



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jewish voters rejected Prop. 22

Jewish voters in California overwhelmingly rejected a proposition that would legally recognize only heterosexual marriages, according to a Los Angeles Times exit poll.

The Jewish vote was 76 percent against the proposition, which was widely perceived as an anti-gay measure. California voters passed Proposition 22 by a 61 percent to 39 percent margin.

Barak attends 3-way summit

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held a three-way summit at the Sinai resort of Sharm el-Sheik.

Appearing after the summit with Barak and Arafat at his side, Mubarak said he hoped for progress in both the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Syrian negotiating tracks so that all parties could reach "the end of the problem of the Middle East."

Jews join Clinton at race parley

Jewish religious leaders joined President Clinton in a White House meeting on racial reconciliation.

"The Jewish community needs to look at where we are on race relations," said Rabbi Kenneth Hain, president of the Rabbinical Council of America, an Orthodox umbrella group. "There's more to be done."

Minister faces more charges

A police investigation into claims that Israel's transportation minister sexually harassed a young staffer in his office prompted more women to come forward claiming they were the target of similar advances.

The State Attorney's Office is investigating another claim of harassment involving Yitzhak Mordechai, who took a leave of absence while the probe continues.

Poll: Majority OKs withdrawal

Sixty percent of Israeli Jews back a withdrawal from all of the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria, according to a new poll.

The survey conducted for Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies also found that opposition to such a withdrawal has declined during the past two years.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish establishment called out of tune with music revival

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — In a cathedral-like room whose finish was painted the green of old money, at an upstate New York retreat center that was once the country estate of a wealthy political family, the Jews had the joint jumpin'.

About two dozen leading Jewish musicians, composers and singers had gathered to meet, talk and play for each other at a by-invitation-only showcase put together by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. Their work at the conference, titled "New Jewish Musics," showed that it's a lot more than klezmer.

It was Jewish music in every genre — classical and jazz, klezmer and American pop, folk and traditional synagogue music, often fusing several together in a single composition.

Their work made clear that it's a rockin' time for American Jewish music — wildly creative, energetic and passionate — and that there are no orthodoxies in Jewish music today.

"Like with the rabbis' commentaries on Gemarah," said Basya Schechter, a singer/songwriter who leads the band Pharaoh's Daughter, referring to the Talmud, "no two interpretations are the same."

The Foundation for Jewish Culture brought the musicians together with a few bigwigs from the Jewish communal establishment and Jewish family foundations — along with representatives of venues presenting Jewish work.

They need to know each other because the artists need more financial support from the organized Jewish community and get little, the musicians said, and because Jewish art should be an explicit part of the "renaissance" now being touted by the Jewish communal establishment.

Jewish artists and the organized Jewish community seem to occupy parallel universes, said one of the retreat's organizers, Frank London.

"This is one of the most vibrant times for Jewish art, but the rhetoric from the Jewish community is that we are dying," said London, a composer and trumpeter for the Klezmatics and Hasidic New Wave. "It's as if I'm living in one world, and there's a whole other world out there."

"I live in this seemingly blessed universe where things are thriving. The last 10 years have really been amazing" for Jewish music. "We need to get that spoken about."

London was referring to the thriving world of grass-roots Jewish culture.

But the organized Jewish community isn't tapping into the well-spring of creativity that is drawing crowds, said executives with the Foundation for Jewish Culture.

"The communities don't have a clue about the artistic riches in their midst," said Jerome Chanes, associate executive director of the organization.

Richard Siegel, the NFJC's executive director, told the musicians, "Frankly, your voices are not being heard by leaders of the organized Jewish community."

To date there has been little discussion of including music and other arts in the new Jewish communal endeavor known as the Renaissance pillar of the United Jewish Communities, the mother ship of Jewish organizations.

Even at its current embryonic stage of development, leaders of the Renaissance pillar, in their position papers and strategy outlines, have not much talked about the arts as an integral part of their work.

"There is not one mention of Jewish art in the first position paper" of the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel may turn over Arab villages

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's chief security adviser said he would not "completely rule out" the possibility that three Arab villages around Jerusalem will at some point be transferred to the Palestinian Authority.

Danny Yatom's comment prompted threats by religious parties to quit the Barak government. Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh meanwhile told Israel Radio that no areas near Jerusalem were expected to be handed over in the upcoming redeployment, slated to occur within the next month and to include an additional 6.1 percent of the West Bank.

Sale OK'd for Western Wall site

An Israeli government committee approved the sale of a site next to the Western Wall in Jerusalem for a fervently Orthodox school and Bar Mitzvah venue. The sale of the site is reportedly facing strong opposition from archaeologists, conservationists and politicians, including the Housing and Religious Affairs ministries.

Israel finds offshore reserves

Israel has frozen negotiations to purchase natural gas from Egypt after finding offshore reserves. According to Infrastructure Minister Eli Suissa, the reserves could meet the country's natural gas needs for the next 15 years.

