

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT ASSEMBLY

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WITNESSES TO THE WOUND

A Covenant Investigation into the Exploitation of the Zamar Carriers

Series Conclusion — A Word to the Working Musician

WHY WOULD ANYONE DO THIS?

A Covenant Word to the Indie Artist

After Twenty Reports — The Encouragement That Must Follow the Indictment

The industry did not give you the gift. Therefore the industry cannot take it. The covenant did not promise you a record deal. It promised you a purpose. Those are not the same thing. They have never been the same thing. And every artist in this series kept playing anyway.

March 2026 · Kepha Arcemont, Elder and Founder

The Question That Demands an Answer

You have read twenty reports. Scott Joplin in 1899 receiving one cent per copy for the song that made his publisher rich. Bessie Smith receiving \$125 per side with no royalties while Columbia Records built an empire on her voice. Jimi Hendrix signing for \$1 and dying at 27 with his royalties frozen. Sam Moore receiving \$73 per month after thirty years of million-selling records. John Fogerty waiting fifty years to own what he wrote at twenty-two. The Wrecking Crew playing every major pop hit of the 1960s for flat fees with no credit while the labels collected royalties forever.

And somewhere in the middle of reading all that, a reasonable person asks the question that the title of this document names directly: **Why would anyone do this?** Why would anyone pursue a career in music — especially as an independent artist — after seeing what the industry does to the people who carry the gift? Why would any rational person invest years of labor, tens of thousands of dollars in equipment and studio time, and the entire emotional and physical cost of the musician's life, in a system that this series has documented as structurally extractive from its first transaction to its last?

The question deserves an honest answer. Not a motivational speech. Not false comfort. **The covenant answer.** The answer that the Torah gives, that the lives of the artists in this series embody, and that every working musician already knows in their body before they can articulate it in words.

The Reality the Industry Does Not Want You to Know

The music industry is not the music. This is the foundational distinction that the entire series was built to establish, and it is the most important thing this conclusion can say. The industry — the labels, the publishers, the platforms, the streaming services, the booking agents, the management companies, the 360 deal structures, the work-for-hire contracts, the session rates, the royalty ledgers — is a commercial apparatus built around the music. It is not the music itself. It never was.

Scott Joplin did not need John Stark to write **Maple Leaf Rag**. He needed John Stark to distribute it. The music existed before the distribution deal. It would have existed without it. What Stark took was not the music — he could not take that. He took the commercial fruit of the music. He took the royalty stream. He took the copyright. He took the financial inheritance. But **Maple Leaf Rag** still exists, still sounds the same, still does what Joplin made it do, regardless of who owns the copyright.

The industry can take the fruit. It cannot take the tree. Every artist in this series kept playing after the contracts, after the settlements, after the poverty, after the courts. Big Bill Broonzy gave the definitive covenant testimony on this: when they tried to make him sound like Nashville, he said, *"I gotta forget what I know and do what he tells me."* He said it with quiet, devastating clarity. He knew what he knew. They could control the commercial output. They could not reach what he knew. **The gift is not in the royalty statement. The gift is in the knowing.**

To the indie artist reading this series: the industry documented in these twenty reports is the same industry you are navigating today. The mechanisms have changed — streaming fractions instead of one-cent royalties, 360 deals instead of coerced session contracts, platform algorithms instead of radio gatekeepers — but the extraction logic is structurally identical. You need to know that. Not to be discouraged. To be clear-eyed. The system was not designed for your flourishing. It was designed for its own. That knowledge is not discouragement. It is the beginning of wisdom.

The Spirit the Non-Musician Cannot Understand

There is a force that drives the musician that has no commercial explanation. Economists call it intrinsic motivation. Psychologists call it flow state. Musicians call it the only thing that makes sense. Every serious musician who has ever tried to stop playing and found that they couldn't — not really, not for long, not without something fundamental going wrong inside them — knows what this is. It is not a career choice. It is a constitution. It is what you are made of before the industry ever knew you existed. Mavis Staples said of Curtis Mayfield: he had a long history of writing wonderful love songs that made you want to dance slow to in the basement, and then all of a sudden he went and wrote some of the best message songs that could be out there. The shift from love songs to message songs was not a commercial calculation. It was a covenant response to what he saw happening in Black America in the 1960s. The gift redirected itself toward what it was needed for. **The zamar knows where it is needed. The artist does not always choose the direction. The direction chooses them.**

Sam Moore, \$73 a month, said: *"If you're making a profit off of me, give me some too."* He said it directly to the Associated Press. He spent thirty years fighting for what was owed him. And he kept performing. He kept singing. Not because the industry deserved his voice. Because the voice required an outlet. The ox treads the grain because that is what oxen do. The musician makes music because that is what musicians do. The system can capture the grain. It cannot stop the treading.

