

Der Bay

The International Anglo-Yiddish Newsletter

March 2005

Vol. XV No. 3

Stars of the Entertainment Stage At the Minneapolis IAYC Conference

Lovers of Yiddish and Jewish music are in for a real treat at the upcoming conference of the IAYC in Minneapolis June 2 – 5, 2005. There will be performances every night of the conference.

MAGGIE BURTON is well known to local audiences for her interpretations of Yiddish songs. She is a cantorial soloist who has performed as a soloist with the University Opera Theater, Bach Society of Minnesota, St. John/St. Benedicts choirs, Kantorei, and Shira Chorale.

Russian vocalist **SIMA SHUMILOVSKY** came to the United States from Odessa in 1978 and was the top vocalist with a large touring and nightclub orchestra. She has sung with most of the top Klezmer bands in the upper Midwest and has appeared on the nationally broadcast *Prairie Home Companion*. She has been a pioneer for Russian music in the Twin Cities. She sings in English, Russian, and Yiddish.

The **SIM SHALOM KLEZMER BAND**, featuring **DAVID HABERMAN**, trumpeter and coronetist, specializes in music for rejoicing and celebrating all that is wonderful in Jewish life. The band has been a performance-based group that thrives on interaction between musicians and audience – venues from weddings, to b'nai mitzvah, to folk festivals.

The musical offerings will also include the local **PRAIRIE HEYM KLEZMORIM**, created by **MARTY DWORKIN** and featuring vocalist **AMY OLSON** who have a rendition of *Minnesota, Minnesota* that rivals the classic *Romania*. And it wouldn't be an IAYC function

without **MITCH SMOLKIN'S CABARET**—starring **AMANDA SEIGEL**, vocalist, back from New York, and **MARTY GREEN**, composer and pianist—a hit in Baltimore.

As a special treat, **FELIX FIBICH**, Master Jewish Dancer, will participate in the conference. Mr. Fibich brings a wealth of experience from the training he received initially in Warsaw from the Yung Teater and later from his partner and wife, Judith Berg (who performed in the Polish film version of *The Dybbuk*). Fibich escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto and made his way to the US in 1950. He has danced, and taught, and choreographed all over the world. He performed in the NY Second Avenue Theater, and on Broadway. During his extraordinary career he has given recent master classes at KlezKamp, performed in Copenhagen on his 83d birthday, and appeared in Superbowl commercials. It is an honor to have him at our conference.

The Ninth IAYC Conference will be held from Thurs., June 2nd to Sun., June 5th, 2005 in beautiful Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Minneapolis Yiddish Vinkl co-chair, Roz Baker is coordinating the conference. Roz can be reached at: 612-377-5456 or the Publicity chair, Annalee Odessky at: annalee@mn.rr.com or 952-544-5423.

Greater Milwaukee/Chicago area attendees can travel by a chartered Greyhound bus roundtrip for only \$100. Contact Paul Melrood at: 414-961-1715 or e-mail majpaulww2@sbcglobal.net

Fun with Yiddish

Doctors tell us that we are what we eat, drink and breathe. If we want to be healthy physically we should not eat khazeray, drink impure water, or breathe in impurities.

Doctors also tell us that we are what we think. Our brain is the most complicated system on the Earth. If we think *happy* thoughts we are *happy*, and if we think *sad* thoughts we are *sad*. More accurately we should use the terms *positive* thinking and *negative* thinking.

So let's have our love of Yiddish make us happy and give us happy thoughts—let's think positively. That is not too easy when most of the newspaper headlines and TV feature stories are of disasters, murders and mayhem.

Here comes Yiddish to the rescue. Just like the Lone Ranger who came on his white steed with his Indian companion Tonto—Yiddish too comes to the rescue.

Fun is not only those things that are funny—ha! ha!

Fun also means enjoyment. If you ask a kid if she is having fun, you are really asking her if she is enjoying herself.

Word games have been popular for a very long time. As kids we played Hangman, and when we started to wear knickers, we were introduced to Scrabble. Yiddish is made for Scrabble. Imagine starting with OY and adding a G for GOY and then GOYIM or GOYISH

There was the game that we had to think of a place or a person whose first letter was the same as the last letter of the previous word—Albany would elicit from us—Yonkers, and then Schenectady. Haynt shpiln mir yidish dzhiografi.

Another game is to come up with words with which we can keep on removing a letter and still have a word. An English example would be RAID, AID, ID, I. Another longer one is PRIDE, RIDE, RID, ID, I. Itst darf men nutsn yidishe verter.