Helicopters hit Hezbollah position

Israeli air force helicopters struck a Hezbollah mortar position in the heart of a Lebanese village. Israeli military sources said the operation reflected the Israel Defense Force's new policy to strike at all Hezbollah centers of activity, even if they are in a populated area.

The strike came shortly after nearby Israel-allied Southern Lebanon Army outposts came under Hezbollah mortar fire.

Renaissance Pillar, said London. "That's a shanda fur de Yidden," he said, turning around the well-worn Yiddish phrase.

"An essential feature" of the Christian "Renaissance was art, and they don't talk about art" in the Jewish organizational effort to bring about a renaissance, said Rabbi Rachel Cowan, director of the Jewish Life Program at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, which sponsored the retreat.

Part of the problem, conference attendees said, is that, unlike in generations past, Jews today are not being culturally educated by their Jewish experiences — and that major Jewish funders have made day school education and trips to Israel their priority, seemingly at the expense of all else.

"It shouldn't be either-or," said Cowan. "We have to create a diverse, astonishing, breathtaking place so that people will want to be part of it, and the community needs your help in articulating an aspiration."

She said, in an interview, that she is considering taking her board members on a tour of contemporary Jewish culture in order to make them familiar with what's happening.

Hankus Netsky, who is founder and director of the Klezmer Conservatory Band, said the arts "are not perceived as part of Jewish education."

Jonathan Woocher, the lead staff person for the United Jewish Community's Renaissance Pillar, wouldn't go so far as to say that Jewish artists would be included in the pillar's committee of people engaged in defining how the central Jewish communal organization will try to bring the renewal of Jewish organizations. But he did agree in an interview, with the critique that London and Cowan were making.

"If we're talking seriously about a Jewish revival, the arts and culture have to be part of this," said Woocher, who was not part of the retreat. "The gaps have to be bridged. It's just a matter of time."

Few, like Schechter of Pharaoh's Daughter, come from a deeply rooted religious place.

Her music borrows echoes from the prayer-filled cadences of her youth as a fervently Orthodox girl in the haredi world of Borough Park, Brooklyn, weaves them with Middle Eastern syncopation and ties it all in with her hip New York chick's ironic sensibility to create something totally original.

Other players in the new wave of Jewish music are rigorously trained musicians who have come more recently into exploring the spiritual aspects of their Jewishness, like jazz saxophonist Greg Wall, who is a member of Hasidic New Wave.

He almost accidentally met maniacally virtuosic Chasidic guitarist Yossi Piamenta and then began playing at Chasidic weddings with the popular Lubavitcher's band.

Though he comes from a "passionless, nonparticipatory Reform" background, Wall said at the conference, he has more recently become observant. Today, learning Torah several hours a week is as important to him as practicing his musical craft.

But despite the wildly varied approaches to religion and music of the participants — from the pure religious spirit of Debbie Friedman's ethereal vocals and guitar strumming, to the operatic classical vocals of Isabelle Ganz, to the avant garde jazz jamming of Anthony Coleman — many had shared the experience of being shunned by mainstream recording executives because they are "too Jewish."

"It's still problematic to be out Jewishly unless you work in the Jewish field," said London, in an interview. "I'll write a jazz piece that sounds just like Charlie Parker and someone will say that it sounds like Jewish music because it's coming from me. We do get pigeonholed."

Even though the musicians feel the Jewish establishment is ignoring them, the joy and creative energy at the retreat made it clear that it's a great time for Jewish music in America. Their work also deeply reflected the uniquely American expression of the interplay between the music of Judaism and other ethnicities and religions.

That may have been best summed up by the video that Hankus Netsky showed of a performance he directed of the gospel choir at the Boston Conservatory of Music, where he teaches jazz and contemporary improvisation.

Two African American soloists — a baritone and an alto — backed up by a multiracial but largely black chorus were singing, in full voice, the late Shlomo Carlebach's plaintive request of God to open the gates of heaven to him, "Pischu Li."

These singers, whose usual musical diet is composed more of black spirituals than Jewish ones, sang their Hebrew with a nuanced Eastern European inflection. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Scrolls to be exhibited in Chicago

Fifteen of the 2,000-year-old Dead Sea Scrolls are scheduled to go on display Friday in Chicago. The scrolls will remain on exhibit at the Field Museum of Natural History through June 11. The exhibit also includes artifacts found near the caves where the scrolls were discovered.

WJC may oppose bank merger

The World Jewish Congress threatened to oppose Deutsche Bank's planned \$30 billion buyout of Dresdner Bank if Germany does not settle a battle over whether German insurers will have to settle the claims of Holocaust victims.

Both banks are part of a \$5.2 billion fund Germany created late last year to pay Holocaust-era slave laborers.

