---- For Immediate Release --- contact: ProfessorLesser@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Larry Lesser's eclectic 24-song album *SPARKS* links today's times to timeless Jewish texts, offering inspiration beyond denomination, and a winner at the 2021 New Mexico Music Awards!

"*SPARKS* packs an incredible amount of Torah, sweetness, beauty and joy into… this album's tracks, which add up to a method for living with greater meaning, purpose, and love… What more could we need? And when could we need it more?" – Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, author and president of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL)

Larry Lesser makes *SPARKS!*

Reflecting a decades-long journey and dream, award-winning songwriter/educator Larry Lesser released *SPARKS*, a bounty of guitar-driven, lyric-centered, non-liturgical, non-denominational songs grounded deeply and accessibly in Jewish text and values with universal meaning.

Like Judaism, the songs are timely and timeless. For example, the Midrashic theme of interdependence in "Rowboat" is salient as we face political, environmental and epidemiological threats; the message in the Talmudic "The Best" echoes the Garth Brooks #1 hit "Unanswered Prayers"; the Talmudic story of "Bruria" resonates with today's empowered women; the centuries-old proverb in "Two Pockets" arose at a televised election year town hall; the recent wave of antisemitism and Holocaust denial gives urgency to "One-Way Train" and "Stack the Stones"; and the title cut (and video) refers to fragments of a shattered world we're charged to heal.

As *Sparks*' opening rocker sparked by a Ben-Gurion quip says, 2 Jews have 3 opinions, but performers/clergy across denominations agree *Sparks* is great, with praise from awardees of major music awards (ASCAP, GRAMMY, etc.) as well as from heads of diverse major Jewish organizations (CLAL, USCJ, Mussar Institute, Partners in Torah, Women Cantors' Network).

This collection sparks dialogue by respecting each denomination's limits and by acknowledging the diversity of Jews in their origin (e.g., the Spanish-inflected Crypto-Jewish "Lights Lead Home"; see video) or observance (e.g., the folk-grass romp "Shabbos Keeps the Jews" or the pluralistic paean "Deep and Wide"). The album also sparks a journey of self-reflection: the flute on "Feathers" conjures windblown feathers from a famous parable on gossip, while "Two Pockets" gives pedal steel texture to the challenge to balance one's importance and impermanence.

SPARKS is also distinctive in how deeply and accessibly it dives into the sea of Talmud, exploring gratitude ("Give Thanks", "The Best"), baseless hate ("Temples"), matchmaking ("Tearin' the Sea"), mid-life turning point ("The Stone"), success ("Everyone"), and women's roles ("Bruria", a rocking tribute to a sharp woman who held her own with second-century rabbis).

SPARKS musicians span not just Judaism's big denominations but also all major Abrahamic faiths. Larry Lesser, Bill Radcliffe, Amalia Zeitlin, Sabiha Khan, Ross Ingram, and Larry Karol have made albums and/or performed with The Platters, Midland, El Paso Symphony, Las Cruces Symphony, Camerata Del Sol, Layali Al-Sham, Pet People, Paperwork, EEP, etc.

The quality and diversity of *SPARKS* is reflected in its being a **Finalist in the 2021 New Mexico Music Awards** for Best Album as well as for 3 other very different categories: best bluegrass song, best religious song, and **best humorous song** (which he won!). *SPARKS* also has a rare thematic/emotional breadth of songs that range from humorous (e.g., "The Bark Mitzvah Song" and "Spiritual Not Religious") to Holocaust ("One-Way Train" and "Stack the Stones").

Post-college relationships launched his journey through 5 denominations to a more knowledgable, spiritual and conscious connection with his heritage, and these songs reflect his experiences. Having David Wilcox and Nance Pettit visit during their *Out Beyond Ideas* tour sparked the idea of writing songs out of textual nuggets of spiritual wisdom, and from there the concept grew.

Lesser wrote the songs and co-produced with multi-instrumentalist Bill Radcliffe. Despite its release right before the pandemic, *SPARKS* has had coverage with NPR-station interviews (e.g., #1 and #2), airplay of 13+ different songs on Jewish or secular music programs in several states, writeups in periodicals from local to international newspapers and international/national periodicals (e.g., *The Jewish Educator*, *Israeli Journal of Humor Research*, *Rice Magazine*, *HaLapid*, *KosherToday*), [Houston] *Jewish Herald-Voice*, [El Paso] *Jewish Voice*, *New Mexico Jewish Link*), and invited performance in college, synagogue, opera, festival, and online settings and at the New Mexico Music Awards.

For more information: **larrylesser.com/sparks**

available from Amazon, Apple/iTUNES, GooglePlay, Spotify, Tidal, etc.
click here for lyrics, here for music, here for one-liner song summaries

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LARRY LESSER has published 130+ songs – Jewish songs, STEM education songs, and folk songs – with 20+ songs (spanning all 3 types) airing on TV or radio and all 3 types yielding some of his 30+ song awards, such as first place in the National Museum of Mathematics' Pi Day of the Century song contest and Semifinalist in the 2021 International Songwriting Competition. Lesser has played national conferences, statewide music awards nights, regional festivals, and community events. His songs are on albums by Sababa, Larry Bach, Ellen M. Wilson, and Folkus.

He published nationally as a music journalist (*Songwriter's Musepaper*) and parodist (*SingOut!*) and won an NSF grant to create *interactive* songs. He has a dozen music articles in national journals and has spoken for the Folk Alliance International Conference and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame & Museum. He's opened for or performed with Layali Al-Sham, Chava Mirel, Beth Hamon, Roy Zimmerman, Charlie King and Karen Brandow, and Opera UTEP. He and his spouse live in El Paso with their Xolo rescue dog Kelev, whose *SPARKS* fave is the NMMA-winning "The Bark Mitzvah Song."