◆ I am Kepha Arcemont. I have been playing music since I was fourteen years old. I am now in my sixties. I have spent tens of thousands of dollars on recording equipment, studio time, production costs, and the infrastructure of a serious musical career. I have received perhaps a few thousand dollars in return over fifty years of playing. By any commercial ledger, this does not add up. By the covenant ledger, it adds up exactly. The music I have made is in the world. The covenant service it represents is in the world. The Kepha Arcemont Experiment recordings with Kenny Aronoff and Philip Bynoe are in the world. Peace of Blues is in the world. That is not a commercial accounting. That is a covenant accounting. And in the covenant accounting, the music that was made by a man called to make it — regardless of what the royalty statements returned — fulfilled its purpose.

What the Torah Says About the Gift That Is Not Rewarded

The Levitical Musician and the Covenant Purpose of Music

"David and the chiefs of the service also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals."

— Divrei HaYamim Aleph (1 Chronicles) 25:1

The musicians appointed by David were not appointed for commercial purposes. They were not appointed to sell records. They were not appointed to generate streaming revenue. They were appointed to prophesy — with lyres, with harps, with cymbals. **The instrument was the vehicle of the covenant message.** The Levitical musician's function was not entertainment. It was the transmission of something the community needed to receive and could only receive through the musical medium. This is the covenant definition of the zamar carrier: not a performer, but a transmitter.

The Levites received provision from the community not as payment for a commercial service but as covenant recognition that their function was essential to the community's spiritual life. They did not receive royalties. They did not receive session fees. They received a tithe — an ongoing proportion of the community's abundance — because what they carried was worth sustaining. **The covenant economy for the musician is not the commercial economy. It never was.** The commercial economy asks: what does this music sell for? The covenant economy asks: what does this music carry, and for whom, and at what cost to the one who carries it?

The Prophet Who Was Not Honored in His Own Country

"If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."

— Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 20:9

Yirmeyahu tried to stop. He had been mocked, beaten, put in stocks, thrown in a cistern, and ignored for decades. He tried to quit. He said: I will not mention him or speak any more in his name. And then the fire came back. **There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.** This is the musician's testimony in prophetic language. The musician who tries to stop playing and cannot — the one who walks away from it for a season and finds themselves writing songs at three in the morning without knowing why — is experiencing what Yirmeyahu experienced. **The fire in the bones is not a commercial incentive. It is a covenant compulsion.** The industry did not put it there. The industry cannot extinguish it.

The Covenant That Does Not Depend on Reception

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

— Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 55:10-11

The word that goes out does not return empty. This is the covenant promise that applies to the music made in covenant purpose, regardless of what the industry does with it. The song that was written in covenant faithfulness — that carried what it was given to carry, that said what it was sent to say, that reached whoever was meant to receive it — accomplished its purpose whether or not it appeared on a Billboard chart, whether or not it was reviewed by a major publication, whether or not it generated royalties, whether or not the artist received what it was worth. People Get Ready. Curtis Mayfield wrote it in 1964. Martin Luther King marched to it. Students sang it going into jail cells. It accomplished what it was sent to accomplish. Mayfield was paralyzed by a lighting rig in 1990 and recorded his final album lying on his back, one line at a time, because the word could not return empty while there was still breath to send it. **The covenant is not contingent on the commercial outcome.** The commercial outcome is contingent on the covenant faithfulness. And the covenant faithfulness is the only thing the industry cannot take, control, contract, or compress into a royalty statement.

Practical Covenant Wisdom for the Independent Artist in 2026

What the Series Teaches About Protecting the Gift

Every artist documented in these twenty reports was harmed by the same mechanism: informational asymmetry at the moment of contract signing. They did not know what they were signing. They did not have independent legal counsel. They did not understand publishing rights, master ownership, royalty structures, or the long-term commercial implications of the documents placed before them. The Torah names this as a stumbling block placed before the blind. The covenant's remedy is knowledge.

COVENANT PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE ONE: Never sign a contract without independent legal counsel who represents your interests alone. The industry's lawyer is not your lawyer. The manager who loves your music is not your lawyer. The label executive who believes in you is not your lawyer.

Get your own counsel. Every artist in this series who did not is in these pages as a warning.

COVENANT PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE TWO: Understand what you are signing before you sign it. Specifically: What happens to the master recordings? What publishing rights are being assigned? How are royalties calculated and by whom? What recoupment clauses apply? What is the audit provision? These are not hostile questions. They are the questions a covenant-educated artist asks because they understand that the gift in their hands belongs first to Yahweh, and they are stewards of it.

COVENANT PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE THREE: Own your masters if at all possible. Own your publishing if at all possible. The shift in the modern music economy — driven partly by artists who read cases like those in this series — has made independent distribution and self-publishing more accessible than at any point in the 127 years this series covers. Use that access. The covenant inheritance of your creative work belongs to you and your heirs. Vayikra 25:23: the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for it is mine; you are sojourners with me. Your catalog is your covenant land.

COVENANT PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE FOUR: Document everything. Every agreement, every verbal commitment, every arrangement, every payment. Sam Moore's wife Joyce said it plainly: 'The whole problem is accounting and accountability. We know the labels don't know how to count except when it comes to their own money.' The covenant standard for just weights and measures applies to your own records as much as to the industry's. Keep yours impeccable.

