

Community News

33rd Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute – August 18-21

Sponsored by the Sandra and Leon Levine Jewish Community Center

By Ruth Goldberg and Baila Pransky

A “Violin of Hope” made its American debut at the 33rd Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute at the Wildacres Retreat in Little Switzerland, NC. Asaela “Assi” Weinstein, of Tel Aviv, Israel, along with her husband, master violin maker Amnon Weinstein, undertook the restoration of violins rescued from concentration camps and ghettos after the Holocaust. Assi recounted gripping stories of the violins’ owners. She brought with her one of the restored violins, engraved by its owner with the Star of David. We were given the rare privilege of having violinist Carlos (Chaim) Tarazona, accompanied by Paul (Pesach) Nitsch, perform on this violin the haunting music from “Schindler’s List,” composed by John Williams.

The Yiddish Institute is dedicated to the memory of I.D. Blumenthal and Herman Blumenthal. Institutniks were greeted upon arrival by Batsheva and Dovid Herbstman, and Esta and Heshl Spindel, who handled reservations and room assignments, and distributed kits with materials printed by Batya Straz. A warm and delicious reception prepared by hosts Shoshana and Yosef Miller and the Spindels, awaited everyone on the patio overlooking a breathtaking view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The Institute opened with Avraham Luski welcoming everyone in Yiddish and English. Mike (Michel) House, manager of Wildacres, told the history of Wildacres. Baila Pransky, Institute Coordinator/Advisor, also greeted everyone in Yiddish and English, and introduced the Yiddish Institute committee. The guest lecturers, performers, and 100 institutniks, introduced themselves and told where they live now and where they or their parents/grandparents migrated from - many from Eastern Europe and beyond. Each evening concluded with tasty refreshments, followed by spirited singing and dancing.

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

“Simkhe,” a musical group, starred Gene (Issam) Kavadlo, Tarazona, and Nitsch. Kavadlo, principal clarinetist with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra since 1975, is the founder and leader of Viva Klezmer!; Tarazona has played violin with the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra since 2003; the pianist, Nitsch, is Professor of Music and Artist-in-Residence at Queens University of Charlotte; Ali (Alissa) Kavadlo accompanied the group with the tambourine.

At the two concerts, “Simkhe” played a variety of Yiddish pieces.



The attendees of the 33rd Annual Yiddish Institute. Photo courtesy of Alan Goldberg.

One program called “Mayses und Musik” featured music of Daniel Galay, an Argentinian-born Israeli. His Yiddish folk tales were narrated by Pransky and accompanied



Violinist Carlos Tarazona and Assi Weinstein, wife of Amnon Weinstein, violin maker and restorer

by the musicians. The second program was “Klezmer Potpourri,” which included festive song and dance music. The program concluded, to a standing ovation, with “The Klezmer’s Wedding” by Srul Irving Glick.

Two New York entertainers, longtime favorites at the Institute, excited the audience with their lively Yiddish music. Performer and Cantor Robert (Reuven) Abelson and Pianist/Arranger Joyce (Freydl) Rosenzweig, presented three concerts which included familiar Yiddish songs for all occasions; a program, “Mir



Bagrisn Der Heylinger Shabbes”(We Greet the Holy Sabbath) on Friday evening; and The John Pransky Concert to honor the memory of one of the Institute’s founders. Abelson, a baritone, is Cantor of Temple Israel in NYC, he performs with symphony orchestras and in Yiddish theater. Joyce conducts, coaches cantors and synagogue musicians, and is music director of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah

led morning and evening minyanim.

The Institute’s well-stocked gift shop was ably organized by Raizel Luski and Leah Bienstock. Moishe Bienstock made sure everyone kept on schedule with announcements through the day. Itzhak Goldberg took photographs throughout the weekend.

At the weekend’s conclusion, everyone gathered in the Lecture Hall to hear the summation of the Institute by the faculty, and to share closing remarks by institut-

niks. Friedler described the weekend as a unique gathering, saying, “We leave here with a little more of the pintele Yid ... culturally, humanly, and Judaically. You made this weekend my minyan.” The 33rd Charlotte Yiddish Institute brought strangers together from far places to express their love of the Yiddish language and culture. When the time came for farewells, it was evident that this was a parting of mishpocha, strangers no more. ☆



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