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## January 2004 Will Mark *Der Bay's* Bar Mitsve Issue

### A Special Occasion

This is to let all of our readers know about a very special occasion, and to send in special articles. The January 2004 Issue will mark the completion of 13 consecutive years of publication with no delayed or missed issues. There have been several years with an extra issue—this year will be one of them.

While the special issue will be sent only to recent contributors, we continue the policy of no paid ads. Every recommendation and suggestion is based solely on its merits. Also, all listings of Yiddish club events and gigs are placed on the website and in hardcopy as space permits irrespective of contributions or not.

New on the website is the special search for *Der Bay* website. If you have a club, a band or are a teacher, translator, performer or presenter, you can find every listing on the site by inserting your name or the name of the group. By doing this you can check the accuracy and ask to have any needed changes. Most important is to check your e-mail address.

*Der Bay* continues to be the **international clearinghouse** for contacts and information on Yiddish clubs, Yiddish teachers, klezmer groups, Briv-Fraynd (Pen-Pals), performers, presenters, Yiddish Institutes and Conferences.

Oystsgn fun briv in der redaktsye (Letters to the Editor) is the most popular column followed by *Der internatsyonaler kalendar*. Each year there have been feature writers and many read like a Who's Who in the World of Yiddish.

The date on the label shows when you last contributed. If it has been a year already, please help again.

### A Yiddish Translator's Nakhes by Archie Barkan ArchiefromCA@webtvnet.

You can enter another connection success into your vast log of *shidukhim!* This one comes with an amazing series of fortuitous events—*Jewish Geography* at its very best!

It seems, a college professor in the San Francisco area, very interested in genealogy, and wanting to search out his widely dispersed *mishpokhe*, came across a pack of old letters and sepia picture postcards with faded Yiddish scrawl. He was referred to you, and you brought me into the picture as translator.

This gentleman was aware of *mishpokhe* in Kentucky, St. Louis, Odessa in the old country, etc. Little by little, as I pieced together a fact, a name, a location, in an infinite struggle with faded letters and odd sentence structure, with no punctuation marks and no such thing as a paragraph. Then results began to show.

One day he discovered relatives in nearby Daly City a stone's throw from his home—and there he met up with an older relation, just over from Russia. When the happy hysteria died down, he found out that just at that moment, another cousin was en route from Australia for a visit and reunion.

A few weeks later I was notified that the reunion in Daly City, now quite sizeable, gave birth to cousins in Toledo, Ohio and Detroit. These couples did not know of one another, and they were actually 30 miles apart.

The story is ongoing. Everyone is now in contact with the one remaining family member in Odessa, and a huge total family reunion is in the works.

I have been kept apprised of the ongoing developments and *kvel* a lot! And, Fishl, so should you....

## The IAYC Conference

Joan Levin [jdlevin@jdlevin.com](mailto:jdlevin@jdlevin.com)

Congratulations on an outstanding conference. I had a fabulous time! The quality of everything was fine. The hotel and the food were ok. Those don't concern me much, and they were certainly sufficient in my view. The quality of the presentations was much more important to me. The ones I attended were first rate. I learned a lot and had a great time.

I would like to mention three presentations that were standouts in my view. These were not those of the well-known *superstars* like Zalmen Mlotek, from whom I expected a first rate experience and got it, or the others Iosef Vaisman and Sheva Zucker, whose presentations were excellent—as I would have expected. The featured programs both day and evening were for the most part all top quality. Rather, I wish to make special mention of three less well known, but who were fabulous, and whom I'd like to see a lot more of at future events.

**Lori Cahan-Simon:** I've enjoyed Lori Cahan-Simon's earlier CD of Pesakh songs, but I was totally blown away by her presentations on Mikhl Gelbart. Lori's "Salute" with two wonderful members of her band exceeded all expectations. Her scholarship, musicianship and enthusiastic participation in so many aspects of the conference made this conference one of the best Yiddish events I've ever attended.

**Martin Green:** Marty was such a quiet presence at first. At the *Amateur Hour* on Friday I got just a hint of his lovely neshome from the way he modestly but expertly accompanied those who needed a piano accompanist. His performance of his compositions was truly wonderful! I bought his CD immediately. I love the way he melds Yiddishkayt into country music in such a sweet and meaningful way. His translation of *On Foreign Soil* is remarkable as well—a wonderful teaching aid.

