

The
Alumni
Association
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SUMMER/FALL 2016

Dear **Alumni**,



As I write this, the Yiddish Book Center's 2016 summer programs are in full swing. By the end of August, about 130 new people, most of them between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five, will have spent at least a week—and in some cases, as many as seven weeks—here in Amherst, reading, learning, and exploring the cultures and legacies of Yiddish-speaking Jews.

As much as I've enjoyed meeting and learning from them, I'm also excited about introducing them to you, the incredible alumni community that they're joining. You know: a diverse group of more than 700 people, including scholars, artists, educators, writers, professionals, and all sorts of people with overlapping but hardly identical investments in Yiddish, Jewishness, and the Yiddish Book Center.

Some of you participated in Center programs more than thirty years ago; many more came here in recent years, as our educational programs have grown massively. We have alumni living all around the world and working in every conceivable industry.

We're eager to help you all connect with one another, to discover new mentors and collaborators within this network, and to let you know about the amazing projects being worked on by other alumni.

That's why we've launched this newsletter. I hope it will inspire you to tell us what's happening lately with you. Please send us your suggestions for what you'd like to see in the newsletter and for ways you'd like to connect with other alumni. I know you'd never hesitate to visit us in person when you're near Amherst, but in the meantime we hope that the newsletter, which we plan to send out twice a year, will help you feel a little more connected to us—and to your hundreds of fellow Yiddish Book Center alumni, brilliant people around the world who might not agree with you about anything precisely, but who would almost certainly be delighted to share a *l'chaim* with you and talk about it.

Zayt gezunt, and keep in touch,

Josh Lambert

ACADEMIC DIRECTOR

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News You Can Use

1 YIVO's exhibit ***Sholem Aleichem, 1859–1916*** marks the yortsayt of the great writer with materials including manuscripts, letters, photographs, and posters from its archives. | yivo.org/Sholem-Aleichem.

2 Following its wildly successful run late last year, the **National Yiddish Theater-Folksbiene** remounts ***The Golden Bride*** through August 28 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. NYTF's staging of the long-lost romantic comedy operetta—in Yiddish, with English and Russian supertitles—earned it two Drama Desk nominations: Outstanding Revival of a Musical, and Outstanding Director of a Musical for Bryna Wasserman and Motl Didner (an alumnus of the Yiddish Book Center's Translation Fellowship Program). | *Tickets and information: nytf.org.*

3 YIVO's online course **Discovering Ashkenaz: Jewish Life in Eastern Europe**, taught by Professor Samuel Kassow, will be offered through August. YIVO describes the six-week course as an "adventure into the history and culture of the Jews of Poland, Russia, and Lithuania, from medieval times through the Communist era." | yivo.org/Online-Classes.

4 Check out the **New York Klezmer Series** fall concerts—the line-up includes Eleanor Reissa with Frank London's Klezmer Brass All-Stars, Nicole

Borger, Ilya Shneyveys, Ben Holmes, and Lenka Lichtenberg—at the Jalopy Theater in Brooklyn. | *More information at aaronalexander.com/wp/.*

5 The Jewish music and culture festival **KlezKanada**, now in its twentieth year, will be held this year August 22–28 in the Laurentian Mountains in southern Quebec. | klezkanada.org/.

6 The Heinrich Heine University in Duesseldorf hosts the nineteenth annual **Symposium for Yiddish Studies in Germany** September 12–14. | phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de/jiddisch/symposium-fuer-jiddische-studien-in-deutschland/.

7 And the year ends with the **Association for Jewish Studies annual conference**, December 18–20 in San Diego. | ajsnet.org/conference-menu-2016.htm.

New Alumni: The Steiner Summer Yiddish Program Class of 2016



Photograph by Ben Barnhart

Front row: Zeke Levine (University of Texas at Austin), Lydia Ivanovic (Smith College)

Seated: Zak Aldridge (Columbia University), Lizzie Frankel (Stanford University), Alexis Aaeng (University of Colorado Boulder), Ben Steiner (Brandeis University), Nadja Shannon-Dabek (Wesleyan University), Hannah Iskow (Indiana University), Emily Glass (University of Ottawa), Rachelle Grossman (Harvard University)

Back row: Josh Kogan-Zajdman (Kent State University), Tova Markenson (Northwestern University), Lena Tsykynovska (Yale University), Max Weinreich (Yale University), Franz Seehausen (New England Conservatory of Music), Anya Broytman (University of Toronto), Corbin Allardice (University of Chicago)

Alumni Updates

JONAH BOYARIN

(Steiner '06, Tent: Creative Writing '13) is a 2016 translation fellow at the Yiddish Book Center, where he is translating a Holocaust memoir, *Shakh-mat: der nes fun mayn lebn* (*Checkmate: The Miracle of My Life*) by M. Volfshaut-Dinkes.

