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SHOW: Fresh Air

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TERRY GROSS, host:

This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross.

My guest Zev Chafets has written a new book about Christian Zionists, that is, Christians who support Israel because of its role in the Second Coming. They believe that the rebirth of Israel, when it became a state, was a prelude to Armageddon and the return of Jesus. Although many Israelis welcome Christian Zionist support, it's still controversial in the Jewish community among people who think that the Christian right's politics and the end-of-days scenario don't reflect the best interests of Israel. Most Christian Zionists believe that at the time of the Apocalypse, Jews will have to convert or be left behind to face years of plagues, wars and other tribulations. Zev Chafets' new book is called "A Match Made in Heaven: American Jews, Christian Zionists and One Man's Exploration of the Weird and Wonderful Judeo-Evangelical Alliance." Chafets grew up in Pontiac, Michigan, and moved to Israel when he was in college. He directed the government press office under Prime Minister Menachem Begin and was a founding editor of the Jerusalem Report. He says that in his book, he tried to see Israel through the eyes of evangelicals. I asked how this helped him understand Christian Zionism.

Mr. ZEV CHAFETS: As I started out, and I went to a lot of churches and talked to a lot of evangelicals around the country, and then I took a trip to Israel with a group of evangelical pilgrims because I wanted to see the country through their eyes, and I found that there are really three basic reasons why evangelicals are so supportive of Israel. There is a prophecy reason. That is to say, there are evangelicals who see the Armageddon scenario, see Jews caught up in that Holy Land. It's something that arrests their attention and makes them focus on Israel. There are a lot of American evangelicals and other Americans, by the way, who love Israel or support Israel simply because Israel is on America's side. Gary Bauer said to me at one time, 'Israel and the Jews cried with us on 9/11 when the Arabs and Palestinians celebrated.' But I think that the third reason and probably the dominant reason is a very simple one. It says in the Bible in Genesis 12:3, God says, 'I will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel,' and if you happen to be a literalist, if you're a Bible literalist, if you believe in the inerrancy of the Bible as evangelical Christians do, and I must say, as I personally do not, but for them, it's a very clear commandment to support Israel. And I think that that's probably the greatest single motivation.

GROSS: So in your book, you tried to see Israel through the eyes of evangelicals who are interested in Israel for Biblical reasons, and one of the things you do is you take a tour of Mageddo with two Pentecostal ministers from America who now live in Israel.

Mr. CHAFETS: Right.

GROSS: What's the connection between Mageddo and Armageddon?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, Armageddon is Mageddo. Mageddo is--Armageddon is--the way

it's been translated into English. Harmageddo is the place in--it's a place in Galilee about an hour and 20 minutes from my house in Tel Aviv. It's in the Jezreel Valley, and it's a place that the Book of Revelations talks about and also that, you know, sort of end-time believers visualize as the spot of the final battle before, you know, after the Second Coming.

GROSS: What was the tour like?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, it was fun. You know, we went up there together and looked around, and the guy, as well as being a minister, was also a brigadier general in the Georgia National Guard so he showed me the military, how he imagined the battle would unfold. They picture, you know, two billion people involved in that battle, which you know, is quite a lot. But--and they read a little bit from the scriptures, and this stuff is all very obscure unless you happen to believe it, which again, I don't.

And then we went to get a drink--to get a Coke at a little village right next to it which is called in Hebrew Omen, which I always find funny because Omen in Hebrew doesn't mean an omen, but you know, it shocked them a little bit. And when we were there, we met a couple of immigrants who had just arrived from Burma, the Burmese-Indian border, who are a people who believe that they belong to the ancient Biblical lost tribe of Manasses and have recently started to be flown into Israel and settled there, so there was a whole sort of Biblical motif to that morning. She--the lady evangelist, when she saw these people who had flown in from India, said, 'Here's your prophecy from the Book of Ezekiel about dry bones coming together in the land of Israel.'

GROSS: Are there a lot of evangelical tours like this? Is this--are there a lot of like Biblical tours of Israel?