**Marcia Gruss Levinsohn:** If there is one thing I am taking home to actually USE, it is her materials! I dropped in because the other three programs didn't interest me so much. I am interested in promoting programs for young children as a pathway to attracting young parents—the same young parents who send their kids to the day schools and religious schools, who sit on those boards, and who are the population that must be reached to bring a new generation in to Yiddish. For this reason Marcia's activities have the most potential for bringing Yiddish to a younger population. They have another advantage. They can be replicated easily without using expensive performers. I hope to produce her *Three Bears* story here in Chicago. It could be done effectively and reasonably. I got more *take home* ideas from her workshop than from any other!

Thank you for a great program, and I'm looking forward to Minneapolis!

## One of Our Tel Aviv Contacts

Daniel Galay [asafgl@012.net.il](mailto:asafgl@012.net.il)

Zay mir moykhl oyb ikh shrayb nit tsu dir offer. S'iz nit vayl ikh tu nit oyfn gebit oyf yiddish, eyle davke vayl men iz tsuifil farnumen. Di frage iz vegn vos vilstu mer hern, vegn der literarisher tetikayt, vegn status fun yiddish in Isroel, vegn di batsyungen tsvishn organizatsyes?

Eyn zakh iz klor. Letstns in Isroel iz faran a vaksndiker interes in der teme ashkenazishe identitet. Oykh yunge sabres heybn on tsu diskutirn vegn dem un es iz epes naves. In a gevisn moment kon es derfirn tsu farfestikn yiddish pozitsyes, ober beyker kon dos brengen tsu adernenterung tsvishn Isroel un yidn umetum. S'iz a breyte teme. Ot di naye terminologye shtelt aroys interesante frages.

Agev, mayn bukh *Klezmer Tunes with a Classical Touch* vert farshpreyt oykh in amerike.

## A Letter from South Bend, Indiana

I just found you on the Internet. How exciting to see that Yiddish is alive and well. My father, the founder in 1910, of the Workmen Circle (which is no more) in South Bend, Indiana wrote many articles for the Jewish Forward in Chicago. One of his stories won a prize and was published by the Forward. I have a copy of it and would love to see it in print. Would you be interested?

I speak and read Yiddish but very few people in South Bend do. My father was one of a large committee that went to a gathering after the war in Israel. Trying hard to see that the language should be Yiddish. He was so certain that Yiddish and all the Yiddish literature would be lost. He would be so happy to see that Yiddish is alive and growing. Love to hear from you. Mrs. Vodnoy (Elsye)

## An Elderhostel Alternative

by Meyer Zaremba [greenhcuzineh@aol.com](mailto:greenhcuzineh@aol.com)

The course that I teach at Madison Senior Scholars is titled, *The Jewish Experience Through Humor and Song*. Actually, it goes beyond that. It is based upon the premise that we can learn a great deal about a society through its cultural elements. I don't just sing songs and tell jokes. Everything is placed in context. In addition there is exposure to Yiddish literature, *A bisele geshikhte*, Yiddish/Jewish film. (I have shown *Teveye*, *Grine Felder*, *The Light Ahead*, *Momele*, etc.)

Last summer we showed and discussed *The Chosen*, *Daniel* (Israeli), etc. This is my course, there are many others, as you will see from the material that will be sent. Thanks for the information about the Perlstein Center.

## "Yiddish After the Holocaust," Aug 26-29, 2003

Jack S. Berger <jsberger@larcorp.com>

I was a guest speaker at the symposium at Oxford University. Below are two pieces of writing. One argues the case why it is imperative to translate Holocaust Memorial Books, originally written and published in Yiddish, into a major world language (my choice is English). The second is built around this theme, and the argument facilitated my ability to make the case to my audience.

The host was the Oxford Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies at Yarnton Manor. The OCHJS website is at: <http://associnst.ox.uk/ochjs>

### The Issue

This symposium was organized because of the generally recognized fact that Yiddish, as a language, is in a serious decline that was accelerated by the calamity of the Holocaust. Of fundamental concern to those who hold Yiddish dear, is the threat that the language could disappear. This concern formed the subliminal agenda of the entire conference.

While those present are lovers of *mame loshn*, few are optimists (i.e. there is a viable future for the language as we know it today). Most of them did not turn away from the demographic and linguistic reality, that a viable population base does not exist—nor is it likely to be regenerated—that would embrace Yiddish as its language of daily living and discourse.

This concern would not have existed, were it not for the fact that Yiddish experienced a literary and cultural flowering in the 150 years, starting at the dawn of the 19th century, that propelled it into the ranks of those world languages, in which mankind's most fundamental hopes and aspirations, are articulated in its highest form. A central issue that ran through this symposium, was how to make the *Yiddish Canon* vibrant and real for future generations.

