



GOOD LORDS: Singer Tally Koren, right, with Ahlam Akram and Lord Eames

Tally shares experiences of growing up in Israel at a House of Lords event

ISRAELI singer Tally Koren spoke — and performed — at the House of Lords on International Women's Day.

As a guest of Lord Eames, Tally was joined by Baroness Blood, Kate Anolue, the former mayor of Enfield, peace activist Pauline Long, Ahlam Akram the founder of British Arabs Supporting Immigration, and Lebanese actress Lena Kay.

Tally, whose new album, *A Love Song For You*, is released today, shared her experiences of growing up in Israel.

The album's title track was released on Valentine's Day — and was written as a surprise for her husband, Simon Edwards, on their wedding day.

In the past, Tally hosted a concert — *Music for Peace in the Middle East* — where Palestinians and Israelis performed on one stage and she received a prestigious award as an 'Ambassador for Peace' at the House of Commons.

■ www.TallyKoren.com or follow her on Twitter @TallyKoren and Facebook at TallyKorenOfficial.

Dustin's tears as he discovers heroic great-grandmother

BY GABE FRIEDMAN

DUSTIN Hoffman didn't know the names of his paternal grandparents when he appeared on the American show *Finding Your Roots With Henry Louis Gates*.

After learning of the tragedies in his family's past and how his great-grandmother survived a Russian concentration camp to escape to America, the Oscar-winning actor broke down in tears.

The story began with Hoffman's grandparents, Frank and Esther Hoffman, who emigrated to Chicago from Belaya Tserkov, a region of the then-Russian empire that is now in Ukraine.

When Frank heard that Jews in the region were being killed in pogroms, he rushed back to find his parents, Sam and Libba Hoffman.

Sadly, he never found his parents — he was imprisoned and ultimately killed by the Bolshevik secret police force. Sam was jailed and killed shortly thereafter.

Libba, however, survived five years in a concentration camp. She escaped to Argentina and found her way to America in 1930.

Gates showed Hoffman, Libba's Ellis Island records, which showed that she had battled through daunting physical health issues — including the loss of one arm, poor vision and "senility" — to make it to America, aged 62.

"This is the hero of your family tree," Gates said.



EMOTIONAL: Dustin Hoffman in tears

After hearing that, Hoffman couldn't hold back his emotions. "People ask me today, 'What are you?' I say, 'I'm a Jew,'" Hoffman said, struggling through tears. "They all survived for me to be here."

The Graduate star explained that his father kept this story from him for his entire life.

"I have so much trouble connecting to this because I come from a family where there were no relationships or need for them," Hoffman said. "Maybe it could be as simple as my kids and my wife are not going to know this because this is terrible stuff, it's not good stuff to report."

Author fell in love with Purim after studying the story

BY DOREEN WACHMANN

BEFORE he started writing his latest book, philosopher and politician Dr Yoram Hazony was not having a good time on Purim.

The American-born president of Jerusalem's Herzl Institute told me: "I loved the other holidays — Pesach, Succot and Chanukah. I couldn't understand what all the noise, drinking and costumes were about on Purim.

"What were we supposed to learn from this which would make it meaningful?"

So Dr Hazony decided to study the *Book of Esther* in depth.

He said: "Every year prior to that, I had read it as a fairytale kind of a story. In fact, it's a very sophisticated, complex and fascinating story, first of all, about politics, and second about God's role in politics. Now I love Purim.

"My study of it revolutionised Purim for me. I look forward to it every year now that I understand what it's about."

The fruits of his study have been published by Cambridge University Press in *God and Politics in Esther*.

The book certainly gives a whole new meaning to the megilla.

We learn that Mordechai was a politician who initially wanted to keep in with Ahashverosh' "relatively benign authoritarianism as the best of the available options", which is why he was a loyal citizen and reported to the king the assassination plot of Bigthan and Teresh.