Mr. CHAFETS: Oh, yeah. Biblical tourism, evangelical tourism is a huge business now. A tour guide told me, 'This is our bread and butter now.' The Jews that come in the summer are the cream and the cake, but the real future of tourism in Israel is evangelical tourism. First of all, there are a lot more evangelicals. And they're not afraid. They're--during the intifada, Jews stopped coming to Israel--Jewish tourists. Evangelicals did not stop coming. That made a big impression on Israeli tourism industry, so there's a large segment of it now, which is really geared to dealing with visiting American and European, and actually now from other countries as well, evangelical Christians.

GROSS: Now you mentioned that Mageddo is expected to be the place for the big final battle, you know, Armageddon, that that's what evangelicals believe, those who take the Bible literally. One of the concerns that a lot of, I think, Israelis and Jews from other parts of the world have about this alliance between evangelicals from the far right and Israel is the sense that, you know, in this apocalyptic vision, there's going to be a huge battle and so peace, peace in the Middle East, isn't necessarily the goal. Because the real goal is the final battle. The real goal is going to be a lot of bloodshed. Of course, the ultimate goal is the Second Coming, which comes after that. But you know, I've spoken to people who are concerned about this alliance who think that the alliance doesn't necessarily work in favor of peace, and in that sense isn't in Israel's best interest.

Mr. CHAFETS: Yeah, I know that school of thought. The truth is that evangelicals who believe in this kind of scenario are pre-millennialist Christians, which means that they believe that what's going to happen happens in God's time. God decides when Armageddon takes place. God decides when the Second Coming happens. It doesn't--it's not decided by human works. It's not decided by anybody's foreign policy or anybody's domestic policy or by anybody's good deeds or by any such human thing as that. It's decided when it happens. And as a Jew, I'm perfectly content with that formulation. I personally don't believe that there's going to be a Second Coming. I don't believe there's going to be a battle at Armageddon. But if--you know, and if

I'm right about that, then swell. And if I'm wrong about that, then I've got a lot of explaining to do when Jesus arrives. But, in the meantime, to me it's an irrelevant argument. It's sort of a red herring. Because why would anyone be concerned about other people's beliefs? The Jews who claim to be concerned about Armageddon are people who don't believe in Armageddon. So you know, whatever ultimate purposes in Christian evangelical theocracy or eschatology that battle serves, it's really a matter of just of sort of poetry or science fiction, as far as I'm concerned.

GROSS: I think there are two issues here. One is the one that I think you're addressing here which is in the Armageddon scenario Jews and other nonbelievers of Christianity have to convert or basically live through the tribulations on earth after Armageddon and the Second Coming.

Mr. CHAFETS: Mm-hmm.

GROSS: But the question I was asking about is if people who believe, literally, that the Second Coming is imminent and so is Armageddon, then their interest might not be in peace in the Middle East but rather in the battles that lead to the final days, and in that sense, is it in Israel's best interest to have an alliance with people who don't necessarily want peace, that you might argue that they're looking for those final battles.

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, look, I don't know what people are looking for, and I don't necessarily think that people who supposedly want peace are people who are acting in Israel's best interests all the time. Israel is engaged in a very long war, and it has been ever since it was founded, and you know, all of us want peace. I think the last time I was on your show was the day that the Oslo Accord was signed in Washington, and I was ecstatic at that time, like most Israelis were, and we found out that the Palestinians didn't mean it and it's been a rough 10 years since then. So the fact that somebody says that they're in favor of peace doesn't impress me very much at this point, and the fact that somebody is more interested in a Biblical scenario doesn't alarm me very much at this point either.

GROSS: My guest is Zev Chafets. His new book, "A Match Made in Heaven," is about the alliance between Israel and Christian Zionists.

We'll talk more after a break. This is FRESH AIR.

(Announcements)

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Zev Chafets, and we're talking about his new book, "A Match Made in Heaven: American Jews, Christian Zionists and One Man's Exploration of the Weird and Wonderful Judeo-Evangelical Alliance."

I want to ask you about Pastor John Hagee...

Mr. CHAFETS: Sure.

GROSS: ...who is the head of Christians United for Israel, and this is, like, the main Christian Zionist group, and you write in your book, 'No Christian Zionist in the US is more red-hot than Hagee.' Taking Christian Zionism out of the equation for a second, he had some views that I think most people would find extreme. For example, in one of his sermons, he preached that Hurricane Katrina was an act of God for a society that's becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. So when I spoke with him last September, I asked him if he believes that Katrina was God's punishment for Sodom and Gomorrah-like behavior in New Orleans, and--let me play you what he said.