Crossword puzzles sharpen the mind, and Yiddish crossword puzzles are great to learn Yiddish. Making up your own puzzle is a real challenge and lots of fun. The good part is that you can put in a blank space anywhere you want.

So now let's have fun with Yiddish. All of our readers will write in with ideas on how to have fun with Yiddish—right?? Okay, most of them, well maybe many of them, all right, some of them.

Groys Fargenign – Hundert Yor Yidishe Literatur

Review by Morrie Feller

We have a great source of Yiddish material that my leyenkrazz enjoyed reading for almost a year. It is entitled *Mit Groys Fargenign – Hundert Yor Yidishe Literatur*. It was edited by Heather Valencia, and published by the Oxford Institute for Yiddish Studies.

The stories consist of a selection from the works of sixteen authors (plus a Biblical piece). The book comes with eight CDs in which all the stories (except one) are read by well known Yiddishists.

Two very helpful features of the book are: an extensive glossary, and copious footnotes which are truly enlightening. With a price under \$40 for the book and the CDs, this volume is a worthwhile addition to anyone's Yiddish collection.

For information about Heather, visit:
<http://www-modlang.stir.ac.uk/valencia.html>
29-page glossary, 238 Pages ISBN 1 877909-76-9

New Yiddish Site for Historians

Mendele Jan. 25, 2005

I have put a website online entitled "Yiddish sources in historical research." It can be found at:

<http://www.iue.it/Personal/Researchers/Zaagsma/Yiddish/>

The idea of the site is to provide people who wish to use Yiddish sources in historical research with links to materials, institutions etcetera and it grew out of my own collection of links and it seemed a good thing to turn them into a site. The site is very much a work in progress and this is the first basic version, I shall be adding more things over time. I would like to invite everybody to take a look and send me any comments, criticisms or suggestions you might have.

Gerben Zaagsma, Research Student
European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization
Villa Schifanoia
Via Boccaccio 121
I-50133 Firenze
Italia

GSM: 0039-347-2233405

Email: Gerben.Zaagsma@iue.it

Homepage:

www.iue.it/Personal/Researchers/Zaagsma/

Felix Fibich, Master Jewish Dancer

By Judith Brin Ingber

Felix Fibich will be at the IAYC conference. The diminutive man with penetrating eyes and expressive hands in constant motion says that at 86 he can hardly imagine planning daily dance workshops for six days in a row.

Yiddish dance might be a newly coined description for dance from the shtetls, cities and countryside of Eastern Europe before the Nazi period but Fibich is an old hand at it. He has all the traditional dances at his fingertips and toes, still spry, still coaxing his students. He distills movements to indicate personalities or characters from Jewish literature, or feelings from holidays and rituals.

"I came to the US in 1950 with my wife, Judith Berg, it is a miracle we survived in a hostile world. We never received artist grants or rewards and we didn't get support from the German Jews we met at the 92nd St. Y. We represented the shtetl that was no longer in style. They were embarrassed by what we stood for.

We turned to the Yiddish theatre in New York. The audience understood the Jewish material we were working from—they knew what it meant if I took my index finger to meet up with my thumb, holding it up in front of my face and shaking it back and forth with a cocked head. In the Yiddish theater my dance gestures weren't considered corny or too ethnic. In Europe it was a virtue to show my emotions, but I don't understand Anglo-Saxon restraint affecting mainstream Jewish America

His style was honed from training in Warsaw from the Yung Teater, and with his dance teacher and later life partner Judith Berg. She was known for her choreography and performance in the best-known Yiddish film made in Poland, the filmed version of "The Dybbuk" made in Warsaw in 1938. Fibich worked with Ida Kaminska and with the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre's Shloyme Mikhoels and performers Dzigan and Shumakher who were also on the run from the Nazis and Stalin into the far reaches of Eastern Soviet Russia

His memories of Jewish dance were embedded first in early synagogue experiences with his father who was from the Hasidic Modzitcher Rebbe's court. His father was a highly talented cantor and Felix remembers how his father performed like an actor, crying with the prayers on the High holidays, expressing his devotion as he led the congregation in song. "

I started cheder when I was 4, but it was expected that I would take over the family restaurant so my education didn't continue. My father understood my longing for the theater more than my mother who was a businesswoman. She ran the Warsaw restaurant. On my treks to get supplies I stopped in Jewish theaters to watch rehearsals

His family was forced into the Warsaw Ghetto; he was determined to resist the Nazis. One day he escaped, running east. He met up with his dance teacher Judith Berg in Bialystok. They joined other Jewish performers; they reached Ashkhabad where he performed in the state opera. After World War II, they were repatriated to Poland and ran a dance school for Jewish orphans. The children associated anything Jewish with danger and death, so getting them to enjoy dancing was monumental.