End to death penalty urged

Jewish religious leaders and political activists are urging President Clinton to impose a moratorium on federal death penalty cases. They joined other religious and political leaders in signing a letter asking the president to follow the lead of Illinois Gov. George Ryan, who has halted executions in his state.

Brooklyn rabbi acquitted

A leading rabbi in Brooklyn was acquitted of having made death threats against a woman who had accused her father of rape. Five witnesses still face witness-tampering charges in the case in which Rabbi Bernard Freilich was found innocent. The woman's father still must stand trial on the rape charges.

Austria asked to avoid ceremony

Members of Austria's right-wing government are being asked not to attend an upcoming memorial ceremony at the site of the Mauthausen concentration camp.

Leon Zelman, a Holocaust survivor and an organizer of the May 7 event, said Jorg Haider, whose xenophobic Freedom Party is part of Austria's ruling coalition, has "trampled" on the moral values the event wants to commemorate. Zelman added that the appearance of government ministers would also inevitably lead to a counterdemonstration that would detract attention from the event.

Korean bar removes Nazi decor

Under pressure from the South Korean government, a bar in Seoul removed its Nazi decor.

The move came after the Israeli Embassy in Seoul and the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center demanded that the Third Reich bar be closed. The bar's owner told the Associated Press earlier this week that he had only wanted to attract attention.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Catholics, Jews unveil new symbol of reconciliation on a Prague bridge

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A famous windswept landmark in the Czech capital has provided the backdrop for a symbolic gesture of reconciliation between Catholics and Jews.

"A little part of history was made today," said the president of the North American Board of Rabbis, Marc Schneier, as he reflected on a ceremony on Prague's Charles Bridge attended by 40 rabbis and a contingent of leading Czech Christians.

In what representatives of both faiths described as a historic occasion, a set of plaques explaining a controversial 300-year-old Hebrew inscription mounted on a statue of Jesus on the Cross was officially unveiled Wednesday on the bridge.

The inscription "Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts" — a traditional Jewish prayer taken from the Book of Isaiah — was placed there by Prague city authorities in 1696 to humiliate Jews for an alleged blasphemy against the cross committed by a Prague Jew. Some Prague tour guides and books suggest that it was placed there to mock a Jewish politician named Elias Backoffen, who refused to bow to the cross. Others say Backoffen had spit at the cross, cursing Christianity. Still others claim that it was placed there to ridicule local Jews who had refused to remove their yarmulkas in the cross' presence.

The inscription has for many years confused — and in many cases, offended — Jewish tourists.

Attempts by local Jewish groups to have the inscription removed, or at least explained, fell on deaf ears until a delegation from the board of rabbis intervened last March, lobbying Prague Mayor Jan Kasl for the circumstances of the wording to be explained.

Kasl agreed and, with the blessing of Czech Catholic Church representatives, a dedication ceremony was arranged. For symbolic reasons, they chose Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent in the Christian calendar.

The new plaques state in English, Czech and Hebrew that the Hebrew inscription was added to the statue "as the result of improper court proceedings against Elias Backoffen."

It also points out that the addition "was intended to humiliate the Jewish community."

"This has been designated a day of reconciliation between Christians and Jews," Schneier told guests and onlookers on the bridge. "This statue will now become a monument to the horrors of anti-Semitism."

A Prague priest, Father Tomas Halik, a keen supporter of interfaith relations, said he was pleased to see the plaques in place.

"I support anything which brings together people of different cultures and religions," he said.

Also present was John Shattuck, U.S. ambassador to the Czech Republic.

Shattuck read a statement from Czech-born U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who expressed her disappointment, due to a prior engagement in Bosnia, at not being able to attend.

"The plaque, and the fact that you have gathered together on this historic bridge, symbolize the growing bonds between the Jewish and Christian communities in Prague and throughout the Czech Republic and beyond," her statement read.

For Schneier, the event was history in the making. "This is one of the first events that can be seen as a tangible response to the call" by the Catholic Church for reconciliation.

"Pope John Paul II is going to make a statement on Sunday about reconciliation, and I would pay tribute to him for what I believe is a genuine and sincere effort on his part to strengthen relations between our respective faiths.

"We are living in historic, if not revolutionary times, in terms of Jewish-Catholic relations," he said. □

ARTS & CULTURE

Oscar nominee tells tale of forbidden Jewish love

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — One of the films nominated for this year's Oscars stemmed from an exhibit — and a filmmaker's instinct.

Until he saw a historical display on life in South Wales several years ago, Paul Morrison never knew that Jews had lived among the Welsh working class — let alone that there were riots against Jews there in the early part of the 20th century.

But the writer and director of "Solomon and Gaenor," a nominee for this year's Oscar for Best Foreign Film, says that once he learned the history, he knew that the 1911 clash between tough Welsh miners and immigrant Jewish shopowners would provide a perfect backdrop for a love story.