(Soundbite from John Hagee interview)

Pastor JOHN HAGEE: All hurricanes are acts of God because God controls the

heavens. I believe that New Orleans had a level of sin that was offensive to God, and they are--were recipients of the judgment of God for that. The newspaper carried the story in our local area that was not carried nationally that there was to be a homosexual parade there on the Monday that the Katrina came, and the promise of that parade was that it was going to reach a level of sexuality never demonstrated before in any of the other Gay Pride parades. So I believe that the judgment of God is a very real thing. I know that there are people who demure from that, but I believe that the Bible teaches that when you violate the law of God, that God brings punishment sometimes before the day of judgment, and I believe that the Hurricane Katrina was, in fact, the judgment of God against the city of New Orleans.

GROSS: So I know you're very opposed to homosexuality, but you think that the whole city was punished because of things like the forthcoming Gay Pride parade.

Pastor HAGEE: This is true. All of the city was punished because of the sin that happened there in that city.

(End of soundbite)

GROSS: That's Pastor John Hagee recorded last September.

And, Zev Chafets, are you comfortable having him as a partner in an alliance when he thinks that the New Orleans flood was God's punishment for homosexuality and a Gay Pride parade.

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, look, one thing has nothing to do with the other as far as I'm concerned. You know, in a war, you take the allies that you have. Would I prefer to have other people as allies? Sure? Do I agree with Pastor Hagee on what happened in New Orleans? Absolutely not. Do I care what Pastor Hagee thinks about that subject? No, I don't. My concern is a central concern. There's a world war in which Jews happen to be topic number one or enemy number one for the Islamic world, and I am in favor of anybody whose ideology enables them to understand that the jihad against Christians and Jews waged by al-Qaeda or the doctrines of wiping Israel off the map, which are prevalent in Tehran, or the notion that the world is controlled by a Jewish conspiracy, which is in the Palestinian Hamas charter, that those things are a form of aggressive fascism, and people who understand that are on my side in this particular fight. Now I might and you might find out that John Hagee has opinions on various subjects that agree with yours and mine. Not on this subject but on other subjects. That doesn't mean that we have to accept everything he says. In my view, Israel has always been a progressive coun--it's the only democracy, the only open society. It's the only society with equality for women. It's the only society in the Middle East where there is a homosexual parade every year, and it's sort of beyond my understanding why some progressives prefer the truly right wing, the truly fascistic side of this battle, but I leave it to them.

GROSS: But getting back to Pastor Hagee, you know, in the United States, the Christian right has had a lot of power in trying to limit the rights of homosexuals and so, like here in the United States where they do have a lot of power and influence, it's for a lot of people a pretty major thing what he thinks about homosexuality. It's not just, you know, a minor thing, easily overlooked.

Mr. CHAFETS: I'm sure that's true, and for those people for whom it's a major thing, it shouldn't be overlooked. During the 1930s, there were--and excuse me for going back to this but it's the relevant example. In the late 1930s, there were people who were opposed to Hitler but who didn't really see that that was the main problem. They were concerned with other issues. I know prominent Jews, for example, who during World War II were pacifists and went to jail because they thought that they were so opposed to war that even stopping the Nazis was not a good enough reason for them to override their other principles. I think that some of them were sorry afterward. But I don't want to be an apologist

for, you know, Hagee's views about one thing or another, just as I don't want to be an apologist for somebody's views on global warming. These aren't relevant issues. In a war, you take the friends that you have, the allies that you have. And it's not a question of agreeing with every single thing that they say or even agreeing with most of what they say. If he's right on this issue, and he is right on this issue, then that's the, you know for me, as an endangered species in this particular conflict, that's who, you know, I'm happy to have his support on this issue, especially if he doesn't ask for my support on his issues, which I won't be able to support him on.

GROSS: You moved to Israel when you were in college...

Mr. CHAFETS: Mm-hmm.

GROSS: ...and then, by the age of 29, you became the director of the government press office...

Mr. CHAFETS: Right.

GROSS: ...which you describe as a position similar to the White House director of communications...

Mr. CHAFETS: Right.