### Matters of Positioning

A basic problem undermined the thrust of this gathering: this was a place where academics were meeting to exchange views that were grounded in various scholarly pursuits. The fundamental problem of trying to conserve and nurture Yiddish is a labor-intensive, long-term commitment to developing a scholastic infrastructure that runs into a considerable amount of money and human resources. This group was not equipped to discuss this issue, nor capable of projecting a vision of what such an undertaking might look like. The symposium ended without an *action plan*. However, while we did not highly resolve anything, a *community* did come into being that didn't exist before.

A terrible incubus lies across the body of World Jewry that dates back to the mid-19th century, when Yiddish and Hebrew contested for primacy as the national language of the Jewish people. That struggle, which split the Jewish community, created an implacable hostility by Zionists towards the *language of the Diaspora*. The price for the victory of Hebrew was to deal Yiddish a body blow that became mortal as a consequence of the Holocaust.

Now, sixty years after the Holocaust, Hebrew is the uncontested national language of the Jewish homeland. Considerations regarding Yiddish are treated gingerly by the Israeli educational and cultural establishment, and somewhat coolly. This is no small matter when it comes to marshalling and allocating resources at a global level. The challenge here is to *change the point of view*, so that the *Yiddish Canon* is viewed as a national treasure—worthy of nurturing and conservation—rather than the legacy of two millennia of a European Diaspora experience, best forgotten.

### Where My Presentation Fit In

*Yiddish Canon* contains 'Holocaust Literature' written in Yiddish. 'Holocaust Memorial Books' (or *Yizker Bikher*) are a proper subset of the 'Holocaust Literature.' My case argued for conserving and nurturing this segment of the Canon, on the basis of the importance of their content for three reasons: There is important, and sometimes unique, *history* to be gleaned from these books—not available anywhere else. The eye-witness accounts of the Holocaust experience constitutes *vital testimony* for the posterity of *all* mankind. Few other sources so illuminate the *way of life* of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe as these books do. *Conservation* implies translation into English. By making a text available in English, *broader access* will be afforded to all (Jewish and non-Jewish alike), whereas letting them sit in their original Yiddish form, consigns them to becoming esoteric reference material for a highly constricted universe of scholars.

### Other Interesting Things

A paper was presented to illustrate the pitfalls of translating Yiddish by people who lack more than just linguistic training. A *good* Yiddish translator clearly needs cultural, religious and historical training to be effective. This underscores the long-term nature of developing a skill base. We heard of the destructive results that early Israeli state policy had on the viability of Yiddish.

**Oy ir kleyne likhtelekh**  
by Morris Rosenfeld

**Translated & Adapted**  
by T. Bikel  
**Sent in**  
by Florence Bickell

I'm sending *Der Bay* this Khanike poem from Theodore Bikel. It is his translation of a Yiddish poem by Morris Rosenfeld. Thanks for all of your help in getting the word out of my interest to support the teaching of Yiddish to children.

In anticipation of the upcoming *yontev, khanike*, here is the Morris Rosenfeld poem and my translation.

Af yidish

O ir kleyne likhtelekh  
Ir dertselt geshikhtelekh  
Mayselekh on tzol  
Ir dertseylt fun blutikayt  
Beryeshaft un mutikayt  
Vunder fun amol.

Ven ikh zey aykh shminklendik  
Kumt a kholem finklendik  
Ret on alter troym  
Yid, du host gekrikt a mol  
Yid, du host gezikt a mol  
Ot dos gloybt zikh koym

S'iz bay dir a tolk geven  
Bist a mol a folk geven  
Host a mol regirt  
Host a mol a land gehat  
Host a mol a hant gehat  
Akh, vi tif dos rirt.

O, ir kleyne likhtelekh  
Ayere geshikhtelekh  
Vekn oyf mayn payn  
Tif in harts bavekt es zikh  
Un mit trern frekt es zikh  
Vos vet itster zayn?

The text is dated of course. But please bear in mind that Rosenfeld died in 1923, and that he wrote this at a time when the memory of the Jewish fight for freedom and independence, in ancient history, was all that he had to sustain his spirit.

It can be used at a Yiddish club meeting or said at home when lighting *di khanike likhtelekh*. Let me know of your experience.

In English

O little lights of mystery  
You recall our history  
And all that went before  
The battles and the bravery  
And our release from slavery  
Miracles galore.

As my eyes behold your flames  
I recall our heroes' names  
And our ancient dream:  
"Jews were learning how to fight  
To defeat an awesome might  
They could reign supreme"

"They would rule their own domain  
When the enemy was slain,  
The Temple cleansed and whole.  
Once there was a Jewish land  
And a mighty Jewish hand."  
Oh, how it moves my soul!

