

# Faith & Values

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## Band has rock message for Jews

 By Judith Cebula  
 STAFF WRITER

**D**an Nichols wouldn't mind if his band became the next D.C. Talk or Jars of Clay. Those Christian groups pack football stadiums with a sound as cutting-edge as anything on alternative rock radio. Their message is pure Jesus. Nichols' is Judaism.

He's part of e18hteen, a Jewish rock band from Nashville, Tenn., set to perform in Indianapolis next Saturday.

"We want to convey the positive life messages that come from living a

Musician believes  
Judaism can be set  
to today's beat.

Jewish life, through music that reaches people," says Nichols.

"The Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam* — repairing the world — is a big theme. So is being a *mensch*, a decent human being in this world."

The 29-year-old guitarist and singer grew up in Indianapolis, attending Pike Township schools. He was 7 years old when his parents

converted to Judaism and began raising him in the faith.

Sabbath services and Sunday school at Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation shaped Nichols' religious identity. So did summers at Goldman Union Camp Institute, a Jewish camp in Boone County that attracts kids from throughout the Midwest. That's where Nichols fell in love with music and where he discovered the power of song to strengthen faith.

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### BAND

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"Music was everywhere at camp. In the morning we would get up, and everyone in the camp would stand in a circle and singing the *Shema*," Nichols says, recalling one of the most essential and beautiful of Jewish prayers.

"We would eat breakfast and sing some more, maybe Jewish folk songs or songs from the *kibbutzim* or sometimes just silly songs to get our bodies moving," Nichols says. "And when we could choose camp activities like basketball or arts and crafts, I chose music."



**MAKING A POINT:** Dan Nichols and e18hteen want to inspire young Jews with fervor for their faith.

Submitted photo

### e18hteen

**What:** e18hteen, a Jewish alternative rock band.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. next Saturday

**Where:** The Arthur M. Glick Jewish Community Center, 6701 Hoover Road.

**More information:** Tickets are \$15 for adults; \$12 for students and seniors. JCC members pay \$12 for adults; \$10 for students and seniors. Call (317) 251-9467

Nichols later became a song leader at Goldman, he says, to inspire young people to embrace their heritage and faith and celebrate it.

That's the same reason he started e18hteen. The name comes from the Hebrew characters that stand for both the number 18 and the salutatory phrase, "To Life."

### Forging a partnership

After moving to Nashville from Raleigh, N.C., to better understand the music industry, Nichols found a creative partner in friend and pianist Mason Cooper. The two met

through their synagogue, Congregation Micah.

Since forming in 1996, the group has toured nationwide, performing in Jewish community centers, for Jewish youth conferences and at Hillel houses on college campuses.

The band's musical influences are broad — from Ben Folds Five to Cheap Trick, Megadeth to the Police, from Jewish folk music to scores for TV shows and movies.

Nichols and Cooper produced the band's first album last year, writing and performing songs in English that celebrate Jewish values. But e18hteen's new collection will be mostly Hebrew, Nichols says, and include music from the Jewish Sabbath liturgy set to contemporary rhythms and arrangements.

"All music is about enlivening an audience. We're about that, but also trying to spiritually awaken people and let them know that religion can be enjoyed," Nichols says. "It is not just for the solemn setting of a synagogue or church, but in a concert hall where people stand up and get singing and dancing with the music."