GROSS: And this was on Menachem Begin's staff when he was prime minister. You say you were the only American on his staff and...

Mr. CHAFETS: The Lonely American, yeah.

GROSS: ...and in that position, you were asked about Christian Zionists who wanted to establish an alliance with Israel. What were the questions then and tell us what year this was.

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, this would have been in the late '70s and early '80s, just at the time that Christian right-wing Republican Christians were becoming significant in American politics, the time of the moral majority and so forth, and these were people who started approaching Israel. They didn't have really any connection with the Jewish community in America but they were interested in Israel, and they approached us through embassies and, you know, people here and so forth, and the question was, well, who are they? Israelis don't--by and large, didn't and don't, at that time especially, have much connection with Protestants. You know, the Jews who came to Israel either came from--the bulk of Jews either came from Muslim countries or they came from countries where the majority of Christians were orthodox Christians or Roman Catholics, not Protestant. So nobody really knew the difference between Billy Graham and, you know, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Nobody knew the difference between William Sloan Coffin and Pat Robertson. As far as they were concerned, they were all just a bunch of Christians.

The Jews in America, who were usually the ones who--Jewish Zionists who usually interpreted for us on these subjects were horrified by the idea of teaming up with Falwell or Robertson or accepting their support or doing anything but denouncing them, but Begin didn't feel that way. Begin didn't really see a great difference, and he was prepared, and in this I'm a Beginist, to take support where he found it. Begin had a, let me say, a cynical view of the goodwill of the world towards Jews and Israel in general, and he was prepared to take alliances, even if they were temporary, even if they were for the wrong reason. But they were better than being castigated by a bunch of other people for, you know, real and imagined sins. So that's how the relationship began and that was my role in it.

GROSS: Zev Chafets is the author of the new book, "A Match Made in Heaven." He'll be back in the second half of the show.

I'm Terry Gross, and this is FRESH AIR.

(Soundbite of music)

(Announcements)

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR.

I'm Terry Gross back with Zev Chafets, the author of the new book, "A Match Made in Heaven," about the alliance between Israel and Christian Zionists. Christian Zionists support Israel because of its place in the prophecy of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Jesus. Chafets divides his time between America and Israel. He directed the government press office under Prime Minister Menachem Begin. When we left off, we were talking about that period of his life which is also when the Christian Zionists first approached the Israeli government.

So what were the early days of the alliance like?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, they were tentative in the sense that Begin was happy to have the support. Begin himself was a Bible-believing fellow, and, you know, he didn't believe in the New Testament obviously, but as long as they stayed on Old Testament grounds, he was fine. And he wanted to settle the West Bank in Gaza, and Falwell and Robertson and others saw that as a Biblical imperative so--and this...

GROSS: A Biblical imperative to keep that as Israeli land?

Mr. CHAFETS: Yes. Jewish land or Israeli land. And, you know, the Carter administration, for example, was extremely opposed to that, to Begin's settlement policy. So--and the American Jewish community, which is a Democratic community by and large, and it was then as well, was caught in the middle and didn't offer Begin a lot of support, so he took the Zionist-Christian support to balance off Carter. That was the primary role. At the time, it wasn't--as I say, this was a relationship which did not go over well with the American Jewish establishment.

GROSS: Well, and I think it's fair to say that there's a lot of Israelis that the relationship didn't go over well with, too, in part, because, as you said, the Christian Zionists want, you know, see, you know, Gaza and the West Bank as being part of the Biblical imperative to keep that land Israeli, and you know, there are a lot of Israeli Jews who believe, or believed then, in trading land for peace and that that was not something that the evangelical people who'd made an alliance with Israel would approve of.

Mr. CHAFETS: No, that's not actually correct. First--it's not correct in two points. First of all, there are not many Israelis at all who are opposed to the connection with evangelical Jews. It's sometimes said here that evangelical Christians and Christian Zionists are aligned with the Israeli right, but the fact is that the evangelical support is a very broadly welcomed support by all parts of the Israeli body politic, except for the extreme Israeli left. And just to give you one example, Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who was the Labor Party prime minister and a kibbutznik and secularist, was actually listed on the faculty at Regent University, which is Pat Robertson's university. Every Israeli prime minister welcomes and takes support from the evangelical Christians and almost every Israeli's in favor of it. That's the first thing.

