for Gary in Georgia.

"We attended a Harley Davidson rally and I ended up mud-wrestling with three bikini clad models covered in chocolate sauce," he exclaimed. "I hope the sauce was kosher."

# Avi got strung along by his neighbour's mandolin

BY SIMON YAFFE

THE mandolin may not be held in as high esteem as the guitar or violin — but Avi Avital is aiming to change that.

The Israeli, best known for his renditions of Baroque and folk songs, many of which were originally written for other instruments, spends much of his time on tour.

He told the *Jewish Telegraph* from France, where he played with the Orchestre National de Montpellier at the Opéra Comédie on Wednesday: "The mandolin is such a sweet instrument."

"There are magical things about it — it has a lot of tone and colours that many people are not too familiar with.

"It is a baroque instrument — similar to the balalaika in Russia or the bouzouki in Greece.

"The first instrument mentioned in the Bible is a string instrument which was similar to the mandolin."

Avi, who was raised in Beersheba to Moroccan-born parents, first became enamoured of music when he was eight.

He said: "We had a lot of music at home, all different kinds of genres because Israel is such a melting pot of cultures.

"When I was eight I heard a neighbour playing the mandolin and I wanted to do the same.

"My neighbour played in the local youth orchestra and I joined it."

Raised in a traditional Masorti



MAGICAL SOUND: Avi Avital

family, they kept Shabbat and the high holy days.

He went on to study at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and, after completing his army service, studied at the Cesare Pollini Conservatory of Music in Padova, Italy.

Avi's time there was sponsored by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation.

"I wanted to expand my musical education," he recalled.

"Italy is a very natural place for artists to be, so it wasn't too much of a culture shock moving there from Israel. I was surrounded by art."

Much of the focus of Avi's work in Italy is from mandolin

transcriptions of violin pieces to those originally written with his instrument in mind.

Avi based himself in Pavia, near Milan, for eight years as it gave him the opportunity to perform around Europe.

He has since performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Centre, the Forbidden City Concert Hall and with the Berlin Philharmonie, as well as performing with a number of international orchestras and chamber groups.

Avi released a collection of sonatas and concertos, *Bach*, last year.

Three years ago he received a Grammy nomination for his recording of Dorman's *Mandolin Concerto* for solo mandolin and string orchestra in the category of best solo performance with orchestra.

In addition to the Grammy nomination, Avi has also won Israel's Aviv Competition and received Germany's ECHO Prize.

Avi said: "My role as artist is to share the experience with an audience.

"I have had the chance to go to such places as the Philippines and Georgia — places I never would have visited.

"I love having the opportunity to get to know cultures and the local people."

On November 22, he will perform with the Geneva Camerata at King's Place, London, as part of the Bach Unwrapped Festival.

www.aviavital.com

## Beverley likes to put shuls in the picture

BY DAVID SAFFER

BEVERLEY Jane Stewart is a Jewish artist of some repute.

Renowned for synagogue paintings, her works concentrate on Jewish identity in a multicultural British society.

"From the age of nine, I wanted to be an artist," she said. "My inspirations are from life, you create things from what you see and interpret them.

"It's very difficult to do something from someone's eyes."

Beverley grew up in Clapham Common and graduated in education and art at London University.

Elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Beverley made a mark at university.

"For me it was about the relationship between buildings, people and how we fit into them," she said.

An Artist Book Club award and Evening Standard 'London at Play' gong came her way before a change in stance two decades ago.

"My synagogue was in Brixton," she recalled. "It was closing down, so I wanted to have a memory of sitting in shul with my mum.

"From there, I questioned what was going on outside and now it's about the social history, the inside-out and what happens."

More recently, her work has



SHUL ART: Right, artist Beverley-Jane Stewart and, above, her interpretation of Blackpool Synagogue

developed beyond buildings as she links synagogues with local history and Anglo-Jewry.

A commissioned painting on 125 years of the United Synagogue brought numerous publications, including a cover for former Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks' book *Community of Faith*.

Work has featured in *Building Jerusalem* by author Sharman Kadish, an etching is of Alderney Road Jewish Cemetery by Rabbi Bernard Susser and her 'East End and Tottenham Home for Incurables' was featured in *Jewish London*.

Limited edition prints, CD covers, cards and centenary celebrations have proved popular.



And her latest work centres around Plymouth and how the synagogue was founded.

"It was a time when Cromwell allowed Jews into Britain," she enthused. "Jews were ship peddlers.

"I'm tracking their perseverance in maintaining a Jewish identity."

## TV JEWS

IRANIAN-Jewish actor Shaun Toab stars as terrorist Majid Javani in *Homeland* on Sunday (10pm) on Channel 4.

Filmmaker Ilan Ziv explores the historical evidence of the exiles of the Jews after their defeat in Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman Empire in *Searching for Exile - Truth or Myth* on Sunday (9pm) on BBC4.

## Daniel will play Olympic hero

DANIEL RADCLIFFE is to play Lord Coe in a film about his rivalry with fellow Olympian Steve Ovett.

The project, entitled *Gold*, will see the *Harry Potter* star as Lord Coe during the runners' famous rivalry in the run-up to the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

Filming will begin in the UK and Russia in April.