

A Review

Yiddish Musical Comedy Theatre

by Baila Pransky

If there are doubters still agonizing over the age-old question, "Is Yiddish a dying language?", let them struggle with this query no longer. Yiddish is exceedingly well and vibrantly alive in Charlotte and in many areas of the country. The time has come to fend off the doomsdayers who take a perverted delight in conjecturing that Yiddish has gasped its last breath. Let us lay that old "bobbeh meiseh" to rest!

The standing-room-only audience who came to hear, sing along with and enthusiastically applaud the touring "Yiddish Musical-Comedy Theatre" appearing at Temple Beth El on March 3 revelled in the sounds of Yiddish, the music, the language, the wit and the humor.

To critique an evening such as this, one must discard most reviewing yardsticks, for though the material carried no profound messages, nor moved with the slickness of a Broadway musical, it succeeded totally and most importantly in reaching out with great warmth. The "Yiddish Musical Comedy Theatre" troupe captured the essence of across-the-footlights rapport by touching the hearts of its Yiddish audience.

Chayele Ash led her group from opening curtain to finale with her own special brand of verve and vitality. With husband Ari Fuhrman and brother-in-law Abraham Fuhrman, she romped through several skits. In "A Trial in the Soviet Union" she became a Jewess on trial, depicting the absurdities of the Soviet courts in persecuting innocent Jews. A second skit, Sholom Aleichem's "Let's Be Happy," found a "mazel tov"

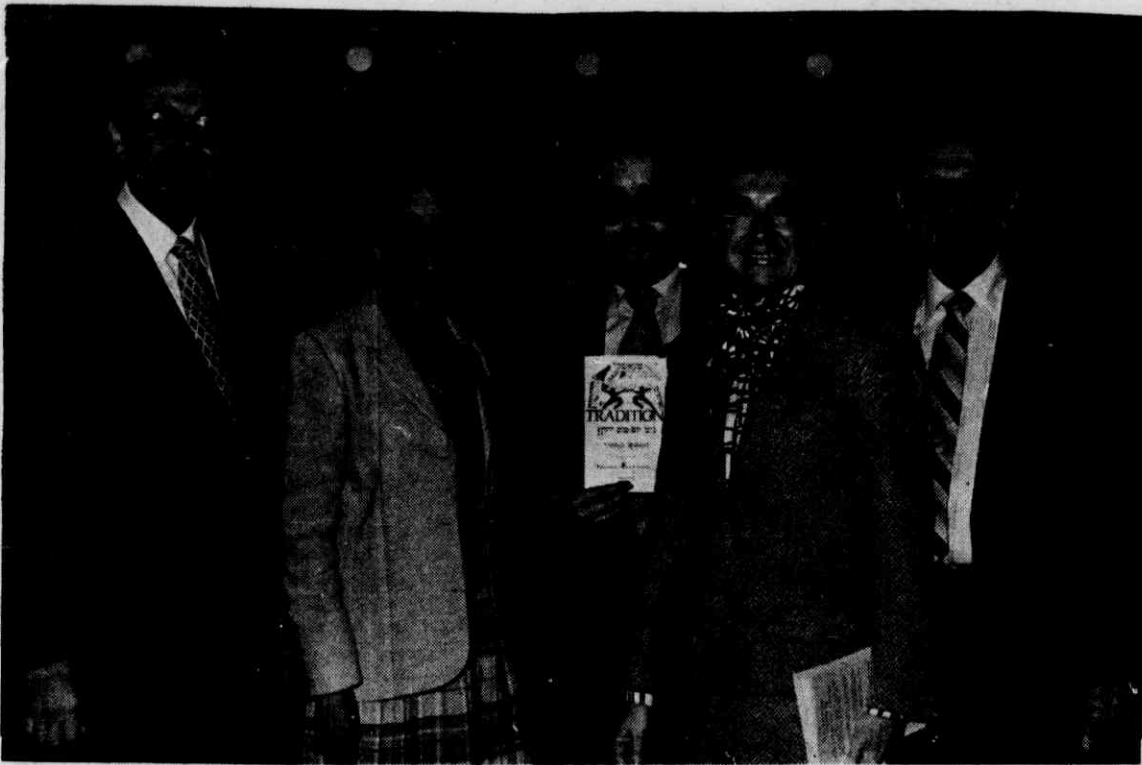
ending for Beilke, the tailor's daughter, and Motel, the apprentice tailor. In the satirical farce, "The Couple with the Dog," Chayele, looking formidable in a long, red caftan, pranced across the stage with long-suffering husband Ari tagging behind, hoping for a crumb of recognition. But Chayele, the all-consuming dog lover, makes no bones about where her devotion lies and Ari is condemned to lead less than a dog's life.

Guest artist Leah Shinderovskaya, a Russian emigre whose career was established on the stages of many of the outstanding theatres of Russia, used her full, rich soprano voice skillfully, interpreting a diverse number of Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian songs.

Abraham Fuhrman showed great versatility as a singer, beautifully chanting a cantorial melody and rounding out his musical portion of the program with Hebrew and Yiddish folk-songs.

Pianist Edith Kesilman, concert pianist and long-time musical arranger for the group, gave a solid accompaniment to the entire production, ably adding her own segment of popular melodies composed by Sholem Secunda.

The heritage of touring Yiddish theatre companies, who brought laughter, drama and song to the Yiddish folk scattered throughout the provinces of Eastern Europe, lives on to this day. Yiddish performers continue to ply their special wares wherever Jewish folk may gather and we can, with a certainty, look forward to future productions in Charlotte, where the audience applauds for yet one more encore, one more sound of Yiddish, and the evening ends all too soon.



Marvin Bienstock (center) and Yiddish Musical-Comedy Theatre Committee, l. to r., Abe Luski, Rose Luski, Baila Pransky, John Pransky.



"Let's Be Happy" skit with Abraham Fuhrman, Ari Fuhrman and Chayele Ash.



Chayele Ash and Ari Fuhrman reach out to audience with Yiddish songs. (photos/Elie Luski)

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