

Exposing cancel culture

How to stop BDS in the arts



BDS SUPPORTERS protest outside the Tel Aviv venue where the 2019 Eurovision song contest final was about to take place. (Ammar Awad/Reuters)

• NEVILLE TELLER

In her new book *Artists Under Fire*, Lana Melman demonstrates how the international movement known as Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) pursues its undeclared aim of delegitimizing and, eventually, eliminating Israel.

BDS, having defined Israel as an apartheid state, maintains that the movement is merely a pressure group advocating the methods once used against apartheid South Africa. It thus provides a respectable cover under which frank antisemites and haters of Zionism can pursue their demonization of Israel. Because BDS is selective in what it says to particular audiences, it attracts support worldwide from people who respond to one aspect or another of its message without appreciating its underlying purpose.

Melman is concerned particularly with how BDS disseminates and promotes its objectives within the cultural and performing arts sectors. In uncovering the pressures, the dirty tricks and the downright lies the movement uses to dissuade artists with international reputations from performing in Israel, as well as whipping up protests against Israeli artists performing abroad, Melman also provides a picture of how the movement operates across the board, detailing each of the boycott, divestment and sanctions aspects of its activities.

For 20 years, Lana Melman was an executive, writer and producer in the movie and TV industry, working for Co-

lumbia, Warner Brothers, Paramount and CBS. Since 2011, she has been a leader in the fight against BDS's anti-Israel cultural boycott campaign. Having founded Liberate Art Inc, an organization dedicated to countering the BDS movement, she has worked with agents and lawyers representing more than 1,000 artists targeted by anti-Israel activists.

"The BDS campaign against Israel," she writes, "seeks to use the celebrity of artists as a tool to destroy Israel and stir up hate against Jews worldwide." Her counter-BDS activities, carried out over so many years, have provided Melman with a wealth of unassailable evidence – facts, figures and above all names – which she produces for all to evaluate. Her research is impeccable. At the rear of the volume, she supplies her readers with a 27-page section called Endnotes, containing no less than 318 references that substantiate all she says about BDS.

IN THE course of the book, she names some celebrities who subscribe wholeheartedly to the BDS movement and actively support its campaigns; she mentions certain artists who intended to appear in Israel, but succumbed to BDS pressure and canceled their appearances; and she lists the numerous world-famous artists who refuse to be browbeaten or frightened into canceling visits to Israel and performing before Israeli audiences.

She counts the 2019 Eurovision contest, transmitted from Tel Aviv to the world, one of the major anti-BDS successes. In the lead-up to the event,

Melman records, BDS petitioned the Eurovision organization not to hold the event in Israel. Unsuccessful in that, the movement tried persuading participating nations not to attend. When that also failed, they turned to the TV and radio companies, and urged them not to carry the show. "And, of course," writes Melman, "they petitioned international artists to cancel."

The result? Singers from 41 countries participated, not a single artist canceled, and the show was transmitted by TV and radio networks worldwide. "BDS's efforts to thwart the event were a complete failure."

Eurovision 2019 represented a major victory against BDS. On the other hand, Melman is able to chalk up a string of successes by BDS in persuading performing artists to cancel planned performances in Israel. "Never underestimate the intensity of the harassment leveled against artists who want to perform for their Israeli fans," she writes, explaining how and why some artists finally succumb to the pressure.

"When they are in the crosshairs, artists often feel isolated and overwhelmed. That goes for their representatives, as well." BDS intimidation can extend to actual threats against the life of an artist. Melman provides several instances and tells us that one lead singer of a heavy metal band canceled a performance saying: "I won't risk my life in order to perform in Israel."

Redressing the balance, she devotes a whole chapter to artists who support Israel, providing numerous examples of artists of international status who refuse to be cowed, treat BDS campaigns with contempt and regularly include Israel in their tours or support Israel in their public statements. Just a few among those named are Grammy winner Ziggy Marley, Kiss front-man Gene Simmons, musician Alan Parsons, singer Michael Bubl , entertainer Jay Leno, American comedian Bill Maher, singer and actress Vanessa Williams, actor and director Michael Douglas, and acclaimed movie stars Helen Mirren, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Kelsey Grammer and Minnie Driver.

In this book, Melman does more than expose the methodology and the ultimate purpose behind BDS. By countering falsehoods disseminated by the movement and laying out facts and figures, she urges everyone, including BDS followers, to question its motives and intentions. Essentially an activist, Melman provides a step-by-step action plan at the end of each chapter for helping to counter it. *Artists Under Fire* is more than informative and thought-provoking, it is positively stimulating. ■

Coming with an idea

Journey to the Holy Land turns out to be pilgrimage fraught with setbacks

• ARI BAR-OZ L. BURROWS

Some books you don't read as much as you climb aboard and ride.

From the first page of *The Flying Blue Meanies: Surviving the Bipolar '60s in America and Israel*, you're buckled in and barreling down a highway faster than the law or common sense allows. Then, the benefit of seat belts removed, the only things separating you from the pavement are a motorcycle helmet and a sense of balance. And that sense of balance – physical, emotional, psychosexual and spiritual – is going to be sorely tested.