Fibich and Berg entered America in 1950. He worked on 2nd Avenue in the Yiddish Theater. Felix's talents belied what was fashionable and Felix the performer was noticed. Joseph Papp hired him for "Café Crown" at the Public Theatre. That play went on to Broadway with Felix and there he performed in 2 other shows.

The New York Times noted his work in the classic Yiddish play "Green Fields;" he starred in a French feature film "XXL" with Gerard Depardieu where he spoke in French and Yiddish. He was featured in a Superbowl commercial ordering around hurly-burly football players in a dance class, one carried him airborne as he executed a fancy flurry of beating feet. Fibich has been on a few episodes of the television program "Law and Order

In 1996 Felix returned to Poland, giving dance workshops at the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow. "I was surprised that I could touch young Polish people. The youngsters responded to an old man. I tried to show the beauty of Jewish music and movements. Polish TV made a documentary film of my life and work, tracing my youth on Nalewki Street in the heart of Warsaw's Jewish quarter."

The documentary was shown on Polish TV. It can be found in at Lincoln Center Dance Division of the New York Public Library. (Information about Fibich's career can also be found at YIVO and the Museum of Jewish Heritage of Lower Manhattan).

After the war I said, there must be a reason why I lived when so many were killed. I must preserve the Jewish soul, the Jewish character in dance.

An Exchange of Letters with Lublin

Subject: Re: Chelm

From: Robert Kuwalek <robkuwalek@gmx.net>

A groysem dank for your e-mail. Monika and Adam told me that you will be writing to me about Chelm. I think that your subject is very interesting. For me most important is to know what exactly is interesting for you - how the town is looking, how looked, what happened before WWII, during and after?

In the 90's I published the article about the Jewish communities in Chelm county (also in Chelm town) based on the archival material in the State Archive in Lublin. Article is in Polish and never was translated into English. I have material about the fate of the Jews in Chelm during the war. About today's Chelm I know also something because my wife is from Chelm and her parents are still alive there. If you could send me more detailed questions, I can help you.

Robert

Tayerer Robert,

I received a post from Monika mentioning that part of your research is on Chelm. My interest is in all facets of Chelm--Chelm of fiction, pre WWII, and post WWII. I've been writing stories of an imaginary Yiddish club from Yenemsville visiting current Chelm. The facts of current Chelm are accurate. My long-term objective is an article on the 3 faces of Chelm in which I compare and contrast each facet.

Robert, I am fortunate to have a young man who was born in Poland and came here when he was 16. He is a computer expert and helps me with my website. He also goes to Poland periodically. He was there for 3 months this last year, and took some pictures—they are on my website. You may wish to look at the site to see what I am doing. The Chelm project is a new one for me.

If you can send me the article, he could translate it. My current information is what I have been getting off the Internet. As you know, there were 2 yizkor books written about the Jews of Chelm. The better one is the one from South Africa. Only a small portion of it has been translated from Yiddish into English.

First, what are the best sites you have found on the web—including those in Polish?

Second, I am interested in any info about the cemetery and the synagogue.

Third, if you could send me a copy of your article (Polish). I would be happy to return any favors I can. Has Monica shown you a copy of *Der Bay*?

fishl

Philip,

I will send you a copy of my article next week. This publication is in my office and I can make the copy there. I think that it will be interesting for you. The cemetery is reconstructed - is located not far from the home of my parents-in-law. I have to look if I have the photos of the cemetery in my computer.

On one photo which you present on your website is small fragment of New Synagogue. There are the photos with tavern and on the right side is the front (fragment) of the wall. It is difficult for me to explain to you which it is exact building. If you can number, probably it will be second or third. Today in this building is Technical Organization.

The Old Synagogue was destroyed in 1940 - the Germans burned down this building in 1939 but final destruction was in 1940. This building was behind the New Synagogue. Now the new building with apartments was constructed there. About the Polish websites, after my checking I will be writing you later.

