

Community News

31st Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute

By Ruth Goldberg

The 31st Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute met at the Wildacres from August 13-16. Guests were met at the door by Branya Gibbs and Bert Fleishman who handled reservations and room assignments, and distributed kits with materials printed by Berta Straz. A delicious reception awaited everyone on the patio.

The overall theme of the Institute was Yiddish Language and Culture with a professional cast of performing artists. Descriptions of the performers and their programs follow.

“Simkhe,” a musical group, starred Gene and Ali Kavadlo and Paul Nitsch. Gene, principal clarinetist with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra since 1975, is the founder and leader of Viva Klezmer!, an ethnic music ensemble that concertizes extensively in the southeast, including the Spoleto Festival. Ali is principal violist with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra since 1975, and plays violin in Viva Klezmer! Paul, Simkhe’s pianist, is the Carolyn G. McMahon Professor of Music and Artist-in-Residence on the faculty of Queens University of Charlotte, as well as Artistic Director for the Friends of Music at Queens.

The trio performed at two lecture/concerts: “Let’s Dance,” a *fraylekh*, is typical of eastern European Klezmer music. Gene lectured and the group demonstrated how the Klezmer music for each of the dances was influenced by whatever country the dance came from. Another concert, “Do You Want to be a Millionaire?” was a contest to see how many songs by American Jewish composers the audience could identify, followed by a performance of popular Yiddish tunes.

Singer/Entertainer Eleanor Reissa and Pianist/Arranger Joyce Rosenzweig performed three concerts, including, “Mir Bagrisn Der Heylinger Shabbes,” (“We Greet the Holy Sabbath”) on Friday evening. One of the songs was “Shabbes” with words by Avraham Luski, music by Reuven Kosakov, and arranged by Joyce Rosenzweig. Eleanor sang mostly in Yiddish, with explanations in English to help some of the audience understand the meaning of the songs. Joyce also trained a group of institutniks to sing a selection at the final concert. Eleanor is a director, playwright, choreographer, actor, and singer who works in English and Yiddish in theatre, concert halls, and cabarets throughout the country. She is a Tony Award nominated director for “Those Were the Days.” Joyce is a pianist/conductor who performs frequently in concerts throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Israel. On the faculty of Hebrew Union College-School of Sacred Music in New York for more than twenty years, Joyce teaches cantors and synagogue musicians, and conducts the school’s chorus.

The Institute opened with Avraham Luski welcoming every-



31st Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute Committee (left to right): Bert Fleishman, Branya Gibbs, Shoshana Miller, Baila Pransky, Yosef Miller, Leah Bienstock, Yitzhak Goldberg, Itzhak Bienstock, Moishe Bienstock, Dovid Herbstman, Raizel Luski, Heshl Spindel, Esta Spindel, Berta Straz, Avraham Luski, Batsheva Herbstman, Sheindel Satanofsky. Photo by Alan Goldberg

one in Yiddish and English. Mike House, manager of Wildacres, told the history of the mountain-top retreat which I.D. Blumenthal bought in the 1930s and turned into a haven for non-profit educational, religious, music and art groups in the 1940s. Baila Pransky, Institute Coordinator/Advisor also greeted everyone and introduced the committee. The guest lecturers and performing artists spoke about how glad they were to be back at Wildacres for the Yiddish Institute. Almost ninety institutniks introduced themselves and told where they live now and where they or their parents/grandparents migrated from. There was a large number of former Cuban Jews participating, as well as three people from Uruguay. Folks began playing “Jewish Geography.” The meeting concluded with refreshments in the canteen, hosted by Shoshana and Yosef Miller, and Esta and Hersh Spindel. They also served afternoon snacks, Shabbes Kiddish, and more sweets every evening. One would think that after three delicious Kosher meals a day, there was no need for more to eat, but essen and fressen were part of the Institute.

Between the concerts, there were workshops consisting of “Beginning Yiddish” taught by Baila Pransky; “Pearls of Yiddish Literature” as well as “Yiddish Readings” both with Avraham Luski; “Nostalgia” facilitated by Moishe Bienstock.

On Shabbes, services were held on Friday evening and Saturday morning, organized and conducted by Itzhak Bienstock with Baruch Weinstock serving as Hazzan/Torah Reader.

Avraham Luski followed the Hebrew Torah and Haftarah readings with Yiddish translations of the same. Rabbi Jonathan Brown delivered the D’var Torah on Shabbes morning. Itzhak led morning and evening Minyans.

Late Saturday night, everyone gathered in the Lecture Hall for singing, dancing and stories. Moishe Bienstock took out his guitar and sang two songs. Avraham Luski entertained the folks with his popular animated Yiddish stories about a new immigrant attending a football game between Colgate and Syracuse, and about a man going to “Yenkee” Stadium for his first baseball game. “Cuba Mia,” with

music and lyrics by institutnik Anita Stone, was sung by a chorus of former Cuban women. Group singing of Yiddish songs followed, accompanied by Joyce Rosenzweig and Paul Nitsch on the piano, and clarinetist Gene Kavadlo. Eleanor Reissa led some of the singing. Lots of people danced to the melodies.

The Yiddish Gift Shop was open all weekend, (not on Shabbes), selling books, CDs, games, T-shirts, and other items. The shop was run by Raizel Luski, Leah Bienstock, and Sheindel Satanofsky, and assisted by Dovid and Batsheva Herbstman.

After breakfast on Sunday morning, everyone gathered in the Lecture Hall one last time to hear the summation of the weekend by the faculty, and closing remarks by institutniks. Old friends and new friends all pledged to meet again next August for the 32nd Charlotte Yiddish Institute at Wildacres as they sang “Shalom Chaverim.” ✪

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