The second thing is the actual connection between Falwell and Begin, especially, and since then, the people that Falwell has trained and as these connections have gotten broader and thicker, there is a large sense of pragmatism now on the Christian side, and Falwell has said this to me directly and others have as well that they are perfectly content--they have their views about what the land of Israel should comprise and so on, and these were the--they believe what the Bible says. But they are perfectly content, in the

meantime, to accept the verdict of the Israeli government, based on the verdict of Israeli voters and the policies that that government implements. And, therefore, there hasn't ever been any strenuous objection in the United States by Christian Zionists to, let's say, giving up Gaza or to giving up parts of the West Bank, and that's based on the idea that, in the end of time, in the end of days, God will dispense with this issue as he sees fit, and, in the meantime, it's the Israelis' issue to deal with and they will support any Israeli prime minister or Israeli government. Are there exceptions to this? There are a few exceptions on the very fringe of the Christian Zionist movement, but they are fringe exceptions, they are not major players.

GROSS: President Bush is seen by many American Jews as a great supporter of Israel, although there are other American Jews who think that the war in Iraq under the Bush administration has been a disaster for Israel and that the Bush administration has missed a lot of opportunities to effectively negotiate a Middle East peace. Let's start with Iraq. What do you think the impact of Iraq has been on Israel?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, first of all, when you say that there are a lot of American Jews who think one thing and a lot who think another thing, of course, you're right because one of the things that characterizes American Jews is that there are a lot of opinions. Strategically, there's no doubt that it was very, very good for Israel that America took Saddam Hussein out of power. I was personally "Scudded" by Saddam Hussein in 1991. I mean, I had the experience of having to put a gas mask on my eight-year-old son's face more than 40 times during that war. And I can assure you that whatever Bush knew and when he knew it later on, we were very certain that the Iraqis had at least the possibility of hitting us with, you know, with weapons of chemical or biological destruction. And again in 1998 we had to go and get new gas masks because Saddam Hussein said he was going to burn half of Israel, so I wasn't sorry to see him go. I'm very glad that he is gone. What do I think of Iraq right now? You know, obviously, it hasn't gone very well, that part of it. But I think that Iraq is a battle in a much larger war. I don't think it's the war, and in war, you know, you win some battles and you do less well in others.

GROSS: Well, you know, some people say, 'Who's won the war in Iraq? The winner is Iran,' because Iran seems to have been strengthened as the result of the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq eliminated one of Iran's great opposing forces, Saddam Hussein. And a strong, you know, Iraqi government. And because the new Iraqi government is a Shiite government and Iran is Shiite, there are possibilities for alliances and there seem to be already alliances between Iraqis in leadership positions and Iran, and of course, Iran seems to be very close to developing a nuclear weapon and the country most threatened by that is Israel. So in terms of Iran, do you think that the war in Iraq has created problems?

Mr. CHAFETS: Not necessarily. You know, wars are not like basketball games. They don't end at a certain time. It's possible that at one period it's a better thing for Iran, and then it could be a worse thing for Iran. For example, there are a lot of people in Iran who are Arabs and who are non-Persians, and it's very possible there could be trouble in Iran over an Iran-Iraq connection. It's possible that you can see already a Sunni alliance forming in the Middle East with Egypt and Jordan and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, which is very opposed to Iran. So, you know, to say that this has been--that this battle has had this result, I think is a bit short-sighted. These battles have results which are ongoing. The Middle East is an old area, and it will continue to develop and 10 years from now Iraq will still be there and Iran will still be there and we'll all still be there. So I don't want to pass judgment about the final results of things which are ongoing.

As far as Iran is concerned in the nuclear threat, Iran is a nuclear threat with or without Iraqi connection or connection to the Iraq war. Anytime since the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini had the Iranians had a nuclear weapon and talked about dropping it on Israel and been involved in denying the Holocaust, which is not a new wrinkle in Iran. It's a fairly old thing. It was just brought to

the floor more publicly recently. It's been a concern. An existential concern.