O little lights of mystery  
You retell our history  
Your tales are tales of pain.  
My heart is filled with fears  
My eyes are filled with tears  
"What now?" says the haunting refrain.

# WOODEN SYNAGOGUES

## Saving A Part of the Shtetls

Archeologists in Israel are constantly digging and finding parts of Jewish history and culture that otherwise might be lost to all generations. Albert Barry, 76 a film maker is trying to save a bit of Jewish history. His interest has been in the wooden synagogues built in the shtetls of Eastern Europe in the 15th to 18th centuries or even earlier.

When a group of Jews joined together in the shtetls to form a synagogue. Their first place of worship was in their homes. But as the towns grew, their desire to build a synagogue became upper-most in their minds. They needed a "home for their souls."

Wood was chosen for construction for several reasons. First, it was handy. The builders didn't have to go to the quarry to buy stones, but could go to the forest and cut down trees needed for the synagogue. The material was available and affordable. Another consideration was that wood was not ostentatious. The Jews did not want to appear to outdo their neighbors and their churches, though it was common practice for the Catholic, Protestant, as well as Jews, to use wood for their sacred houses of worship.

The structure usually had a plain exterior with a three-tiered roof almost like a Chinese Pagoda. It was simple, but practical, for what the Jews needed for the inside of the synagogue. The 3-tiered roof made it possible to construct a cupola or dome like ceiling.

The complexity of the roofs confirm the technical skill, artistry and engineering skill of the craftsmen. The artisans fell into two groups: the professional craftsmen who were members of the carpenter's guild, and those who practiced carpentry as a side line. This explains why some wooden synagogues show a remarkable degree of proficiency, while others erected at the same time, are quite simple.

Although the exterior of all wooden synagogues were very plain, not so the interior. The walls and ceilings were painted and decorated "with floral and arabesque designs and were entwined with signs of the Zodiac, biblical beasts and tablets covered with inscriptions, giving the appearance of a woven tapestry," describes Barry in a recent lecture.

Because there was a biblical injunction against *Graven Images*, no human figures were painted on the walls and ceilings. Two of the best known artists who did such beautiful paintings were David Friedlander and Eliezar Katz. Their paintings, and others doing similar work, has been called "the only real Jewish Folk Art in history."

One of the special features of these wooden synagogues were the Bimahs, centrally located to the interior. It was usually a "raised gazebo-like structure under a splendid canopy of wood." with steps on two sides, and from which the Torah and Holy Scriptures were read. The intricately-carved Bimah, together with the Ark for the Torah, were the outstanding features of the synagogue.

The Bimah was handcrafted and carved without the use of modern tools and with loving care. It has been estimated that approximately 1,000 wooden synagogues were built. But today, sadly, you cannot find a single one which remains as a synagogue. Some were burned down because they were made of wood and very flammable.

In many cases, the synagogues were destroyed by Cossacks during the pogroms, and what they did not destroy, the Nazis did during the Holocaust. Often the Nazis entered a town, gathered all the Jews, locked them in the synagogue, and burned the building down. Not only did the Nazis destroy the Jews but their culture as well.

Barry's family came to the United States in 1904 from a small Polish shtetl called Blendov. It had no synagogue. To pray the family went to the neighboring town of Mogielnica—three miles away. This synagogue was one of those burned by the Nazis with all of the residents locked inside.

Of the remaining structures in Eastern Europe, all are boarded up and in disrepair. In 1993 researchers from the Center for Jewish Art at Hebrew University in Israel went to Lithuania to find remnants of Jewish Life. They were surprised to find 6 wooden synagogues—that no one was aware of.

Barry, with the auspices of the Judaic Collection at FAU Libraries, decided that a documentary must be made so that future generations could see the structures and the art. He contacted a production company in Miami and went with them to Eastern Europe to document these few that are left. He documented the six, and also discovered four additional synagogues that no one was aware of.

The film, *The Lost Wooden Synagogues of Eastern Europe* has won awards at five film festivals. Theodore Bikel did the narration. The film was released in English, Hebrew and Yiddish. For a VHS copy in Yiddish, contact:  
**Albert Barry, 9761 Sunrise Lakes Blvd. Suite 205, Sunrise, FL 33322 or call 954-578-7070.**

# The American Yiddish Theater: Origins & History—Part III

by Israel Kugler

## Theater in America

Initially it was based on the needs of the semi-literate working-class families, for their life was *Bread and Theater*. After many hours of dreary sweatshop labor Jewish masses flocked to the Shund presentations with varied and extensive repertory that was designed to titillate audiences and based upon superficial changes in plot. House lights were on all the time, and people would feel free to converse, eat, and identify with what went on by shouting at the actors.