I have one addition for you. The photos of the railway station in Chelm - it is not the main railway station. The main railway station is looking differently - now there is new building. The old building was bombed by the Soviets in 1944. I use the main railway station because it is closer to my parents-in-law but not closer to the center. Both stations were located far from the town because in the tsarist Russia the railway stations were located for military purposes not economical. On your photo you have the station called "Chelm Town". "Chelm Main Railway Station" is located about 4 km. from "Chelm Town" in the eastern direction. Monika did not show me your newsletter.

Robert

Zapraszam do odwiedzenia stron o Zydach lubelskich:

<http://platon.man.lublin.pl/~stona/JEWS>.

phone: +48/81/74-00-348

NEU +++ DSL Komplett von GMX +++

<http://www.gmx.net/de/go/dsl>

GMX DSL-Netzanschluss + Tarif zum
supergünstigen Komplett-Preis!

Jim Hendon's Road to Yiddish

Any journey that we begin always starts with an initial step. I remember when I made such a journey to learn the Yiddish language. There is no practical reason for my having done so, other than the fact I'm an avid student of languages. I was a language major at the university, and to this day I still study a great deal on my own.

My efforts with Yiddish started when I was a child, and it has continued well into adulthood. My first exposure to it came from a simple box of kosher salt my father once bought at the grocery store. On the one side there was Hebrew and Yiddish lettering. I stared at the letters for quite a while. At the time I didn't realize that each letter would become pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that I would gradually put together.

Many people may find it odd that I chose Yiddish. You see, I'm not Jewish. My very first exposure to Judaism actually came from the three kids in my grade school class who were. They got holidays off that the rest of us didn't. I grew up in a working class suburb of Chicago, where Jews dotted the region, but were far from being the majority. To this day I have no idea where they may have gone to shul, but there must have been a synagogue somewhere, because one of my classmates used to go to Hebrew school once a week.

I will never forget the day she brought in the textbook she used in her lessons, and read to us from it, starting from the back of the book. She only read a small portion, but when she finished it was pointed out to us that Hebrew reads from right to left; the exact opposite of English. As rudimentary as this may seem to some, this was an epiphany that would remain with me in the years to come.

It wasn't until much later that I developed an appreciation for the Jewish faith. During the early 70's I spent time traveling throughout Europe, and eventually I ended up on a Kibbutz in Israel. I was not alone in my sojourn. Airfare was inexpensive, and many college-aged students of all faiths, followed a similar route. I lived on an Ulpan kibbutz, which is a kibbutz where you divided your time working and studying Hebrew.

One day I was thumbing through the glossary of the textbook we used. It showed a list of Hebrew words and their equivalents in several basic languages, one of which was Yiddish. By then I was familiar with the Hebrew alphabet, and because I had studied German, I usually was able to read the words. I saw the link with its Germanic

past, and I was astounded by it. I had never realized German and much of Yiddish were close cousins. Still, there was much more for me to learn. I didn't stop there.

Years later I continued with my tertiary level of education, and majored in German at the University of Illinois. At the time they offered courses in Yiddish that helped meet the school's language requirement. One day I stumbled across an old textbook in the university's bookstore. It was no longer used for the course, as it went for a dollar. I bought it and began my own independent studies to learn Yiddish.

The more I studied the language the more I leaned about the religion and its people. That holds true, really, for any language you learn. Language and culture go hand in hand. At one point I even went to a Yiddish group in the city where I now live. This gave me an opportunity to hear it spoken. Up till then my exposure to Yiddish remained in book form. Hearing it spoken gave me a chance to train my ear, and that is essential for education of any language.

One motivation to learn Yiddish is that it is in some danger of extinction. There once was a nuclear family of several generations that spoke it together as a group. That usually is not the case now. The estimated number of speakers in the United States is approximately 250,000 with another 100,000 worldwide. Fortunately, scholars believe these numbers are not declining.

All around the globe there are efforts to teach it to others, regardless of age. There are Yiddish theatre companies in New York, Warsaw, Tel Aviv and Montreal. One can send their child to a Yiddish immersion summer camp. In Boro Park, Brooklyn one can use an ATM that lets you choose between English or Yiddish.

We are who we are because of those who have gone before us. They've laid for us a remarkable foundation upon which we can build individual identity and self-worth. Our forefathers left for us a remarkable legacy, and it's a legacy that must be passed on to generations to come.

The task that lies ahead is to preserve our heritage, which in this case is the Yiddish language. Doing so helps us to become a complete person. At the same time, it can prevent us from becoming a bit lost. Learn it, then encourage your children to do so as well. A better eytse I can give you not.

