

32nd Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute – August 19-22

By Ruth Goldberg

The 32nd Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute met at the Wildacres Retreat and Conference Center in Little Switzerland, NC from August 19-22. The Institute is sponsored by the Sandra and Leon Levine Jewish Community Center and is dedicated to the memories of I.D. and Herman Blumenthal. Guests were met at the door by Batsheva and Dovid Herbstman and Esta and Heshl Spindel, who handled reservations and room assignments and distributed kits with materials printed by Berta Straz. A delicious reception awaited everyone on the patio overlooking a breathtaking view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The overall theme of the Institute was “Yiddishkeit Abounds” with a professional cast of performing artists and lecturers. Descriptions of the performers and their programs follow.

“Simkhe,” a musical group, starred Gene (Ussam) and Ali



32nd Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute Committee (left to right): Itzhak Goldberg; Batsheva and Dovid Herbstman; Raizel and Avraham Luski; Berta Straz; Esta Spindel; Sarah Ackerman; Itzhak and Leah Bienstock; Heshl Spindel; Baila Pransky; Shoshana and Yosef Miller; Moishe Bienstock. Photo by Alan Goldberg

(Alissa) Kavadlo and Paul (Pesakh) Nitsch. Gene, principal clarinetist with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra since 1975, is the founder and leader of Viva Klezmer! Ali has been principal violist with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra since 1975, and plays violin in Viva Klezmer! Paul, Simkhe’s pianist, is Professor

of Music and Artist-in-Residence at Queens University of Charlotte.

The trio performed to standing ovations at two lecture/concerts: The first one was “Tango Schmango ... A Survey of Yiddish Tango Music.” The Jews in Eastern Europe heard recordings of the Argentinian tangos and combined the rhythms with Klezmer style. Composers for Yiddish theatre wrote some tangos for their shows. Simkhe played many selections of Yiddish tangos. The second lecture/concert was named: “From the Yiddish Theatre to Broadway to the Concert Stage ... A Jewish Musical Journey,” including Aaron Lebedeff’s “Rumania, Rumania” and George Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm.”

Two New York entertainers stormed Wildacres with their lively Yiddish music. Singer Eleanor (Alte Rishe) Reissa and

Pianist/Arranger Joyce (Freydl) Rosenzweig, performed three concerts. Eleanor sang mostly in Yiddish, with explanations in English. The titles of the concerts were: “Immigration” recalling in song the joys and tragedies of the Jews who came to Ellis Island; “We Greet the Holy Sabbath” evoking the observance of Shabbes in the home; and “Yiddish Songs: Love and Longing.” In addition to accompanying Eleanor, Joyce trained a group of eighteen institutnikes to sing two selections at the final concert.

The Institute opened with Avraham Luski welcoming everyone in Yiddish and English. Mike House, manager of Wildacres, told how I.D. Blumenthal bought the mountaintop in the 1930s and turned it into a haven for non-profit educational, religious, music and art groups in the 1940s. Baila Pransky, Institute Coordinator/ Advisor also greeted

everyone in Yiddish and English, and introduced the devoted Yiddish Institute committee. She paused for a remembrance of the late Bea Gibbs who died in February, and had served on the board for many years as reservations chair. The guest lecturers, performers, and 106 institutnikes introduced themselves and told where they live now and where



“Simkhe” Trio (left to right): Ali Kavadlo, violinist; Paul Nitsch, pianist; Gene Kavadlo, clarinetist. Photo by Alan Goldberg

they or their parents/grandparents migrated from — many from Eastern Europe, Cuba, and a few from Uruguay. The meeting concluded with refreshments in the canteen, hosted by Shoshana and Yosef Miller, and Esta and Heshl Spindel. They also served afternoon snacks, Shabbes Kiddish, and more sweets every evening.

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.

Professor Jonathan Boyarin, Professor of Modern Jewish Thought at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, lectured on “Making a Life with Yiddish.” He discussed the challenges of maintaining Yiddish as a living language. Boyarin is the associate director of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies.

A Student Symposium featured the Yiddish Institute’s scholarship recipients, Rochel Eisenstadt and Yehusheh Goodman. Both of them take Yiddish courses at the University of Pennsylvania. They described their backgrounds, their interests in learning the language, and their hopes that other young people will study Yiddish and help to keep the language and culture alive.

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 was Menahem Me-Zahav; and Haftorah was chanted by Malka Me-Zahav.

Avraham Luski followed the Hebrew Torah and Haftorah readings with Yiddish translations of the same. Itzhak led morning and evening Minyans.

At the end of the weekend, everyone gathered in the Lecture Hall to hear the summation of the institute by the faculty and college students, and to share closing remarks by institutnikes. Old friends and new friends all pledged to meet again next August for the 33rd Charlotte Yiddish Institute at Wildacres as they sang “Shalom Chaverim.” ✨

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