GROSS: Israeli intelligence experts are saying that if Iran does develop a nuclear weapon, it would pose an existential threat to Israel. And they're also saying--some of them are saying that to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, action would have to be taken this year, action such as bombing their nuclear facility. What do you think is likely to happen?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, I don't know. I mean, I was involved in an administration that did bomb the nuclear facility of the Iraqis in 1981 and I--my hunch is, or my gut feeling is that attacking Iran is a bad idea but it might be better than any other idea. If it becomes clear that the Irani--if the choice is that the Iranians--an aggressive, actively anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish regime--was going to get a nuclear weapon or Israel is stuck with having to take it out, then I'm in favor of Israel taking it out, and I suppose that Israel will try to take it out.

GROSS: How does Israel do that without the attack developing into a wider war or without facing the kind of retaliation that would, you know, that would be horrible?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, I don't know the answer to that. You know, Israel does it as carefully as it can. But I think that it's just not realistic to expect, and I don't like invoking the Holocaust but it's an ever-present thought in the Israeli psyche, and it's unrealistic to expect six million Jews who are now living in the land of Israel to sit around waiting for the next Hitler to exterminate them. I don't think that's going to happen, and I think that if, you know, that if the results of that are sloppy, and they'll be sloppy for the entire world, not just for the Middle East, well, that's going to be a sloppy result.

GROSS: My guest is Zev Chafets. His new book about Christian Zionists and their alliance with Israel is called "A Match Made in Heaven."

We'll talk more after a break. This is FRESH AIR.

(Announcements)

GROSS: My guest is Zev Chafets, author of the new book, "A Match Made in Heaven." He divides his time between Israel and the US. He directed the government press office under Menachem Begin and was a founding editor of the Jerusalem Report.

When President Carter wrote his current best seller, "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid," we had him on the show to talk about it. The book has been very controversial, and you know, one of the recent developments in the ongoing controversy is that 14 members of the Carter Center's advisory board resigned this month over the book.

Mr. CHAFETS: Mm-hmm.

GROSS: I'm wondering if you've read the book and what your impressions are of it, and you were as a, you know, a government press person under Menachem Begin during the peace process and the Camp David accords.

Mr. CHAFETS: Right. I haven't read the book. I've read the reviews of the book but most saliently I read the title of the book, which is really, as far as I can tell, the main issue here. The use of the term 'apartheid' in Israel is not accidental and I don't even think it's commercial, although I think that they thought, you know, his publisher, that it would sell some books, and it has sold a lot of books. The idea is to say that Israel is the same as South Africa and South Africa is the same as Israel, and therefore, Israel is a racist fascist apartheid state and so on and so forth. And this is a stock argument in the anti-Israel rhetoric of the Arab world and of the European far left or

anti-Jewish left or anti-Israeli left, and in taking it up, it's--I understand why Americans were upset with Carter, especially Jewish Americans and Jewish Zionists, because it means that if you're a supporter of Israel, you're basically a supporter of South Africa, and I think that there are a lot of American Jews who were offended and a lot of other Americans were offended by that suggestion. Beyond that, you know, as I said, I haven't read the book...

GROSS: Since you haven't read the book, let me point out a couple of distinctions that Carter makes between the type of apartheid he's accusing Israel of and South African apartheid. He says that in Israel, he's talking about not Israel itself but he's talking about Israeli policies toward Gaza and the West Bank, and he describes the apartheid-like treatment of people there, not as being racial but as being about land. Does that change your point of view at all?

Mr. CHAFETS: No, because the headline is that Israel is an apartheid society, and that isn't--that's not a--you know, the fact that he has an explanation to go with it is not very relevant. He did what he did on purpose. He's not stupid, Jimmy Carter, and he's not unsophisticated about the language that's used in this particular debate, and for him to use that language is deliberately provocative. Does he have the right to use it? Sure, he does.

GROSS: Now we've been talking about politics, but one of the things you spend a lot of time doing and writing about, in addition to politics, is music and...

Mr. CHAFETS: A little bit.

GROSS: You love rhythm and blues, you like doo-wop, and in one of your writing credits, you pointed out that you cowrote the Hebrew doo-wop song, "Boi Motek." Am I saying that right?

Mr. CHAFETS: Perfectly. Thanks.

GROSS: What is the song?