My Visit to Piltz, Poland

by Sonia Pressman Fuentes spfuentes@comcast.net

From August 12-25, 2001, I took an Elderhostel Jewish Heritage trip to Poland, during which time I visited my parents' *shtetl* of Piltz. My article on that experience, *A Visit to Piltz*, was published in the March/April 2002 issue of *Outlook*, Canada's progressive Jewish magazine, and in the *Kielce-Radom Special Interest Group Journal* of jewishgen.org, an issue about Piltz (Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 2002). It was subsequently translated into Polish for the Polish Jews Forum, an e-zine for Polish Jews and Poles interested in things Jewish; the English is at: <http://www.erraticimpact.com/fuentes>

On that trip, there were 11 of us tourists, 4 of whom were non-Jews. I became friendly with these 4 and have remained close to 3 of them. These 3 are Steve and Helen Chambers, a Catholic couple from Minnesota, and Alex Oldfield, who is not affiliated with any religion. I am a secular Jew and wanted to visit the village where both my parents were born.

Steve, Alex, and I e-mail each other many times each day and have had several visits. I plan to go to Minneapolis June 2-5 to attend the conference of the International Association of Yiddish Clubs, during which time I plan to see Steve and Helen.

It has seemed miraculous to me that we met and became friendly on this tour and have since found that we have so many things in common. I thought our relationship was so special I decided to write an article about it.

One of my questions was: Why did you, a non-Jew, take a two-week Jewish Heritage trip to Poland? I mentioned that I doubted that I, a Jew, would take a similar Catholic or Protestant Heritage trip to a foreign country. Alex's answer on his evolving interest in Jews and Judaism was longer than Steve's and will be incorporated into my article. I found Steve's comment marvelously uplifting and hope it will be similarly inspiring to you. It follows.

"Why was/am I so interested in Judaism as to sign up for the Jewish immersion trip to Poland? My first thought is 'why wouldn't I be?' I remember Helen reading aloud to me the notice from the Elderhostel bulletin and both of us declaring 'Yes' without any need for discussion. A mutual interest in Judaism is one of the first topics that drew Helen and me together in our discussions when we met.

"The suggestion that a Jew would not be drawn to journey to places important to Catholic or Protestant history might open an avenue of interest. Perhaps the

difference is that Helen and I see Judaism as far more than religion. It's a major, major foundation of our culture and history as a people, whatever religious or non-religious expression a person is following today.

I remember being very young and having a visit from my Aunt Effie an assertive hawk of a woman who was a Christian missionary to the Armenians in Turkey for 20 years late in the 19th century up to about 1914. She was present when the massacres began and gave lectures about the events for many years.

"She was always reminding us that our 'Christian' foundation begins with the Jewish people, and if we ever forget that, we are making a sad mistake. She expressed horror at the ignorance, dishonesty, and evil that spawned prejudice against the Jewish people, and didn't hesitate to speak up.

"This included taking on a couple of my uncles and another relative who made dreadful remarks against Jews, Blacks, and Catholics. I witnessed all that, and afterwards Aunt Effie and others would talk to us kids about it, telling us that those relatives were good people despite their mistakes, but that we should not discriminate against anyone because of their race, religion, or creed.

"Then the Holocaust occurred, the State of Israel was created, and I read dozens of books about the Jewish people. Perhaps more important, I have had the good fortune over the years of being friends with many Jewish people. So I am grateful for having these fine teachers who have opened my eyes.

"As I think about your question, Sonia, it hits me that going to Poland was even more than seeking to study Judaism. It was that of course. I felt an attraction to visit sacred places where vital people lived and were deeply wronged by our Western civilization—brutalized and murdered. How could civilization perpetuate such a sin? All of us in this civilization bear some of the stain, I feel, and by facing up to it, perhaps the civilization as a whole can grow toward wisdom and love.

"I doubt if I would have been interested in simply touring Poland. But by doing so with Jewish people who have become dear friends, has helped me grasp something powerful and beyond words, something that transcends Judaism, Christianity, nationalism, and all other isms."

Copyright 2005 by Sonia Pressman Fuentes

The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe

by Jeffrey P. Edelstein

The YIVO Institute of Jewish Research has embarked on a monumental publishing endeavor, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. When published by Yale University Press in 2008, this multivolume encyclopedia of approximately 2 million words, 1,000 images, and 100 maps will draw on the most current scholarship in all relevant fields and will explore Jewish life in all its variety and complexity. This unprecedented project aims to cover everything of cultural or historical significance using an ecumenical, nondenominational, and nonideological editorial approach.