The *Star System* soon prevailed where the theaters were owned and managed by the superstars. Thus Thomashefsky Kessler, Adler, and Liptzen, had their own theaters, competed with each other for casts and developed followings of fanatic *patrioten*. The many societies based on the towns and cities of European origin—the *Landsmanshaften*—depended on additional income from their tickets to finance sick and death benefits. These organizations in addition to the Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring branches bought discounted blocks of tickets to be sold to their membership.

## The Theaters

The Yiddish playhouses were originally places for simple English dramas on the Bowery and then moved to over a dozen theaters on Second Avenue. The casts dwelt on types: the prima donna, the flirtatious soubrette, a lover, comic, villain, old men and women character roles. It took some time to overcome the Orthodox prejudice against women acting. Another barrier that finally was breached was the use of Yiddish for low characters and Daytshmerish (Germanism) for noble and prestigious types.

## Goldfaden's Contribution

Boris Thomashefsky gave a tribute to Goldfaden in the final and impecunious stage of Goldfaden's life:

"Goldfaden made us comedians, tragedians, playwrights, prima donnas and soubrettes. If not for him we'd be plain and simple Jews—cantors, choir singers, wedding jugglers, peddlers, and garment workers."

## Jacob Gordin (1853-1909)

Gordin was a revolutionary intellectual. He came to the U.S. in 1891 at the age of 38 with his 8 children. He wrote 35 plays and sought to elevate Yiddish drama

with a purer language, serious topics, and with the dramatist in command. He was hailed by Ab Cahan, the editor of the Yiddish Daily Forverts, as a welcome change from the popular Shund Theater. Gordin wrote about revolutionists imprisoned in Siberia, took themes from Shakespeare, Gogol, Chekhov, and Ibsen and transmuted the plots into Yiddish life.

*The Yiddish King Lear* has an old, wealthy Jew face the ingratitude of his daughters; *Got Mentsh un Tayvl* reworks the Faust story with a poor weaver buying a winning lottery ticket from the Devil, becomes a rich exploiting boss in his factory, and then hangs himself in remorse. His most famous play, a kind of Yiddish Queen Lear, entitled *Mirele Efros* starred Esther Kaminska and later her daughter, Ida. It had the will of a matriarch standing up to an avaricious daughter-in-law and her weak son.

The famous diary of the self-made Glückl of Hamlin dating back to the 17th century may have been a model for Gordin. I have my own memory that play put on by Polish Yiddish refugees in WW II Shanghai when I was in the navy. Gordin lost favor by obliterating the Jewish tradition and having actors orate and pontificate from the stage. But the cast *ad libbed* and he himself made some artistic compromises to *feed his family*.

The principal actors; Adler, Thomashefsky, Kessler, Moguiescu and Kenni Liptzen swung between their yearning for a purer Yiddish theater and succumbing to shund to make the theater business a going concern. Even the Hebrew Actors Union that antedated Actors Equity, became a job trust in deference to the star theater owners and their casts. Through *auditions* they prevented such coming stars from being admitted as Maurice Schwartz, Jennie Goldstein and Peysakh Burstein. Even Herman Yablokoff, known theatrically as Der Payatz, was initially rejected but later became the head of the Hebrew Actors Union.

Actors, critics, and producers of the English stage paid profound respect to the Yiddish actors and actresses. Eminent critic, Stark Young, found in Yiddish acting "expressiveness of hands and eyes and shoulders—tremendous and inexhaustible vitality. It had the realism of intense feeling and a deep respect for that feeling. Its best efforts come from a compulsive rendering of that intensity; and the beauty of these effects is a spiritual beauty, almost without appeal to the eye."

Gilbert Seldes, Jed Harris, and John Barrymore expressed similar sentiments.

## Toward a Yiddish Art Theater

Beyond Jacob Gordin, there were outstanding literary figures who enriched Yiddish drama and entered into a race between Yiddish survival in a less and less compact Yiddish-speaking population and its cultural expression. The grandfather of Yiddish literature, Mendele Moykher Sforim; the father, Yitzhok Leyb Peretz; and the grandson, Sholem Aleichem had their plays performed on the Yiddish stage. Mendele wrote of the Meat Tax and Military Conscription. Later a movie starred David Opatoshu in *Fishl der Krummer* that featured the love of a blind girl for a crippled young man.

