



December 2020



A Refreshingly Real Picture of Israel

Israel Story is a radio show, podcast and live show production outfit dedicated to telling the story of a diverse and more nuanced Israel. We attempt to overcome borders – both ideological and physical – between Israel and the world, by presenting human-interest stories that profile a broad spectrum of Israelis. Our hope, ultimately, is to promote greater awareness of, and interest in, the complexities of modern Israeli society.

Modeled after Chicago Public Media's *This American Life*, our show seeks to portray the intricacies of Israeli culture and showcase its rich plurality. We have found that the Israel people love, as well as the Israel people hate, is – more often than not – an imaginary place. The goal of the show is, therefore, to tell the stories of a 'real' Israel. Stories that are much more complicated and interesting than the usual coverage the country receives (coverage which typically only leads to further ignorance and animosity). Consequently, *Israel Story* is not concerned with Bibi or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It does not focus on the threat of Iranian bombs or Security Council resolutions.



Instead, our primary goal is to amplify and humanize voices that are rarely heard on the airwaves: to tell long-form tales by, and about, regular Israelis.

As avid believers in the power of storytelling, we hope that our radio show offers a fresh way for Jews and non-Jews around the world to connect, and reconnect, to Israel. After all, once we hear a compelling personal narrative – whether it is touching or humorous, dramatic or illuminating – we begin to empathize, and it becomes much harder to hate. The ‘other’ swiftly becomes a person. A person with a story.

Through our episodes, live shows and educational outreach, we strive to find new ways of engaging listeners and introducing them to the vibrancy of life in Israel. As we look ahead to 2021, with a growing team and a growing appetite, we wish not only to remain the world’s leading podcast about Israel, but rather to expand our reach and explore additional storytelling mediums as well.

Israel Story: The World’s Most Listened-To Jewish Podcast



Our first English episode went live on August 18th, 2014 and – in the six-and-a-half years since – we have released over one hundred episodes and specials.

Our listenership has steadily grown from an audience of twelve who tuned in to our first-ever episode (the four founders’ partners and doting parents), to upwards of 150,000 unique monthly downloads today, making us the largest Jewish podcast in the world. We reach new ears every day – through high-profile collaborations, distribution, marketing campaigns and press (see, for instance [this New York Times profile of the show](#), when we just launched). All in all, more than three million people have downloaded episodes since we began the project (in addition to hundreds of thousands of streamers and tens of millions of radio listeners in the US, Israel, Australia, South Africa and elsewhere).

Our listeners hail from 194 countries, with approximately 63% of them living in the States (in all fifty states), and another 14% in Israel. While roughly 82% of Israel Story listeners are Jewish, a growing number are not. In our most recent listener survey, conducted in March-April 2020, we discovered that we appeal to a wide distribution of ages, political convictions and denominational affiliations.

Interestingly, *Israel Story* is able to reach many who are not otherwise engaged with Israel: More than a third of our audience do not define themselves as Zionists, and a quarter have either never visited Israel, or haven't been in over a decade.

Roughly **11% of listeners** reported that *Israel Story* is their **only form of connection to Israel**, and they do not engage in any other Israel-related issues, debates, content or news. Furthermore, a full 57.8% of our listeners shared that *Israel Story* has changed their attitude or opinion about Israel, or made them think of Israel in a new light. We routinely receive messages to that effect from listeners around the world, such as this one, from a woman in Germany:

"I'm not Israeli or even Jewish, and not sure I even like Israel. But these episodes are captivating and engaging, and I always learn a lot. I really enjoy this podcast and can't recommend it enough."

The Ultimate Goal? Making An Impact



Statistics and numbers are not, of course, a goal in-and-of themselves. More than anything, reaching more people speaks to our deeper mission, which is to have as broad a reach, and as significant an impact, as possible. We are most genuinely excited when we receive emails and letters from people who tell us that we made a difference in their lives. For example, we cherish this note, from a listener in Hawaii:

"Your show gives me so much hope that I can, after all, find a place in the land that I love so much, and that there is a place for Jews like me in this crazy collective project we call Judaism."

Israel Story's 2020

This year has been extremely challenging for everyone. But early on in the pandemic, facing countless cancelations and economic hurdles, we made a decision to double-down and be as present as possible for our global community. At a time of isolation and distance, we figured, we were more needed than ever before.

In April 2020, at the height of the first wave, we stepped up and produced [IsraPalooza](#), a twelve-hour-long Zoom celebration of Israel's 72nd Independence Day. In what was a total experiment for us, we put together a day full of intimate interviews (with the likes of violinist **Itzhak Perlman**, cookbook author **Joan Nathan**, Nobel laureate

92.3%

of listeners stated that they believe *Israel Story* is "an honest broker" and "does a good job humanizing all kinds of people."

Our listeners are extremely loyal and dedicated, with more than **77%** either **never missing an episode** (50.8%) or **listening to nearly every episode** (26.7%).

99.3% said *they would recommend the show to a friend.*





Dan Shechtman and NBA legend **Amar'e Stoudemire**), live rock concerts by **David Broza** and **Shaanan Streett**, cooking classes and arts-and-crafts workshops. To our amazement, more than 10,000 people bought tickets, and thousands stayed online for the entire day!