The encyclopedia will constitute the definitive reference work on all aspects of the history and culture of Jews in Eastern Europe from the beginnings of their settlement in the region to the present time. The articles will cover the area east of German-speaking lands, north of the Balkans, and west of the Ural Mountains. Thus, Hungary, Czech lands, and Romania are included, as are the Baltic States.

Editor-in-Chief **Gershon David Hundert**, professor of history and chair of the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University, has assembled an internationally recognized group of scholars. More than 30 editors and 400 contributors have committed to the project. *The YIVO Encyclopedia* will not only provide a forum for their collective knowledge, but also serve as a meeting point for a new generation of scholars from former Communist Europe and their colleagues from North America, Israel, and Western Europe. Currently 1,200 of 1,800 planned articles have been submitted and are at various stages of the editorial process.

In addition this encyclopedia also will be published electronically. Its Web site will serve as a portal into the study of East European Jewry by placing educational, archival, and reference resources at the fingertips of users worldwide. The integration of a basic reference work and public access to a major archival and library collection makes *The YIVO Encyclopedia Online* perhaps the only project of its kind currently in development.

When completed, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* will offer a much needed revision of the memory of the East European Jewish experience. With its up-to-date scholarship, diversity of contributors, and attention to overlooked aspects of history and culture. This encyclopedia set will be a valuable addition to the humanities bookshelf.

The encyclopedia is a new expression of the preeminent role that YIVO has played in Jewish scholarship and communal life for almost 80 years. Founded in Berlin in 1925, and headquartered in Wilno, Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania), YIVO set out to bring modern culture to all sectors of the Jewish community. This mission was to be accomplished by studying Jewish society through the prism of the modern social sciences: sociology, folklore, linguistics, psychology, history, and economics.

In 1940, concurrent with the destruction of both YIVO's collections and Europe's Jewish communities, YIVO director **Max Weinreich** formally reestablished the organization in New York City, where a branch of YIVO had existed since 1925. After the war, portions of YIVO's library and archives were discovered in Germany, and the materials were shipped to New York. These remnants of YIVO's prewar holdings served as the basis for rebuilding the institute's collections.

YIVO is the only pre-Holocaust scholarly institution to have transferred its mission to the United States. It continues to serve as the foremost center for the study of East European Jewry and Yiddish language, literature, and folklore. It is a leading resource for the study of the American Jewish immigrant experience. The institute publishes scholarly journals and monographs; mounts public programs such as exhibitions, lectures, and film series; and educates and trains through seminars and Yiddish language courses.

In 1999, YIVO moved into the Center for Jewish History (CJH), marking the start of a great cooperative venture in the world of Jewish scholarship. Housed under one roof are five institutions committed to educating the public on the culture and history of the Jewish people. The CJH shelters the combined holdings of its partners, which include thousands of library and archival collections, thus offering the public an opportunity to piece together fragments of Jewish history in a way previously impossible.

As the guardian of the cultural treasures of the Jewish people in Eastern Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere, YIVO sees *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* as a fresh opportunity for opening the doors of its archives and library to the general public and as the best way of carrying its legacy of Jewish scholarship into the future.

For the Love of Yiddish—Far di libe fun yidish

by Charles Casper, Las Vegas TYN Contact (Las Vegas Yiddish Reporter 12/24/04)

I had a love for the Yiddish language almost from the day I was born. My parents came from Poland and Yiddish was their first language. It became mine as well. We lived in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, NY, which was populated with Yiddish speaking immigrants. Until I went to public school, I thought the whole world spoke Yiddish. As I was growing up, I realized what a wonderful gift my parents had passed down to me. Yiddish was opening up a whole new world and enabled me to communicate with other Yiddish speakers wherever I traveled.

I would like to share one such experience with you.

In 1954 I was drafted into the US Army for two years. I spent my first year in the States. I was then sent to Bordeaux, France. It was the first time I was away from my family and friends—it was a lonely feeling. I went to Shul to pray on Yom Kippur. I asked the man next to me if he spoke Yiddish. His eyes lit up and we conversed in Yiddish. He asked me to join him at home to break the fast and to meet his wife, Mme. Rabey and his daughter, Suzanne, who spoke Yiddish. I became a frequent visitor on weekends. I was made to feel like a member of the family. When it was time to return to the States, it was hard to say goodbye.