Peretz wrote more directly for the theater:

- *Shvester* is about 3 young women; a widow with starving children, one who is seduced and made pregnant, and a third whose boyfriend was stolen by the middle sister.
- *Frimorgen* pictures poverty and despair in a slum basement.
- *Kvores-Nakht* deals with an abused wife crying on her mother's grave,
- *Di Goldene Keyt* concerns a rabbi who wants to preserve the very essence of Jewish continuity through the creative device of an eternal shabes,
- *Bay Nakht Afn Altn Mark* employs symbolism in the interaction among the ghosts of the past. They include; a poet, a streetwalker, and a water-carrier.

## Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916)

Among Sholem Aleichem's one-act plays there was *Mentshn*. It was set in a wealthy Jewish household where the servants were being abused. In my college days I worked as a waiter in Rosenblatt's Hotel in the *Borsht Circuit* in the Catskills in upstate, New York. The owner, Lebke Rosenblatt was a Yiddishist who staged a play in Yiddish. Since I knew Yiddish from my Arbeter Ring Shul days, I acted in *Mentshn*. The word *mentshn* has 3 meanings—a person, an outstanding human being, a servant. In this play the head of the household castigated his children for their nefarious acts toward the servants. Sholem Aleichem's punch line was, "Mentshn zaynen oykh mentshn" (Servants are also people).

Then there is the often-produced *Groyse Gevins*. This is a happy play of a simple tailor whose lifestyle changes when he thinks he won a 200,000-ruble jackpot. Still another is *Shver tsu Zayn a Yid* where two students, a Russian Christian and a Jew trade places for a year. *Fiddler on the Roof*, the successful musical, is derived from *Teveye the Dairyman*.

## Sholem Asch (1880-1957)

His reputation, outside Yiddish Theater, was as a novelist.

- *On the Sanctification of the Name* is about martyrdom in a Yiddish stage
- *Kiddush Hashem* in a 17th century Cossack pogrom.
- *Motke Ganef* about the underworld.
- *Uncle Moses* dealt with love and money in the Lower East Side garment trade.
- *G-t Fun Nekome* (G-d of Vengeance) was notorious—dealing with a Jew who owns a whorehouse, is married to a former prostitute, and their daughter who defies the father's effort to save her when she is involved with a lesbian prostitutes.

## David Pinski (1872-1959)

The 1903 Kishenev pogrom caused him to write the *Family Tzvi* about a bourgeois family awaiting a pogrom with the patriarchal grandfather confronting his three grandsons—a Zionist, a Bundist, an assimilationist. His *Yankl der Schmidt* concerns a virile blacksmith who wants his neighbor's wife as well as his own. One of his plays was translated into English and produced by the Theater Guild—*The Treasure* about a town getting wild with greed about a treasure supposedly hidden in a cemetery.

## H. Leivick (1888-1962)

Maurice Schwartz staged three of his plays dealing with the clothing business on the East Side—*Shmattes*, *Shop* and *Bankrupt*. His *Der Goylem* is set in 17th century Prague where a rabbi fashions a mechanical man out of clay to defend the Jews against a blood libel. The Golem then turns to the rabbi's daughter, at which point the rabbi destroys the Golem to a heap of clay.

## Ossip Dymov (1878-1959)

*Yoshke Musikant* (adapted by Joseph Buloff) was produced by the Folksbiene Yiddish Theater). A fiddler loves a servant girl and wins a fortune in a lottery. He turns the money over to a rival wastrel (a spendthrift) who then marries the servant girl. Yoshke commits suicide over his broken heart. *Bronx Express* appeared on Broadway in English.

## Peretz Hirshbein (1881-1949)

He wrote of rural Lithuanian Jewish life. In *Grine Felder* a Jewish farmer hires Levi Yitzkhok to tutor his sons. The daughter Tsine tries to prevent him from taking a job with a nearby farmer and wins Levi's hand. Other plays include—*Der Schmidt's Tekhter* and the *Puste Kretshme*.

### **Anski (1863-1920)**

Anski's *Der Dybbuk* was one of the most popular Yiddish plays, put on also in English and Hebrew. It deals with exorcism of a spirit in the bride's betrothed who dies and afflicts the bride to a rich suitor.

### **Maurice Schwartz (1890-1960)**

After moving from Irving Place to the original Madison Square Garden, Schwartz amassed funds to build his own theater on Second Avenue and 12th Street. Its greatest successes included J.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb*. The actresses were Bina Abramovitch, Jennie Goldstein, Celia Adler and Berta Gersten. The actors were Jacob Ben-Ami, Lazar Freed, Maurice Schwartz, Muni Weisenfreund (Paul Muni), David Opatashu, and Joseph Buloff.