We launched our members-only [Facebook "Super Fan" Community](#), which grew from roughly 200 members in January 2020 to more than 2200 in December 2020. During the early months of COVID, we hosted [weekly Facebook Live events](#) with some of the most memorable characters who have appeared on our show over the years. Thousands of fans around the world watched, and got to ask the guests their own questions directly.

In addition to all that, in 2020 we also...

- More than halved our inter-season break, and returned with a new season - Season Five - in June 2020, way ahead of schedule
- Pivoted our entire production plan and produced a seven-part COVID-19 miniseries - "[Alone, Together](#)" - which garnered tremendous enthusiasm and accolades around the world. Calling *Israel Story* a "life-saver to my soul," one listener wrote to us:



"Heading towards six months of COVID-19 in the United States, trying to keep an optimistic perspective is not so easy. Israel Story has added breath to resilience. Your beautifully-told stories are reminders that caring and commitment will get all of us 'home.'"

- Grew our audience every single month, remaining the no. 1 Jewish podcast in the world by a wide margin!
- Launched a [brand new website and logo](#), led dozens of Zoom events for communities around the world, ran virtual workshops and storytelling evenings, initiated our podcast consultancy services and much much more!



As you can see, 2020 ended up being a year of heightened activity, growth and expansion, despite the circumstances. And with your help, we hope to make 2021 even greater!



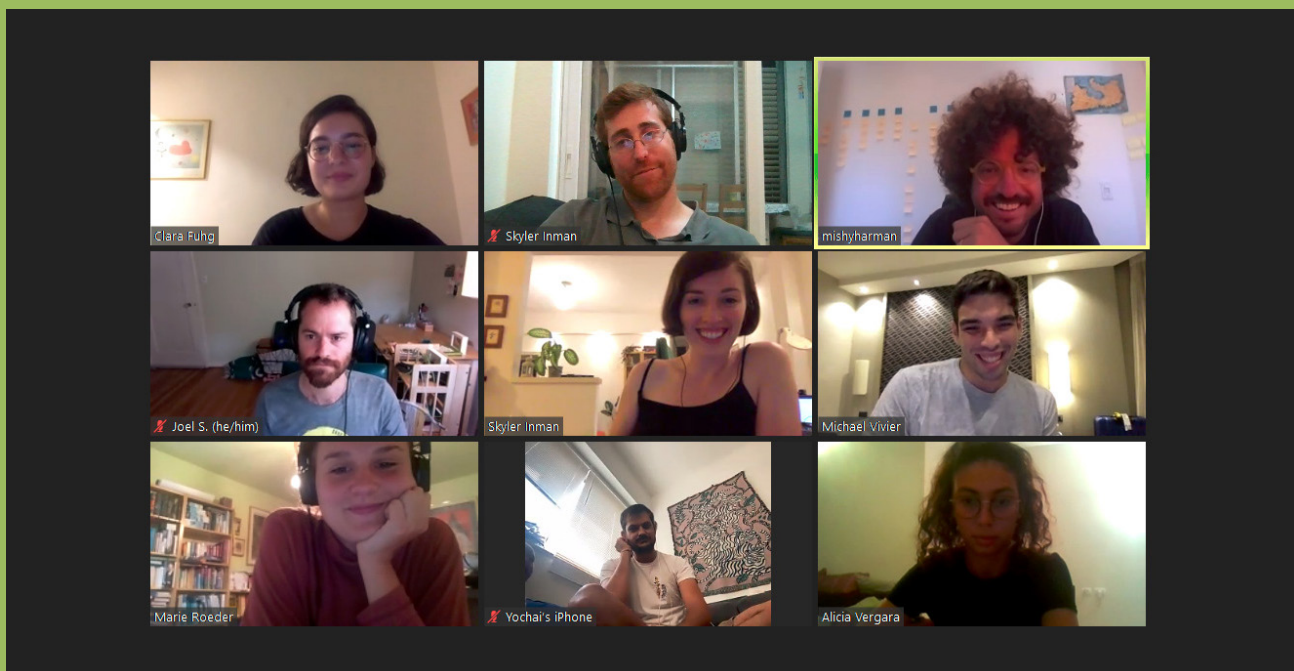
We Hope We Can Count On Your Support

One more milestone in 2020 was the creation of [The Friends of Israel Story](#), an IRS-approved 501(c)3 in the US. As a result, supporters can now receive tax-deductions for any contribution to the show.

Our Board of Directors, led by Sheila Lambert (former Board President of the JCC Manhattan and former Vice Chair of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College), Rabbi Joy Levitt (Executive Director of the JCC Manhattan) and Jeff Feig (a New York-based businessman, investor and philanthropist) is growing, helping us increase our fundraising efforts, and providing valuable guidance in our transition from a survival mode to one of strategic sustainability.

As 2020 comes to a close, we hope you choose to support our project, and join us on our magical storytelling of bringing Israel, and its story, to the world.

Support Us



Thank you!