



Olympic Virtuoso Pianist Reveals All

How did a world-class piano accompanist cope with the death of his child? How did a simple young Jew with no Jewish education from Niagara Falls become fervently observant?

These were some of the questions addressed in a unique evening last week organized by Rabbi Gershon Overlander of the Chabad Student Programme together with Rabbi Menachem M Junik of the Jewish Home Network in the West End by virtuoso pianist Gershon Wachtel.

Over a hundred people sat riveted to their seats at the prestigious Arts Club listening to Wachtel's inspirational insights and stories of his own life experiences. The phenomenal level - and variety - of piano music displayed was only matched by Wachtel's frankness and genuine humility. As one member of the audience put it, "this wasn't just another event, it was an experience!"

Wachtel played various classical Jewish numbers with dazzling skill and personal embellishment. Between pieces he retold his life's ups and downs. He recalled how he had been chosen to lead the US Olympic gymnastics team in 1976 and 1980 only because his rabbi encouraged him to go to the trials.

There was hardly a dry eye in the audience when Gershon told of the tragic drowning of his four year old son at a summer camp. But his subsequent words of encouragement and extraordinary rendering of the tune "mizmor I Dovid" left everyone inspired and uplifted.

Mr. Israel Russell described it as "an amazing evening, something I have never experienced before."

Mr Jaques Cadranel from Radlett said, "this was the most meaningful and entertaining evening I have had in years ... and probably ever." Gershon was able to give the audience to not only a world-class musical performance, but also touch our souls. He has impacted and inspired my own outlook on life going forward."