"I just had the image of the black-coated Jew from Eastern Europe and these chapel-going Welsh miners," says Morrison, who lives in London.

"The juxtaposition of cultures. Both of them being Old Testament people."

The result is "Romeo and Juliet" — with a Jewish twist.

The film, scheduled to be released in the United States in August, focuses on the love affair between the Jewish, Yiddish-speaking Solomon (Ioan Gruffudd) and the Christian, Welsh-speaking Gaenor (Nia Roberts).

Both families, while portrayed sympathetically, are depicted as provincial in their desires to keep the lovers apart. Gaenor's family belongs to a strictly Protestant community — in one scene, Gaenor is cast out of the community in a display worthy of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter."

By contrast, Solomon, who lives in a neighboring valley, is a son of religious, immigrant shopkeepers who dreams of opening up his own shop.

Uneasy with his Jewish background, Solomon hides his Jewish immigrant identity, claiming to be of English descent.

Gaenor "almost accepts his Jewish identity more than he accepts it himself," says Nia Roberts, who plays Gaenor. "It's not like one is shown as a victim and the other is not. That's one of the things I like about this film."

In addition to Solomon and Gaenor's religious struggles, class and gender weigh heavily on the film.

For Gaenor's brother Crad — a poorly educated, physical man who is willing to use violence to protect Gaenor — Solomon is an outsider even as an Englishman who doesn't work in the mines.

"In North London, it's experienced as a Jewish film. In Wales, it's experienced as a Welsh film," says Morrison, who is also a

trained psychotherapist. The film features dialogue in Welsh, English and Yiddish. Since David Horovitch, who plays Solomon's father, was the only actor who knew Yiddish, an instructor was brought in to coach the cast on its Yiddish lines.

The veteran British Jewish actress Maureen Lipman, who plays Solomon's mother, had the most difficult time learning Yiddish. In fact, Lipman nearly walked out on the project at one point out of frustration at learning the Yiddish lines.

"We had to beg her to stay," says Morrison.

Ironically, Gruffudd, who is not Jewish, had the easiest time learning Yiddish — perhaps because he grew up bilingual and because Welsh and Yiddish both contain guttural sounds.

The culture clashes that figure heavily in this film have also shaped Morrison's life. The 50ish Morrison grew up in the Jewish area of North London.

His grandparents were anarchists and his parents founded a Reform community. Like many members of his generation, Morrison took a circuitous path to his Judaism.

In his university days, he became involved in leftist politics, and perhaps as a result of what he calls the British pressure not to be "too Jewish," he then dabbled in Eastern religions.

He quickly learned, he says, that "that wasn't my language" and returned to Judaism. The longtime documentary filmmaker then decided to apply his Jewish reawakening to his work as well.

"I reached a point where I realized that I had never really honored my Jewish upbringing in my filmmaking," adding that the Jewish experience in Britain has rarely been portrayed on screen.

He made a series of documentaries on British Jewish identity that aired on British television before he made "Solomon and Gaenor," his first nondocumentary.

Jewish symbolism suffuses the film.

The scenes of the riot, in which unemployed miners smash a Jewish store run by Solomon's family, are reminiscent of the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom — when Jewish homes and shops were attacked throughout Germany and Austria.

When Solomon goes to meet Gaenor, he hides his tallis in a stone wall. On one such occasion, his brother spies him hiding the ritual cloth and places it under his pillow. Later, the tallis shields Solomon as he fights the harshly beautiful elements of the Welsh landscape in a biblical-like search for Gaenor.

As Morrison jokes, "Someone said, 'This is a film about a thousand and one uses for a tallis.'" More seriously, he says, "For a Jewish man, it is a very powerful symbol."

It's a story that Morrison believes has a universal appeal on a personal level today as well.

"I feel that something people are grappling with is how can I be with someone and not try to change them," he says.

Morrison has faced this challenge in his own life. His wife is not Jewish — but he says their relationship was never infused with the difficulties faced by his film's heroes.

He and his wife are raising their three children as Jews, and his parents accepted the marriage with little difficulty.

"They were just happy I was getting married," he says.

Morrison cautions against drawing too many links between his life and the film, but admits that he was moved that because of the rainy Welsh weather, the crew shot the scenes of Solomon and Gaenor's wedding on his own wedding anniversary.

"It was very poignant. Those scenes are some of my favorite scenes in the film." □

CORRECTION: The March 9 JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN incorrectly stated the breakdown of Jewish votes in Tuesday's New York presidential primary. According to exit polls by Voter News Service, Jewish Republicans chose Sen. John McCain of Arizona over Texas Gov. George W. Bush, 58 percent to 28 percent. Vice President Al Gore captured 61 percent of the Democratic Jewish vote, while former Sen. Bill Bradley of New Jersey won 39 percent.