

Golden News

Exploring faith with a little bluegrass

Shalom Feivel and Rocky Mountain Jewgrass play Passover at Acoustic Alley

[By Meredith Knight](#)

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Shalom Feivel and Rocky Mountain Jewgrass band members, left to right, Saul Rosenthal, Gail deVore, Sandy Reay and Ben Cohen combines traditional bluegrass-style playing with Jewish themes.

Sandy Reay is "in it for the food."

"I'm a gastronomic Jew since the day I was born," Reay sings. The song, "I'm in it for the food," is a tribute to her father who used the phrase to describe how he viewed the faith as a non-practicing Jew married to a practicing one.

"I describe myself religiously as a devout agnostic," Reay, the bass player for Rocky Mountain Jewgrass, said.

"The other three members are far more devout and religious than I am, but they let me play with them," she joked.

Shalom Feivel and Rocky Mountain Jewgrass is the brainchild of Saul Rosenthal, a public relations specialist by day.

The band will play April 11 at Acoustic Alley, the music series performed at Miners Alley Playhouse, 1224 Washington Ave.

Rosenthal is a cantor, the leader of musical liturgy, at his temple. He experiments with combining Jewish liturgical music with more modern styles. One day he and his band mates started playing a traditional song with a bluegrass style.

"We kind of looked at each other and said, "Hmm, maybe we've got something here," Rosenthal said.

The band has been playing together for the last two years.

"Stylistically we try to hew to bluegrass style ... The Jewish piece is content," said mandolin and banjo player Ben Cohen.

The band parodies traditional Jewish themes, as in the song "Mah Nishtana" and traditional bluegrass songs, as in their own version of "Home on the Range."

In "Mah Nishtana" Rosenthal changes the traditional four questions that children recite at the Seder dinner on the first nights of Passover, to the questions he thinks modern Jews are really asking.

Instead of "Why do we eat matza instead of bread? Why do we dip greens in salt water?" Rosenthal asks, "Why can't the children sit still? Why can't we drink Cabernet?" Traditionally, Mogen David or Manischewitz wine, which are very sweet, are drunk during the dinner.

"We try to make a connection to Judaism accessible through music," Rosenthal said about Rocky Mountain Jewgrass' concerts.

Music lovers do not have to be Jewish or very knowledgeable about the religion to appreciate the humor, according to the band.

"An act like (Rocky Mountain) Jewgrass that takes the traditional bluegrass genre, but then mixes it with this ethnic humor and experience is really a unique listening experience," said Donald Davidoff, Acoustic Alley Music Director. "There's really no other band quite like it."

Details

Rocky Mountain Jewgrass will play at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 11, at Acoustic Alley, which is part of the acoustic music series at Miners Alley Playhouse, 1224 Washington Ave., Suite 200. Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door. Acoustic Alley is a nonprofit dedicated to bring quality music to the Foothills. Visit <http://www.acousticalley.org/index.htm> for more information on future concerts and to buy tickets. You can listen to samples of Rocky Mountain Jewgrass songs like "Thank God I'm a Jewish Boy" online at www.oySongs.com.