Mr. CHAFETS: A friend of mine, and I--I have a friend who's a big Israeli rock star and like me, he's an Israeli-American, an American-Israeli, and he grew up on this music also, and we decided one day, we said, 'What does Israel not have that we could make a contribution to in its culture?' you know, and we said, 'Well, let's try a doo-wop song.' So we translated the Del Vikings song, "Come Go with Me"...

GROSS: Great.

Mr. CHAFETS: ...into Hebrew, and we took it in the studio, and he recorded it, and it became a, you know, a hit, and that, as far as I know, that's the first Hebrew doo-wop song.

GROSS: Zev, since I know you speak Hebrew, have you seen the Borat movie? And now that we all know that Borat, that when he's allegedly speaking the language of Kazakhstan, he's really often speaking in Hebrew. Can you tell us some of the things that he's saying?

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, that was an amazing thing. You know, I went to see the movie, and as he's leaving his village in Kazakhstan or wherever he's supposed to be, Kazakhstan, he says to a guy with one arm... (foreign language spoken). 'I'll buy you an arm in America,' and I looked at my wife and I said, 'Do I understand this language?' Because I had no idea that they were going to be speaking in Hebrew. And the thing about the Borat Hebrew is not only that he spoke in Hebrew but that his Hebrew is so amazingly current and sort of hip. So you know, it was a little bit distracting for me in a way, watching the movie, because I kept listening to what he was saying in Hebrew, which sometimes was and sometimes wasn't what he was, you know, supposedly saying in English.

GROSS: So are there any Hebrew in-jokes in Borat that you can clue us in on?

Mr. CHAFETS: No, I think the only Hebrew in-joke was the fact that it was in Hebrew.

GROSS: Right.

Mr. CHAFETS: I mean, I wasn't paying, you know, strict attention to--if there was any additional jokes beyond the Hebrew itself, but as I say, the Hebrew was extremely colloquial, and he spoke in an accent which would have been funny in Israel--in Hebrew, too, I mean, in Israel.

GROSS: Well, Zev Chafets, thanks so much for talking with us.

Mr. CHAFETS: Well, thanks a lot for having me on.

GROSS: Zev Chafets is the author of the new book, "A Match Made in Heaven," about the alliance between Israel and Christian Zionists.

OK, so we found an excerpt of the Hebrew version, cowritten by Chafets, of the Del Vikings doo-wop hit, "Come Go with Me." So here it is, sung by Danny Sanderson, back to back with the Del Vikings.

(Soundbite from "Come Go with Me")

Mr. DANNY SANDERSON: (Singing in foreign language)

(Singing) "If I need you, if I really need you, please, babe, never leave me. (Unintelligible)... say you never, never, really never, never give me a chance. Come, come, come, come, come, come into my heart. Tell me, darling, we will never part. (Unintelligible)... darling, come and go with me. Yeah!"

(End of soundbite)

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TERRY GROSS, host:

A great singer from the early days of doo-wop died this week. Pookie Hudson was the lead singer of The Spaniels, who were best known for the 1954 hit, "Good Night, Sweetheart, Good Night," which was written by Hudson. He died of complications from cancer at the age of 72.

(Soundbite from "Good Night, Sweetheart, Good Night")

THE SPANIELS: (Singing) "Do-do-do-do-do. Good night, sweetheart, well, it's time to go. Do-do-do-do-do. Good night, sweetheart, well, it's time to go. Do-do-do-do. I hate to leave you but I really must say, oh, good night, sweetheart, good night. Do-do-do-do-do. Good night, sweetheart, well, it's time to go. Do-do-do-do-do. Good night, sweetheart, well, it's time to go. Do-do-do-do. I hate to leave you. I really must say, oh, good night, sweetheart, goodnight. Well, it's three o'clock in the morning. Baby, I just can't treat you right. Well, I hate to leave you, babe. Don't mean maybe because I love you so. Do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do. Good night, sweetheart, well, it's time to go..."

(End of soundbite)

GROSS: Coming up, Ken Tucker reviews a new CD by one of Canada's most popular bands. This is FRESH AIR.

(Announcements)

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TERRY GROSS, host:

Sloan is a quartet that formed in Nova Scotia in 1991 and has spent most of the time since then as one of Canada's most popular rock bands. Their new album, "Never Hear the End of It," consists of 30 new songs, an unusually large amount of new material, but rock critic Ken Tucker says this creative feat isn't a stunt.

