

From not singing to singing notes simultaneously

By **PATRICK O'SHEA**

Staff Writer

Some motorists, when driving alone, like to crank up the car radio and sing along.

Guy Mendilow is just as happy singing along with the hum of the highway.

After all, it's a great opportunity to work on his overtone singing — the remarkable art of forming two or more notes simultaneously.

"I learned it in the car because I was pretty self-conscious about it and the car is one of few places where I could sing in private," says the former Lawrence resident, who is returning to the area for two free concerts this weekend — tonight at Ten Thousand Villages in Princeton Township and Sunday afternoon at John & Peter's in New Hope, Pa.

"It's funny, because some people think overtone singing is this spiritual, intense thing that must be learned at the feet of a guru," he says. "But no... I've learned it singing along with the car engine or something outside that would be a drone.

Mendilow says he actually wrote a song that features overtone singing while "stuck in a traffic jam in Detroit on the way to a gig." The tune is one of 12 tracks on his self-released CD, "Soar Away Home."

Mendilow, who started his musical career at age 10 as a member of the American Boychoir, obviously has a knack for making the most of his musical op-

portunities. And considering the vast number of opportunities he's had in his 24 years, that can add up to a whole that even he has a hard time labeling.

"I am sometimes at a loss to describe my music..." he says. "It's such a mix of the places I've lived and the musical traditions I've learned. I didn't grow up listening to one thing or studying one type of music."

Some phrases he's offered to categorize his sound include "acoustic world," "world folk," "third stream" and "slash music."

"You know, folk-slash-Israeli-slash-Brazilian-slash-whatever else is kicking around my head."

Mendilow says he grew up "moving from place to place" as his family acquired triple citizenship: Israeli, British and United States.

He's lived in Israel, South Africa, Mexico and Brazil and now calls Boston his home — when he is home, that is. His musical pursuits, both performing and conducting workshops, still often has him on the road.

Mendilow's world sampler of musical influences can clearly be heard on his CD, an intriguing collection of folk, bluegrass, gospel, South African, biblical passages adapted from Sufi melodies, New Orleans blues and, of course, overtone singing. The only thing missing is Mendilow's latest infatuation — bossa nova, which he embraced on a trip to Brazil this year after the release of the CD. Look for those sounds on his next release, or at the shows he'll be giving this weekend.

Mendilow plays guitar and percussion to complement his soft, rich voice, and he's joined on the disc by a number of his musician friends from Oberlin College Conservatory, including multi-instrumentalist Brendan Cooney, who will perform with him at John & Peter's. ("He's a strange mix of jazz pianist and bluegrass banjo," Mendilow explains.)

While Mendilow began playing piano and writing songs at age 5, he was not particularly interested early on in singing (never mind singing multiple voices simultaneously). That changed shortly after he moved to New Jersey.

"Representatives from the Boychoir came to our school for an after-school program and my friends dared me to audition," he recalls. "I probably wanted to try it anyway, but they gave me just the excuse I needed.

"I was given a song to sing that I didn't know, so I just hummed it because I didn't know the words," Mendilow continues. "I got home that same day and my parents said the Boychoir had called to say I was accepted.... My parents thought I was nuts." Little did they know.

It would be just one of the first of his apparently infinite string of opportunities.

Guy Mendilow will give free concerts 6 p.m. today at Ten Thousand Villages in the Princeton Shopping Center, 301 N. Harrison St., Princeton Township. (609) 683-4464; and 6 p.m. Sunday, with Brendan Cooney, at John & Peter's, 96 S. Main St., New Hope, Pa. (215) 862-5981.



Singer-songwriter Guy Mendilow will perform at Ten Thousand Villages in the Princeton Shopping Center tonight and John & Peter's in New Hope on Sunday. Both shows are free.