COVENANT PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE FIVE: Build community, not dependence. The artist who depends entirely on a single label, a single platform, a single booking agent, or a single revenue stream has built their covenant inheritance on a single load-bearing wall. If that wall moves, everything falls. The covenant economy is community-based: multiple streams, direct relationships with the audience, multiple platforms, diversified income. Ruth Brown built the Rhythm and Blues Foundation. Sam Moore testified before Congress. John Fogerty outlasted Saul Zaentz. The ones who survived were the ones who built wider than the walls that were built against them.

The Answer to the Question

Why would anyone do this? Here is the covenant answer:

Because the gift was given before the industry existed, and it will continue after the industry is gone. The industry is a temporary commercial apparatus. The music is permanent. Maple Leaf Rag is still playing. Funky Drummer is still being sampled. People Get Ready is still marching. Soul Man is still calling. The Star-Spangled Banner at Woodstock is still rearranging something in the body of everyone who hears it. The commercial apparatus that exploited the people who made those things has largely dissolved, been acquired, been restructured, been sued, been shamed, and been replaced by a newer commercial apparatus that operates on the same extraction logic. The music remains. The music always remains.

Because ***the fire in the bones cannot be held in***. Yirmeyahu said it. Every musician who has ever tried to stop and couldn't says it in their own way. The covenant compulsion to make the music is not a career choice. It is a constitutional reality. The person who carries the zamar is not choosing to carry it any more than a river chooses to run downhill. The music will come out. The question is whether the artist has the covenant wisdom to protect what comes out, to steward it faithfully, and to refuse the stumbling blocks placed before them with clear eyes and independent counsel.

Because ***it shall not return empty***. The music made in covenant faithfulness — even if it sells nothing, reaches no chart, receives no industry recognition, earns no significant royalties — accomplishes what it was sent to accomplish. The person it was sent to reach, it will reach. The community it was meant to serve, it will serve. The covenant does not promise commercial success. It promises purposeful completion. **Every song made in covenant faithfulness is a word sent from Yahweh that will not return empty.** That is not a consolation prize. That is the primary prize. The commercial outcome is secondary. It has always been secondary. The artists in this series who forgot that are documented here as tragedies. The artists who remembered it are documented here as witnesses.

Because ***you are made of it***. There is a spirit that drives musicians that non-musicians will never fully understand. It is not ambition. It is not vanity. It is not the desire for fame or money — if it were, the financial reality of the music career would extinguish it immediately in nearly every case. It is something more fundamental: **the recognition, somewhere in the body before it reaches the mind, that the music is the truest thing you do.** That when you play, you are most fully what you are. That the instrument in your hands is not a tool but a covenant organ. That what comes through you when you play is not entirely yours and was never entirely yours and cannot be captured by any contract, any royalty ledger, any streaming platform, or any bankruptcy proceeding. **That is the zamar. That is why anyone does this.**

◆ *I am Kepha Arcemont. I have been playing music since I was fourteen. I am now in my sixties. I have spent tens of thousands of dollars in service of a musical calling that has returned perhaps a few thousand dollars in direct commercial revenue over fifty years. And I am not describing a failure. I am describing a covenant life. The music I have made is in the world. Peace of Blues is in the world. The Kepha Arcemont Experiment is in the world. The recordings with Kenny Aronoff and Philip Bynoe are in the world. The covenant purpose those recordings carry — the blues-rock tradition, the ministry of sound, the zamar in its American form — is in the world. No royalty statement can account for that. No industry ledger was ever designed to hold it. Yahweh holds it. Yahweh has always held it.*

To every indie artist who has spent more than they have made, who has played to rooms smaller than the gift deserved, who has signed contracts they didn't fully understand, who has been told by every rational voice around them that this doesn't make financial sense: **it doesn't make financial sense.** It makes covenant sense. Those are different things. The artists in this series prove that the covenant sense outlasts the financial sense every time. The commercial apparatus eventually moves on. The music stays. **Keep playing.**

A Blessing for the Covenant Musician

From the Elder and founder of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly, to every musician who has carried the zamar in faithfulness:

May the fire in your bones burn clean. May the words that go out from your instrument not return empty. May you have the wisdom to protect what Yahweh gave you before you sign what the industry offers you. May you know the difference between the gift and the commercial apparatus that surrounds it. May you be paid justly for your labor and credit given where credit is due. May the false weights in the accounting be corrected and the stumbling blocks removed from your path. May you be given community that sustains you and an audience that receives what you were sent to carry. And may you play, in faithfulness and in joy, until the last note is played.

"Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp. Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe. Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise Yahweh. Praise Yahweh."

— Tehillim (Psalms) 150:3-6

Let everything that has breath praise Yahweh. The gift is older than the industry. The gift will outlast the industry. The gift was given for this — not for the chart position, not for the royalty statement, not for the streaming count. For praise. For transmission. For the thing that happens in the room when the music is right and the fire is in the bones and the word is going out and everyone present knows that something real just happened. That is what the covenant calls music for. That is why the musician plays. That is why you play. **Keep playing. Selah.**

END OF SERIES

Selah.

*Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly · Pearl River, Louisiana · March 2026
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