(Soundbite from "Can't You Figure It Out")

SLOAN: (Singing) "Do you remember when October disappeared... (unintelligible). And by December... (unintelligible)... live in the past. Well, I have to go. You see, the sign said so. A well-known title comes to mind, did you ever have to make up your mind? Can't you figure it out, yeah, figure it out, yeah. So..."

(End of soundbite)

Mr. KEN TUCKER: Sloan is a pop band, first and foremost, steeped in American and British music from the '60s and '70s in particular. In the song I just played called "Can't You Figure It Out," the first verse culminates in the lines, "A well-known title comes to mind, did you ever have to make up your mind?" The title Sloan is referring to is a 1966 song by the Lovin' Spoonful. Elsewhere, Sloan's close harmonies and layered production is reminiscent of the British band Squeeze.

(Soundbite of music)

SLOAN: (Singing) "I can't sleep even though I want to. My nerves are shot right between... (unintelligible). I can't sleep, I'm always looking forward to... (unintelligible). (Unintelligible)... a matter of what we keep and how we got to let it all go. Ahhhhhh. I can't sleep."

(End of soundbite)

Mr. TUCKER: Sloan's four members--Andrew Scott, Patrick Pentland, Chris Murphy and Jay Ferguson--seem to operate like a musical collective. They alternate instruments. Murphy, for example, plays the base most frequently, but also plays drums and lead guitar. Scott plays all of these at various times. They alternate lead vocals or blend them in various combinations of harmonies. One thing they do individually is write songs. In fact, that's probably the main reason putting 30 songs on "Never Hear the End of It" really isn't such a stretch. Divide the number by four songwriters, and it comes out to seven and a half songs a piece, not too strenuous a workload when you're as clever and fertile as these guys seem to be. But I must say, whoever wrote the best song on this album, "Ill-Placed Trust" deserves an extra cut of the royalties.

(Soundbite from "Ill-Placed Trust")

SLOAN: (Singing) "Everything you do, I want to do, too. Everywhere you go, I'll follow you. When I'm on my own, I wonder where you are. People tell me that I take it too far. Ill-placed trust promises rust. Ill-placed trust, ill-placed trust. Ill-placed trust standing in the dust. Ill-placed trust. Ill-placed trust. Yeah. Can you feel it all around you. (Unintelligible)... know you that surround you. Ill-placed trust..."

(End of soundbite)

Mr. TUCKER: Of course, using the phrase "Ill-Placed Trust" as a song hook is a dead giveaway that this is a group of Canadians. I don't mean to stereotype, but their command of the more literate cliches is something of a national trait. In fact, Sloan plays into many American rock band's ideas of our neighbor to the north as a kind of a fractured mirror of US pop culture with the influences and details slightly scrambled. Just listen to the way they make

an original composition, such as this one, called "I Understand," sound like the Beach Boys turned inside out.

(Soundbite from "I Understand")

SLOAN: (Singing) "Falling from the sky, you're free finally. You took me by surprise, crashing down in front of me, but it's all right. You open up your eyes to show how they see. You open up your heart to show how it beats. You open up your hands to show how they can bleed. It's all right. It's OK because everything will work out fine today because I understand..."

(End of soundbite)

Mr. TUCKER: Eight albums into their career, Sloan has yet to break through in a big way in America. I think the reason is pretty simple. Their brand of throwback-power pop appeals to only a sliver of the American market, a peppy little cult. On the other hand, they are huge in Canada, which is a huge, diverse country. But America likes its new music to sound new, at least in keeping with whatever the current trends are in rhythm, instrumentation and sentiment. The Sloan boys are happy to live in a self-created world where the Beatles never broke up, where ill-placed trust is a reason for puppy love breakup and where you really do never have to make up your mind about which is your favorite Sloan song because there's always a new one, right here on an album that never seems to end, in a good way.

GROSS: Ken Tucker is editor at large for Entertainment Weekly. He reviewed "Never Hear the End of It," the new album from Sloan.

(Credits)

GROSS: I'm Terry Gross.

(Soundbite of music)

Unidentified Singer: (Singing) "Listen to the radio where..."

(End of soundbite)