### **The Vilne Troupe**

This company was made famous by the avante-garde production of the *Dybbuk* in Vilne (Yerushelayim di Lite). Led by Leyb Kadison, his (daughter, Luba and her husband Joseph Buloff, his company achieved world-wide recognition. It arrived in New York's competitive theater in the late 20's and was pulled in many directions by rival companies. After Muni Weisenfreund left Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theater, Buloff took his place acting in such classics as *Three Cities* by Sholem Asch, J.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb* and *The Brothers Ashkenazi*. Buloff's ability as an actor resulted in his joining the English stage where he appeared as the Greek landlord in *My Sister Eileen*, the peddler in *Oklahoma*, and in Arthur Miller's *The Price*. He also acted in a Yiddish version of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. He held one man shows with readings from Chekhov and delightful humorous pieces by Lutsky (*A Piece of Paper Driven by the Wind*, and *A Pot of Bubbling Soup*).

### **Yiddish Comedy**

Yiddish comedy was always an important phase, of Yidish theater, but some of it descended to *Shund*. Ludwig Satz, Aaron Lebedeff, and Peysakh Burstein were outstanding followers after Sigmond Mogulescu in their ability to use mime—a variety of vocal expression, facial plasticity and body language to caricature a character. Last in this male line was Menashe Skulnik—the perfect player of Shlemil and Shmendrik.

The diminutive Molly Picon stands out all by herself, in her ability to sing, dance, turn cartwheels, and sparkle as a gymnast. All of the comedians were capable of acting more serious

roles if called upon.

### **ARTEF**

ARTEF was the artisan politicalization of Yiddish theater. It is the acronym for a group tied to the Jewish sector of the American Communist Party. Existing in the glow of the Moscow Art Theater of Stanislavsky and the great Yiddish actor-producer Shlomo Mikhoels (later murdered by Stalin along with Soviet Yiddish writers) ARTEF drew a following under the direction of Benno Schneider. The Yiddish plays had expressionistic staging and adapted some standard Yiddish plays with a party-line twist. Many Broadway actors came to ARTEF performances. David Opatashu got his start there and appeared in movies and on Broadway. Jules Dassin who was associated later with the great Greek actress Merlina Mercuri also was a product of ARTEF.

### **Music & Dance**

Much of the music for Second Avenue came from the pens of Joseph Rumshinsky, Abraham Ellstein, Alexander Olshanetsky and Sholem Secunda. Secunda composed *Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn* and in the depression years sold it for 15 dollars! Many plays had choreographed dance developed by Binyumin Zemach, Felix Fybush, & Pearl Lang.

### **Yiddish Theater Today**

Despite growing numbers of Vinklen, Yiddish courses at universities, at the Workmen's Circle, and well-attended outdoors Yiddish festivals, the Yiddish theater leads a tenuous existence. The Folksbiene, founded in 1915 as a branch of the Workmen's Circle with amateur actors and actresses, continues to carry on. Once housed in the auditorium of the Forward Building on East Broadway, it moved to the Central Synagogue on East 55th Street. Since the fire there, it has had two seasons on West 55th Street, starring Yiddish actresses Mina Bern and Shifre Lehrer.

The 2002 season of the Folksbiene opened with *Yentl*, a play based on a story of I. Bashevis Singer. It stars Eleanor Reissa with excellent support of the veteran actress Minna Bern. It is hoped that the Folksbiene, the Forward, and the Workmen's Circle will locate in a setting for all three organizations. The Foiksbiene has a program for youngsters, *Kids and Yiddish*. There are staged readings by veteran actors and actresses in classic Yiddish plays.

I end with a dream and hope for the future—Zukunft. The Folksbiene must dare to flourish by incorporating:

- A Chorus and Chorale;
- A Dance program associated with Pearl Lang;



- A troupe appearing in urban centers across the U.S., even in Central and South America;
- A contest for new plays in Yiddish;
- A dramatic training program for new Yiddish performers;
- A Klezmer program.

Lovers of Yiddish and Yiddish culture will help make this dream a reality. Other ethnic groups have successful theaters —Repertorio Espagnol and The Irish Repertory Theater are examples. Yiddish has survived many obituaries. Nobel Laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer predicted that it will continue. As for the Yiddish theater as an expression of Yiddish culture, it is too important a part of historic Jewishness to disappear.

