

Hava Nagila – The Movie

Hava Nagila Kicks off 2013 Festival in Style
By Michael J. Solender

All it takes is the first five notes and every Jew is running for the dance floor – it's Hava Nagila! The 9th annual Charlotte Jewish Film Festival has selected for its opening night a new film on that quintessential Jewish folk song that will launch the festival on a joyous and lighthearted note and just may have the audience dancing in the aisles.

What could possibly be more Jewish than Hava? The question is one the film asks of its subjects early in the opening scenes at Canter's Deli in Los Angeles. When the question is posed to the counterman who hovers over such delicacies as herring, lox, and bagels – "Which is more Jewish, Hava Nagila or gefilte fish?" he unhesitatingly responds, "Hava Nagila!"

And thus begins a journey that travels more than 150 years exploring the origins of the niggun that has its roots in the shtetls of the Ukraine, follows the tune to the beginnings of the Zionist state of Israel and provides cultural back-story and context to Hava's arrival into the Jewish American weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, and a storied pantheon of music.

The evolution of a true cultural icon is not without controversy and it is in the exploration of the relationship between two families laying claim to Hava's original authorship that the film displays its serious research chops, laying bare two equally plausible versions of a shared truth leaving the viewer to decide for themselves (or not) which story has more veracity.

Filmmaker Roberta Grossman has an extensive background in documentary filmmaking both for public and cable television. The question of what Hava Nagila was so vexed her that after conversations with scholar Josh Kun, she decided she simply had to find the answers behind this important cultural marker in her life. Grossman enlisted the help of *Friends* co-creator/producer Marta Kaufmann along with a team of talented writers and support personnel and the Hava Nagila quest was on.

"The film was originally titled, Hava Nagila – What is it?" said Grossman, who said her quest led her down a "rabbit hole" of exploration uncovering more layers and nuances to the Hava story than she ever imagined.

The film has quick pacing and features interviews with musical scholars, historians, chazzans, and most entertainingly performers. Turns out Hava Nagila has more covers than the couches in the lobby at New York City's Waldorf Astoria. Glen Campbell, Regina Spektor, Connie Francis, and Hava's greatest ambassador, Harry Belafonte all share for the film what the song has meant to them and how it came into their repertoire. Other versions heard in the film feature Elvis, Bob Dylan, and a wildly energetic version by Catskill performer Irving Fields, at a spry 90 years old.

Clearly a labor of love, Grossman's film underscores the enduring power of music as story, lesson and spirit.

Fair warning: You may leave the theater with an endless loop of Hava playing in your head. Re-joice! ☆

NC Filmmaker Expands Family Holocaust History Into Documentary

Allen Weiss Uncovers a Pattern among the Children and Grandchildren of Survivors

Award-winning North Carolina filmmaker Allen Weiss is working on a documentary entitled "Six Million Minus One" that explores a little known brick in the wall surrounding Holocaust survivors: the effect their tragic history has on their children and grandchildren.

The son of a survivor himself, Weiss wants his documentary to answer the question, "What is it like growing up in a household with this incredible reality always present, even if seldom voiced?"

He notes: "My daughters know more about my father's experiences than I ever did growing up. We simply didn't talk about it. No one said my brother and I couldn't ask questions, we just didn't. I don't know why we didn't, but I've learned that that's very common among children of survivors."

A few years ago, Weiss, who lives in Raleigh, wrote, directed, and produced a public service announcement (PSA) for the N.C. Council on the Holocaust. The 30-second PSA featured Holocaust survivors in the Raleigh area, as well as their children and grandchildren. The title of the piece, "Number 89444," refers to the number the Nazis gave his father in the Dachau death camp in Germany that was tattooed on his arm after he was transferred to the



NC Filmmaker Allen Weiss

Landesberg death camp (which was featured in the mini-series "Band Of Brothers").

The point behind the piece was to remind the public that Holocaust victims are more than their numbers. They have names.

