

# Bagels and Biscuits dishes up a soulful first album

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Musician Stefanie Posner's favorite moment of 2017 was when she stood on-stage singing Hanukkah songs at the Cascades Amphitheater with her band, Bagels and Biscuits. Looking out at a crowd bedazzled in Christmas hats and sweaters, she felt a sense of unity rippling outwards as the audience bobbed their heads and contributed their voices to the jubilee.

"That concept of people of all different faiths appreciating our music is amazing to me, and it's what I really wanted most," says Posner. "It's to bring our culture out there so people can see we're not so different. Music is the language for all of us. We all speak it and love it, and we're all after a good time and good love."

Posner says she loves the sound of her cello the most and credits teachers Eric Edburg and Amit Peled for her training. She listens to bluegrass, soul, and old southern rock, and in addition to playing cello, uses a guitar strap so that she can stand while playing with Bagels and Biscuits. The band will release their first album on Jan. 6.

Posner remembers when she first heard the instrument played when a friend asked her if she'd like to see their new musical toy.

"I thought she said Jello," laughs Posner. "I remember seeing the shine off the varnish, the smell of the resin, and watching the strings vibrate and I thought it was the coolest thing ever."

When it came time for her to pick an instrument in school, she convinced her mother that the cello was the only one for her. Posner soaked up all the knowledge she could until she surpassed her teacher's abilities and sought out private lessons. She attended the Baltimore School of the Arts for high school, and earned a degree in music from Goucher College. Her career took her towards sales and marketing, however, and for a while she didn't play.

"My life revolves around music," says Posner. "I can tell you what year things happened just by listening to a song. It touches my soul in a way that I find extremely moving, and even when I wasn't playing I felt like something was missing."

In 2009, an unexpected layoff propelled her towards Tallahassee and allowed her to follow her passion for Jewish education at Temple Israel. Posner began working as a school administrator for the pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade program.

Eventually, the position expanded



Bagels & Biscuits will release their first album on Jan. 6. DANIEL LOCKENBACH

into the role of Education and Music Director as Posner stepped in to co-direct the adult and children's choirs. For the past seven years, she has felt an enormous sense of pride in watching how invested the parents and community is in the children's choirs and the music.

"Sometimes you'll have students who are there that may not necessarily love it, so you have to try and find that moment for the child where they achieve something," describes Posner. "You get excited with them even if it's the smallest thing and talk to them about how it will lead to something even bigger and better."

When she and former youth group leader Brian Pelc joined forces to bring more instruments to the congregation, they discovered a lot of talented members in their community. Inspired to start an ensemble, they began searching for the common denominator between their Jewish faith and Southern locale — concluding it to be food— and arrived the name Bagels & Biscuits for their new venture.

Members Alex Molina, Lee Istrail and Howard Rubin round out the ensemble. Posner says they started out providing liturgical music for services, but soon were writing and arranging their own original music. Playing at the Union for Reform Judaism Biennial convention, however, was a serious turning point when they decided it was time to start putting together an album.

"It's just evolved into this beautiful, musical, soulful space, and it's like family," says Posner. "The first time I heard Joe Williams play the drum part to 'Anim Z'Miroi,' I just about fell out of my

chair. I thought, 'this is what I've waited for my whole life.' It just made everything come together."



The album cover for Bagels and Biscuits' first album. DISCMAKERS

## If you go

**What:** Bagels and Biscuits Album Release Party

**When:** 7-10 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 6

**Where:** Temple Israel, 2215 Mahan Drive

**Cost:** Admission is free

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-877-3517, RSVP to [educator@templeisraelth.org](mailto:educator@templeisraelth.org), or visit <http://bagelsandbiscuits.com>

chair. I thought, 'this is what I've waited for my whole life.' It just made everything come together."

In terms of style, Posner describes the band's influences as eclectic at best, spanning from Southern bluesy and classical Jewish tunes. Over the sum-

mer they recorded their first album, "B'tayavon," translated as the Hebrew equivalent of French's bon appetit, and blended their creative processes with support from sound engineer Fred Chester.

Posner says Pelc and Istrail provided the majority of the lyrics for this endeavor and would come to the group with an idea for a melody or riff that they would then work together to grow. She remained at the ready to provide her cello chops and jumped in to correct any Hebrew language errors so that everything was pronounced correctly when sung.

"This album has been a labor of love," says Posner. "This is our first time we've all recorded together and every piece of music on it is different and interesting. It's not like any Jewish music that I've heard before and I'm really proud of what these guys have done."

Standouts include the soulful "Tzur Mishelo," which ruminates on being thankful for your food and leaving enough for the rest of the world, as well as the back to back songs, "On the Move" followed by "Ner Tamid," which follows Pelc's story of his family escaping the Holocaust. The lighthearted "Koogole Earth" remains Posner's favorite, however, as it plays on the phrase "Google Earth" and tells the creation story through a favorite Jewish dish, kugel.

Recording the album was completely crowdfunding, and Posner is grateful to the local congregants and supporters around the U.S. that wanted to hear their original Jewish music come to fruition.

The album release party will take place at Temple Israel from 7-10 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 6, and Posner says attendees can look forward to plenty of biscuits, plenty of bagels, shirts and CDs for sale, and some new songs, too. She says the band is also happy to provide chord and sheet music so churches and synagogues alike can share their message.

"Whole movements have been pushed along with a simple melody," said Posner. "We want to change the world for the better, and being Jewish, that concept of tikkun olam, or repairing the world, is at the heart and soul of what we do. We're building interfaith community, sharing friendships, helping each other, and reaching out through music."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).