In 1997, my wife and I took a trip to France. It was 41 years since I had been there as a soldier. When we arrived in Bordeaux, and after visiting the synagogue which was still there, I looked for the apartment building in which the Rabey family once lived. I was shocked when I found the family name still on the doorbell outside the building. Suzanne answered when I rang the doorbell and was shocked when she realized who it was. We went into her apartment, which brought back so many memories. My wife and I learned that Suzanne's parents had passed away. She never married and stayed in the same apartment.

I have been telephoning Suzanne every *month* since our visit *with* her to inquire about her health and together we share the memories of long ago, in Yiddish, of course.

Ikh bob gehat a libe far Yidish k'mat fun dem tog ikh bin geboyrn gevorn. Mayne eltern zenen gekumen fun Poyln un Yidish iz geven zeyer ershte shprakh. Es hot gevorn mayn ershte shprakh oykh. Mir hobn gelebt in dem Brownsville teyl fun Brooklyn, New York vos iz geven befelkert mit Yidishe shprekher imigrantn. Biz ikh bin gegangen in Shul hob ikh getrakht az di gantze velt hot geredt Yidish. Ven ikh bin dervaksn hob ikh realizirit vos a vunderlikh matone mayne elteren hobn mir gegeben. Yidish hot

mir geefent a gantse naye velt un hot mir oykh derloybt tsu zakh farbindn mit andere Yidish reders vi ikh hob gegangen.

In 1954 hot di regirung mir genumen in militer far tsvey yor. Far mayn ershtn yor bin ikh geven in di Fareynikte Shtatn. In 1955 hot men mir geshikt tsu Bordeaux, France. Ikh hob ongekumen in shtat a tog far Yom Kippur. Es is geven dem ershtn mol avek fun mayn familye un fraynd. Ikh bin geven zeyer elent. Dem kumendikn tog bin ikh gegangen in Shule tsu oysbetn a gutn yor. Ikh hob gefregt der man vos iz gezetsn noent tsu mir az efsheer ken er redn Yidish. Zayne oygen hobn zikh ungetsindn un mir hobn ongehoyn a shmues af Yidish.

Far di ende fun Yom Kipur, hot er mir gebetn tsu geyn mit im tsu zayn heym un brekhn der fast tsuzamen mit zayn vayb, Mme. Rabey, un tokhter, Suzanne. Zey hobn beyde geredt Yidish. Ikh bin geven dankbar far zayn farbetung.

Es iz nit geven lang nokh dem az ikh bin gevorn an oft gast in der Rabey heym nokh mayn arbet in militer. Zey hobn mir gemakht tsu filn vi a mitglider fun di familye. Ven di tsayt hot gekumen far mir tsu tsurik geyn tsu di Fareynikte Shtatn iz dos geven zeyer shver tsu zogn "goodbye."

In 1997 mayn vayb un ikh hobn genumen a rayze tsu Frankraykh. Es iz geven eyn un fertsik yor zint ikh bin geven dortn az a soldat. Ven mir zenen ongekumen tsu Bordeaux, zenen mir gegangen tsu zen di Shul vos hot nokh geshtanen dort. Nokh dem hob ikh ongehoyn zukhn di dire binyen vu di Rabey familye hot amol gevoynt. Ikh hob gehat a shok tsu gefinen di familye nomen oyf dem tir gleker indroyen fun binyen.

Suzanne hot geenfert ven ikh hob ongeklingen un zi hot oykh gehat a shok ven zi hot realizirt ver tsi iz oyf dem untershter shtok. Zi hot aruntergekumen tsu undz bagrisn un tsuzamen zenen mir arayngegangen in ire dire vos hot tsurik gebrakht azoy fil ondenkn. Mir hobn geredt far a lange tsayt. Mir hobn oysgefinen fun Suzanne az ir elteren zenen geshtorbn mit yorn tsurik. Suzanne hot keyn mol nit khasene gehat un zi iz geblibn voynen in di zelve dire ale di yorn.

Tsu badoyren hot zi medikal problemen un zi ken nit arumforn vi amoL Ikh ruf Suzanne yeder khoydesh tsu nokhfregn vegn ir gezunt un tsuzamen teyln mir dem ondenk fun yorn tsurik. In Yidish Avade! Yidish Avade!