Ilan Chaim's book is a coming-of-age story as well as an end-of-an-age story. It's ostensibly the tale Michael Spikov, a Jewish teenager from the suburbs of Philadelphia and his struggle to find love, adventure and meaning as he tries to remake his life in Israel. However, as it takes place predominantly in the late '60s and early '70s, it's also the story of a dynamic and unsettling milieu, although it is smartly left to the reader to write the epoch's obituary.

The book does much to contradict the witticism, "If you remember the '60s, you weren't there." Spikov was there for it all and (more or less) remembers it all. For anyone old enough to have lived through those times in all their brittle insanity, there are plenty of reminders on every page to jog your own faded memories.

More than LSD, free love, and rock and roll combined, it was war that defined the '60s in which Michael comes of age. It is largely the conflict of hating America's adventures in an unjust war of its own making, and loving Israel for its military successes that in many ways opens our hero to a more complicated, fuller life.

In the US, Vietnam and the threat of being drafted created the so-called generation gap. There have always been differences between the generations but this was different. American fathers who served willingly in World War II were often hard-pressed, at least in the war's early days, to understand why their sons weren't motivated as they had been by patriotism when duty called.

In Israel, the 1967 Six Day War changed not only the map of Israel but the hearts and minds of Jews throughout the world. The changes generated from that conflict electrify the protagonist of *Blue Meanies*, as it did so many at the time. More than merely thrilling, it gave a sense of meaning, purpose and muscle to the suburban Zionist platitudes of American Jewish youth. An 18-year-old hippie could be a pacifist in his parents' house, but when it's his ancestral home, everything changes.

Yet, Michael's journey from the suburbs to the Holy Land turns out to be a pilgrimage fraught with setbacks, disappointments, injuries and emotional strain. Without revealing too much, suffice it to say that the FBI, the Jewish Defense League, the Israeli Foreign Ministry and a variety of well-meaning but rather psychologically flabby psychiatrists get in the way.

What does not get in the way is sexual modesty. Michael is a nearly insatiable, priapic adventurer. It's not just Michael, it's the times and the influence of music upon them.

These were years when lyrics were more than rhymes to string the notes together, they were anthems and words to live by. One essential set lyrics that plays a large part in the story belongs to Stephen Stills: "If you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with."

It's easy to criticize such thin philosophy with the benefit of a half-century's hindsight, yet for a wide swath of the younger population – the hero of our book included – it was the zeitgeist. In fact, for a brief historical moment, musical icons sang bumper-sticker instructions for life that were good enough to base a life on by virtue of nothing more than the icon's predilection for marijuana and long hair.

If that sounds like a curmudgeon's take on foibles of the past,



it is only because the foibles of the modern age have become too small to deserve comment. Today, icons have been reduced to influencers and manifestos have shrunk to 280 tweeted characters.

If anything, *Meanies* reflects a time of greater seriousness of purpose, no matter how silly the conclusions drawn during those years might appear today. It is here, where I wanted more from the book.

What drew Michael so strongly to certain aspects of his Judaism? What motivated him to find meaning in the newly born Israel? Was it simply a product of his home life, large parts of which he rejected? It seems that when Michael tries to explain to himself what his motivations are, there are deeper questions that need to be answered.

Michael's journey, after all, is a search for meaning... and sex, but the need for sex is self-evident; the need for meaning is often self-generated.

These aren't just questions for our protagonist, they're questions for everyone who has immigrated to Israel or has entertained the thought of immigrating. And while what follows is not an answer, it provides some thoughts around which to address the issue.

For a moment, let's forget the geopolitics of Israel and pigeon-hole the millennia of Jewish history. Try to think for a moment in a vacuum in which the only question being addressed is the "Why?" of the Jewish world's interest in Israel.

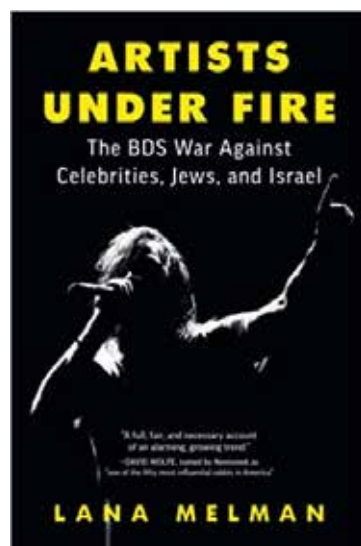
In that very narrow context, is it possible that one of the reasons Israel is such an intense place to live is that the 30% of the population who came here, came here with an idea in mind? That they came for an ideal? Not just an idea, but an ideal.

How many of those millions were on the verge of killing themselves, as Michael briefly was, before they decided to salvage their lives with aliyah? How many immigrants had run out of options? How many were desperate to imbue their lives with meaning and found that meaning in the modern State of Israel?

The book doesn't answer those questions but it sharpens them in a way few other recent stories have done. Although, there's a far better lyric to sum up the book than "love the one you're with." If anything, that distinction goes to the Grateful Dead: "What a long strange trip it's been." ■

A MAN takes up during the 420 Hippy Hill festival, as marijuana enthusiasts mark the annual but informal cannabis holiday at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, in April. (Illustrative of the wild 1960s; Carlos Barria/Reuters)

ARTISTS UNDER FIRE
By Lana Melman
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THE FLYING BLUE MEANIES
SURVIVING THE BIPOLAR '60S IN AMERICA AND ISRAEL
By Ilan Chaim
314 pages; \$15