**Important. Sources**

**Books**

- Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater, Nahma Sandrow, Harper and Row, 1977
- Great Songs of the Yiddish Theater, Norman H. Warebud, Quadrangle, 1975
- On Stage, Off Stage: Memories of a Lifetime in the Yiddish Theater, Luba Kadison and Joseph Buloff, Harvard University Library, 1994
- Yiddish Proletarian Theatre: The Art and Politics of the ARTEF 1925-1940, Edna Nahshon, Greenwood Press, 1998
- The World of Our Fathers, Chapter 14, Irving Howe, Harcourt, Brace, Joyvanovich, 1976
- The Downtown Jews, Chapters 12 and 13, Ronald Sanders, Harper and Row, 1969

## The Alphabet

**Frage:** Why should we learn the alphabet in the standard order? As long as you know the letters, what difference does it make? (See answer at the bottom.)

There are tricks used in learning/teaching alphabets. A major problem is look-alikes. Here are a few. The mem & tes both have slits—mem on the bottom and the tes on the Top. Another example is the reysh-daled problem. The reysh is Rounded and the daled extended. Also there are pairs of adjacent sound-alikes; beys-veys, khes-tes, kof-khof, pey-fey, shin-sin and tof-sof. The lamed looks like a bolt of Lightning. With the exception of the shlos mem all of the lange oyses (those different at the end of a word look exactly like their regular partners except that the lower portion is curled 90 degrees to the left.

In the Roman alphabet the M is the 13<sup>th</sup> letter—the Middle one. In the Hebrew alphabet the lamed is the 14<sup>th</sup> letter of the 27 letters, and thus the middle one. There is one Hebrew triple sequence that follows the Roman alphabet—Lamed, Mem, Nun. It spells LeMoN.

Dr. Allan Blair has taught a workshop at an IAYC conference on how to teach the alphabet.

Der romanisher alef-beys af yidish

A	a	from A-Z	fun alef biz tof
B	be	musical	notesi
C	tse	musical	notedo
D	de	musical	notere
E	e	musical	notemi
F	ef	musical	notefa
G	ge	musical	notesol
H	ha		
I	ee	self	ikh
J	yot		
K	ka		
L	el		
M	em		
N	en		
O	o		
P	pe		
Q	ku		
R	er		
S	es		
T	te		
U	u		
V	ve		
W	toplve		
X	iks		
Y	inrek		
Z	zet		

**Entfer:** If there were not a general agreement in the accepted sequence of letters, there would be no useable lists as the likes of telephone books, encyclopedias, dictionaries rosters of names, etc.

## To the IAYC Conference

by Ruth Barlas

Since David and I cannot attend, we are sending you a greeting to the Conference and hope it will be presented in our absence. (Ruth is having a much-needed pacemaker implanted two days prior to the Conference).

Libe Khaveyrim,

Mir shikh aykh undzere hartsike grusn tsu der gor vikhtiker konferents fun di Yidish klubn fun IAYC. Es iz far undz a groyse antoyshung vos mir kenen nit zayn mit aykh, iberhoypt ven di teme fun der konferents iz di anerkenung fun di ibergegebene lerer fun di veltleke Yidishe shuln un fun di vikhtike tsvekn un dergreykhungen fun di shuln.

Dear Friends,

We send our very warmest greetings to this truly important conference of the Yiddish clubs of the IAYC. It is a great disappointment for us not to be able to be present with you, particularly when the theme of the Conference is the recognition of the dedicated teachers of the secular Yiddish shules and of the important goals and achievements of these shules. Only urgent health problems are keeping us away.

The secular Yiddish shules always knew that Yiddish is more than a language. It carries with it our entire culture of a thousand years of European Jewish life. It is an outgrowth and a reflection of our history, our beliefs, customs, attitudes and humor... yes, our pain and our suffering; but also our vitality, creativity, our compassion and most of all our humanity.

Today, there is a new vibrancy occurring. For example: An article that appeared August 15, 2003 in the "Yiddish Forward" of an interview with three young Sabras. They had brought with them a copy of a declaration proclaiming the importance of connecting the Israeli culture with the Jewish culture in the Diaspora, including Yiddish. This declaration was prepared by a group of Israeli students studying Yiddish in Tel Aviv, to appear in *Ha'aretz*.

We hope that this conference and the exciting activities in the world of Yiddish will inspire us all to continue to work for the goals of the International Association of Yiddish Clubs and reach for the standards set by the Yiddish secular shules.

Mit khaverishn grusn,  
Ruth and David Barlas

Co-chairs, 3rd International Yiddish Conference,  
Miami, Florida  
March, 1996