Mordechai also initially kept a low profile as a Jew, advising his niece Esther to do the same when she went before the king.

But, then, suddenly, when Haman is appointed sole adviser to the king, not only does Mordechai reveal that he is a Jew, but he risks his life to do so and urged Esther to do the same.

The reason, according to Hazony, is political. As long as the king had many advisers, as he had at the beginning of the book, his rule was comparable with that of a democracy.

But the assassination plot of Bigthan and Teresh made Ahashverosh paranoid, not knowing which of his advisers to trust. He made the disastrous mistake of giving total control of his empire to Haman.

In Mordechai's political analysis, according to Hazony,

Booker Prize winner dies

BOOKER Prize winner Anita Brookner has died, aged 87.

She won the award in 1984 for her novel *Hotel du Lac*.

Anita was born in London to Polish Jewish parents who later opened their home to refugees



COMPLEX STORY: Dr Yoram Hazony

once there was only the one adviser this equalled not only a dictatorship, but also idolatry.

Mordechai risked not only his own life, but also that of all his people by opposing this totalitarian regime.

Along these political lines, the book explains the course of events which led Ahashverosh to dump his trusted adviser Haman for the Jewish politician Mordechai.

God is not mentioned in the *Book of Esther*, writes Hazony. All the events that take place are as a result of political action.

Esther keeps on inviting the king and Haman to banquets to make Ahashverosh suspect Haman of having designs on his queen. That is why the king couldn't sleep at night, tortured by the memory of the assassination attempt and desirous of recompensing Mordechai who saved his life on that occasion.

But then Hazony comes to the big question which has haunted readers of the book of Esther throughout the ages.

Over the centuries the *Book of Esther* has received much stick, mainly from Christians and liberal-minded Jews, over its alleged bloodthirstiness.

Why did the Jews have to cruelly kill so many Persians doing, as the books says, "as they pleased to those who hated them, killing 75,000 of those who hated them"?

Hazony, who was an adviser to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and has been regarded as belonging to Israel's political right, is less than convincing in his explanation.

He told me: "The entire issue of

fleeing the Nazis.

She started writing fiction in her 50s, having forged a successful career as an art historian.

She was the first woman to hold the Slade professorship of fine art at Cambridge and was made a CBE.

the military response in the *Book of Esther* was self-defence. I don't think we did use the same standard as our enemies.

"The text says that they defended themselves against those who set out to harm them.

"There is no reason to think the story is promoting that Jews should do what their enemies do. Their actions were taken from the kind of warfare that was conducted during that period.

"Am I happy about it? No, I don't think we should behave that way now. But I also think that condemning works of literature from earlier periods because we wouldn't fight our wars that way is usually hypocritical.

"It's fine and desirable for Jews and Christians to say today we wouldn't want to conduct a war that way. That's admirable.

"But very often this criticism is coming from people who are willing to defend dropping nuclear bombs on Japan or fire-bombing Germany. Those kinds of vast killings of innocents were considered to be reasonable

Story of Esther can inspire anybody

because they saved lives of millions of British and American servicemen, ending the war more quickly."

Hazony added: "Esther used to be mostly a Jewish story. But in the last generation it has become extremely interesting to Christian denominations.

"It used to be a Jewish debate in which liberal Jews were uncomfortable with the violence. It has become a Christian debate in which liberal Christians are also uncomfortable.

"In addition there's a broad antisemitic history of writing that Esther is an example of Jewish bloodthirstiness which you find in antisemitic scholarships of the last 100 years."

But, he said, on the positive side, many Christian democracy campaigners were taking courage from the lessons of the *Book of Esther*.

He said: "In 2014, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Christians in the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong said they weren't scared to walk in the streets and face down the Chinese dictatorship because they had studied Esther and realised that if she could risk her life in order to break the law and save her people, then it was their obligation as Christians to do no less."

He added: "I think the story of Esther can inspire just about anybody."