

PROFILE Daniel Rome

Long before Full Circle Preschool became part of Ohavi Zedek, Green Mountain Shalom Preschool lived here. Originating in the early 1990s and confined to one classroom and the hours of 9:00 am to 2:00 pm (to accommodate twice-a-week Hebrew School classes), the program was headed by one teacher, Judy Kaplan Cross, a couple of paid aides, and a revolving group of retired OZ volunteers, including Ducky Donath, Rose Pels, Judy Hershberg, and the late Ellie Potash and Harriet Hand. Among the 3-and 4-year-olds enrolled over the years the school flourished was a little boy with big dark eyes named Daniel Rome. “I remember Daniel as a bright, sweet, cooperative child, happy to be there with other children and eager to learn,” said Judy Cross.

Today, at 30, Dan is back in the building, helping the congregation deal with overwhelming technological challenges due to the COVID virus. He upgraded the sound system in the sanctuary, under strict budgetary guidelines; designed and built an automated streaming system and brought everyone up to speed on Zoom. “I cannot imagine how we could have gotten through these past months of pandemic isolation as we created virtual and hybrid services for Shabbat and holidays without Dan Rome,” Rabbi Amy said. “With a smile and a generous spirit, Dan has been there for us, helping us to imagine, plan and implement the technology to make our sanctuary equipped for hybrid services and programs. It was way more complicated than most of us could have imagined,” she added, “and once the complexity became clear, we knew we needed expert help. Dan has been that expert for us.” In turn Dan says, “I’m happy to have reconnected to lend my professional skills to the community where I’ve grown up.” He is quick to acknowledge the assistance of Rich Berger, Deb Lashman and Joanna Grossman for their help in transforming the sanctuary’s technical setup.

Dan’s roots in Vermont are deep, going back to great-grandparents on his father’s side who lived in Rutland. His widowed paternal grandmother has resided in New Jersey for many years. His maternal grandparents, Barbara and the late Professor Alexander Rippa, came to Burlington in 1960, when Al joined the UVM faculty. Barbara, a retired math teacher, and her current partner, Marvin Glickstein, are OZ members. Dan’s parents, David Rome, a math teacher at Essex High School, and Dr. Diane Rippa, a private practitioner, have both recently retired. They are active members of the synagogue, where David serves as chair of the House Committee. Dan has one brother, Dr. Benjamin Rome, an internist and health policy researcher at Harvard Medical School. Ben and his wife, also a physician, are the parents of two small children. Dan and Ben grew up in Essex.

Dan graduated from Essex High School in 2009 and Brown University in 2013, where he earned a BA in Music with a focus in Computer Music and Multimedia. Primarily a saxophone player, he has gotten some local notoriety as one of Ohavi Zedek’s shofar blowers *extraordinaire*, as anyone who has attended High Holy Day services here can attest!

Since his return to Vermont after college, Dan has given saxophone lessons, performed with numerous bands, including Gnomedad and The Dead Shakers, and began collaborating with his friends and musical partners to create recording studios and capture the sounds of musical projects from Vermont and beyond. You can hear his saxophone featured on several songs from LA-based artist Channel Tres, as well as on Gnomedad and Dead Shakers recordings. He currently co-owns Future Fields Studios in downtown Burlington, where he has been producing, recording, mixing and mastering various musical projects.

In 2013 Dan found full-time employment at Soundtoys, a creative audio company in Burlington that primarily manufactures effects plug-ins (additional pieces of equipment that can be integrated into digital audio platforms to add nuance and ‘oomph’ to audio projects). Starting in tech support, he moved on to marketing and web design and rose to become Soundtoys’ artist relations and content coordinator. Though he learned a lot in five years, he says, he decided to abandon full-time job security in 2018 in favor of working there part-time and free-lancing, while trying to raise funds to get a recording studio off the ground.

At the beginning of 2019 Dan signed on as general manager for the band Moon Hooch. He spent many weeks on the road, oversaw major transitions in the band, and worked on everything from merch sales to tour planning to helping the band sign a new publishing deal. He also recorded, co-produced, mixed and arranged for the independent release of their latest studio album, “Live on Other Planets.” The scope of the job left him drained, with no time at all for a private life or for focusing on recording with other projects, although the gig kept him financially afloat for a year and taught him so much about the music industry. He remains great friends with the band members and still collaborates musically with them. A solo saxophone album featuring the playing of Michael Wilbur from Moon Hooch, recorded and mixed by Dan at Future Fields, will be released in the new year.

“Then, in March of 2020, the world ended!” Dan sighed. Along with isolation and unemployment the coronavirus has led to frustration, exhaustion and anger, especially in young people accustomed to socializing, attending concerts and traveling freely. “In the entertainment field you’re used to performing before big crowds and attending crowded concerts and other events,” he says, acknowledging at the same time that as a society we need to adjust to the coronavirus with all its likely variants – we may never return to pre-pandemic life as we knew it.

Having lived in several places in the area, Dan is back in Essex, renting a house with his partner Katie, a special educator in Cambridge. Gardening enthusiasts, the couple did a lot of planting last summer, inspired by Dan’s grandma Barbara, an avid gardener who has been supplying Dan with numerous tomato and pepper plants over the years. Dan spends most of his time at his downtown studio, and has been dabbling with new performing and recording opportunities with his saxophone.

Future Fields is bustling with a diverse array of musical clientele after Dan and his professional partner took advantage of the COVID restrictions to complete renovations to their space. In addition to several other projects, Dan spent much of this year recording and producing a full-length album for Phil Cohen, another Vermont native, and he is excited for that to be released in 2022. His goal is to figure out how to secure funding to enable him to use his experience to help talented artists create great art for people to enjoy. He and his team of creatives are developing a YouTube channel to do just that, by recording and creating high-quality studio videos for up-and-coming musicians and bands from the region and beyond.

OZers who attended the recent Congregational Meeting on Zoom caught several glimpses of Dan Rome as he appeared on screen adjusting the microphone and attending to potential glitches before they got out of hand. “Dan has been a tremendous gift to us!” Rabbi Amy says. “We love him and feel so grateful for his help.” On a personal note she adds, “It feels especially sweet that Dan was my son Ben’s buddy at Camp Tel Yehudah in the summer of 2010 and through Young Judaea. He’s like family!”

~ Judy Hershberg