More recently, Weiss didn't realize he had the germ of a documentary when he began filming his own family's story in his spare time, simply to record his 82-year-old father's history. Along with his father, Harry Weiss, recalling his experiences, he decided to include his brother and the five grandchildren, who would talk about their Dad/Grandpa.

"As I was filming the kids, I suddenly remembered that when I

was creating the Holocaust Council's PSA, I'd noticed a pattern," he said. "The children of the survivors had alarmingly little knowledge of what their fathers and mothers actually went through, yet the grandchildren seemed more attuned to their grandparents' experiences."

He knew what he had to do, he said. He had to tell their stories as well as his father's "because no one has bothered to document what it's like being the child or grandchild of a Holocaust survivor. In my own life, no, I didn't ask questions. But I carried the unspoken knowledge of my father's past with me all the time. I still do."

To see the original PSA, "Number 89444," go to <http://vimeo.com/21578208>.

After 15 years as a professional photographer in Raleigh and New York, Allen Weiss turned his attention towards short films, public service announcements, and television commercials, both regionally and internationally, 20 years ago, and won regional awards for two PSAs. Through his business, Allen Weiss: Works on Film & Paper, he offers still photography of all varieties, film and video (director, directory of photography, cameraman), and freelance writing/branding. For more information visit www.allen-weiss.com. ☆

Bone Marrow Donor Registration Drive at the LJCC

Did you know the swab of a cheek has the potential to save someone's life? For over 30 years, one of the best kept secrets in providing cures for illnesses such as leukemia, lymphoma, and sickle cell anemia has been bone marrow donation and transplantation. In 1987, a federal mandate created the National Marrow Donor Program, which had a simple, audacious goal: connecting volunteer donors with patients whose only chance for a cure was a bone marrow transplant. In 1990, Project Life was born when a group of college students at Davidson College held its inaugural bone marrow donor recruitment drive. Primarily enlisting college students as potential donors, Project Life has spent the past 20 years adding more than 6,000 donors to the national registry while enabling 45 individuals to provide miracle matches to patients in need of a marrow transplant.

LJCC Cares joins Project Life in recruiting volunteers in the effort to ensure that every patient needing a transplant will have a great chance of finding a cure. Please join us for an educational

seminar on January 24 at 7 PM to learn about this process and at the donor registration drive on Sunday, January 27, from 8:30 AM-12:30 PM. For more information, contact Julie Rizzo at julie.rizzo@charlottejcc.org. ☆



Mazel Tov & Congratulations

Charlotte Insurance Solutions Selected to Offer The Hartford's AARP Auto Insurance Program

Charlotte Insurance Solutions (CIS) announced today that it has been selected by The Hartford of offer its award-winning AARP Insurance Program in North Carolina.

CIS was selected after satisfying a number of eligibility requirements, which included demonstrating a commitment to community service, meeting a high level of business and ethical standards, and completing an extensive training program designed to address the needs of the 50+

population.

According to Mike Littauer, CIS President, for more than 25 years the industry-leading AARP branded auto insurance program from The Hartford has been extremely popular because of its commitment to innovative product features and a commitment to truly understand and support its customers. We are thrilled and proud to be one of a very few agencies selected to offer these benefits to our community. ☆

ENGAGEMENT Kweskin-Weiss

Mr. and Mrs. Joel Kweskin of Charlotte, NC and Rabbi and Mrs. Mordechai Weiss of West Hartford, CT, are happy to announce the engagement of their children, Paula Kweskin of Jerusalem, Israel (originally of Charlotte, NC) and Yoni Weiss of Givat Shmuel, Israel (originally of Margate, NJ). Paula received a BA and JD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a film producer at a non-profit documentary film organization in Jerusalem. Yoni received a BA in Accounting and Economics from Bar-Ilan University. He is the Associate Director of Mergers and Acquisitions at Grant Thornton Israel. The wedding is scheduled to take place in Jerusalem. ☆



Save The Date!

Temple Israel will host a Grown-ups Purim Carnival Saturday night, February 23.

Bring your friends along for food, fun, blackjack, roulette and more.

Details will be coming soon!