Jason Peck—A Personal History

My parents had Jewish parents who came from Eastern Europe. While I don't know if my mother's father spoke Yiddish, my father was raised in a house where Yiddish was spoken. Polish was the language my grandparents spoke with each other, and English was the language the children taught the rest of the family. My father has memories of his mother reading *A Bintl Briv* in the kitchen of their apartment, all the time laughing and crying in her foreign tongue.

I had little exposure to Yiddish growing up, outside the colloquial Yiddishisms in the daily speech of the average New Yorker. I grew up in an interfaith household; my mother was not raised with any religion, but her grandmother was Catholic, and we celebrated Christmas with my mother's family.

I was Bar-Mitzvahed, socially necessary, but had little contact with my extended Jewish family. Jewish culture meant little to me outside of Hebrew school, where the rabbi was paranoid and chastised us for celebrating the pagan holiday of Halloween.

In the 7th grade we were required to choose a foreign language class. I decided to take German. Although this didn't bother my parents, my father told me not to tell the rest of the family, especially my Jewish relatives in Florida. When I decided to major in German literature in college, my parents told me that, for family functions, to tell everyone I majored in Journalism.

I stayed away from Jewish studies when I entered Graduate school, but I couldn't resist the appeal of Jewish writers in the German language, nor forget my family history. In 2002 I applied for a stipend to study Yiddish in NYC at the YIVO program. Although I ostensibly learned Yiddish to study the emergence of a discussion of Yiddish during the 18th century in Germany, I also wanted to learn more about the culture in which my father was raised.

On one weekend of the YIVO program, a group of us went to the Lower East Side to visit some historical buildings. Amid the Chinese vendors, trendy restaurants and renovated lofts (I'm told the Lower East Side is the new hot spot for young people with disposable incomes) I found the building where my father lived as a child. I realized that hiding my family from my interests and hiding my Jewish heritage from my profession occupied most of my adult life, and that both aspects of my personality had ultimately become manifest in my studies.

Editor's Note: Jason will be a presenter on Yiddish websites at the IAYC Conference in June.

On Second Avenue

Mike Burstyn will headline the Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre's upcoming Off-Broadway revival of *On Second Avenue* a musical revue that surveys the history of the Yiddish Theatre from its roots in Jassy, Romania to its heyday in New York. It plays February 27 through April 10 at the JCC in Manhattan, 334 Amsterdam Avenue. (There are no performances March 7 thru March 13.)

Created by **Moishe Rosenfeld** and **Zalmen Mlotek**, and produced in association with the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre of Montreal, the bilingual English-Yiddish musical revue is directed by **Bryna Wasserman** and stars City Opera veteran **Robert Paul Abelson**, musical comedienne **Joanne Borts**, and Chicago klezmer diva **Lisa Fishman**. Tickets are on sale at 800-9-YIDDISH or online at www.folksbiene.org. Performances: Wed and Thurs at 2 P.M. & 8 P.M., Sat at 8 P.M., Sun at 2 & 6 P.M.

On Second Avenue showcases the songs of the great Yiddish composers—**Goldfaden**, **Olshanetzky**, **Secunda**, **Rumshinsky**, and **Elstein**, as well as excerpts from landmark shows. The fast-paced contemporary revue evokes the sights and sounds of a once-bustling theatrical thoroughfare (that at its height in the late 1910's boasted over a dozen large and medium-sized playhouses). We can relish the ripe drama, rib-tickling comedy and stirring music that entertained and inspired generations of Jewish immigrants.

Mike Burstyn performed as a child with his parents—**Pesach Burstein** (1896-1986) and **Lillian Lux**. The Bursteins performed in London, Paris, Israel, South America, Johannesburg, and with Maurice Schwartz's company. For over 50 years as a singer and actor, Burstyn alternated between Yiddish and mainstream projects, having starred on Broadway in "Barnum" and "Ain't Broadway Grand," and in the national tours of "The Tale of the Allergist's Wife" and the musical "Jolson" (in which he portrayed Al Jolson).

Fluent in eight languages Burstyn has hosted and starred in TV variety shows in Israel and Holland. Off-Broadway he earned a Drama Desk nomination for "The Rothschilds." He appeared in the 92nd Street Y's "Lyrics & Lyricists" series.

Bryna Wasserman staged *On Second Avenue* at the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre of Montreal in 2000, and traveled to Vienna and London. This is a new production. Celebrating its historic 90th consecutive season, the Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre is America's only professional Yiddish theatre.

Contact: Beck Lee 718-403-0939 beckblitz@aol.com