ANITA CHRISTENSEN

(Fellowship '10–11 and Tent: Museums '14) taught Norway's first Yiddish course, at the Oslo Jewish Museum.

LEORA EISENBERG

(Great Jewish Books '14) recently began an internship as the engagement coordinator at KAHAL, a nonprofit that connects study-abroad students with immersive Jewish experiences. She will spend two months in Jerusalem and will attend Princeton University in the fall, where she plans to major in Middle East

studies, with a possible double major in Jewish studies.

HANNAH ELBAUM

(Great Jewish Books '14) is now at Smith College. This spring, she began a yearlong program called the Smashing Idols Fellowship, a program through the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, in which Jewish college students rethink and create venues for progressive Jewish involvement on college campuses. This summer, she is working as a counselor at the Union for Reform Judaism's Six Point SciTech Academy in Byfield, Massachusetts.

Hannah also recently wrote an essay about her experience at Great Jewish Books for the *Jewish Journal*.

JOSHUA B. FRIEDMAN

(Steiner '10) finished his PhD in sociocultural anthropology at the University of Michigan last year. His dissertation –based on fieldwork

conducted at the Yiddish Book Center, in New York City, and at Yiddish Farm—won the Michael Bernstein Dissertation Prize in Judaic Studies. He's been teaching anthropology at Brooklyn College this year and in the fall will be at Rutgers University as the Aresty Visiting Scholar at the Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life.

LIORA HALPERIN

(Intern '01) has been assistant professor of history and Jewish studies at the University of Colorado Boulder since 2013. Her first book, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920–1948*, was published by Yale University Press in 2015. It deals with discussions about Yiddish, German, Arabic, English, and other languages among promoters of modern Hebrew in pre-1948 Palestine. Last fall she was also appointed

Endowed Professor of Israel/Palestine Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. Liora regularly lectures to academic and community audiences about Jewish history, language politics, and Israel-Palestine studies.

DEIRDRE

HIRSCHTRITT (Steiner '11, Tent: Theater '13, Tent: The South '14) writes, "I was just awarded a grant through the American Library Association to create a scholarly reading guide to map resources about Jewish history in select Rust Belt cities (Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis). The guide is intended to widen the audience for the Jewish history of these cities

and to put the stories of these communities in conversation with one another. I'll be working on the project over the next two years and aim to launch this research guide as a publicly

accessible website in April 2018. I'm always on the hunt for hidden treasures, and I welcome emails if anyone has recommended resources to include in the guide. You can reach me at dbhirsch@umich.edu."

JOSH KAHN

writes with news about Fruigees, the snack food company he founded with his cousin and fellow Tent: Food LA '14 participant **DAVID CZINN**: "We've taken Fruigees from a snack found at farmers markets to one found on the shelves of 1,500-plus stores. It's a lot of travel as we meet with new retailers and try to focus on getting the word out!"

KATIE MCGINNIS

(Tent: Creative Writing '13 and Tent: Comedy '14) is pursuing a PhD in English and creative writing at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

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Mazl-Tov: Award-Winning Alumni

Lee Conell (Tent: Creative Writing '16) took the grand prize in this year's Nelson Algren Literary Awards competition, sponsored by the Chicago Tribune, for her short story "The Lock Factory."

This spring, **Chen Chen** (Tent: Creative Writing '14) won the A. Poulin Jr. Poetry Prize for his collection *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*; as part of the prize, BOA Editions, Ltd. will publish a book of his work in spring 2017.

Yiddish Book Center alumni won the first- and second-place Amy Levy Prizes, a new international prize for writers under thirty whose work addresses Jewish themes.

Beatrice Baltuck Garrard (Steiner '13) took the top award for "Feet of Clay," a reimagining of the Golem story. And **Michelle Samuels** (Tent: Creative Writing '13 and Tent: Journalism) won second prize for her story, "Tum Balalaika," about a couple who are preparing for Shabbos when they're visited by a mysterious stranger.

Jessie Kahnweiler (Tent: Comedy) won a Webby Award for Best Drama for her web series *The Skinny*, a dark comedy about an aspiring YouTube star struggling with bulimia. The series—whose executive producers include *Transparent* creator Jill Soloway—premiered earlier this year at Sundance and can be caught at refinery29.com.

sam sax (Tent: Creative Writing '14) has been named a finalist for a 2016 Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship, a national competition sponsored by the Poetry Foundation to support young poets.

Alumni Updates, continued from page 3:

SCOTT MEYERS

(Steiner '14) is a summer 2016 fellow at Yeshivat Hadar in New York City.

He plans to move to the Bay Area to work as a software engineer at Google.

at the Yiddish Book Center. The fellowship, made possible by a grant from the Eugene and Marcia Applebaum Family, was given in recognition of his extensive background in and commitment to Yiddish learning and Jewish leadership. Yashinsky was joined as a 2015-16 Center Fellow by **JORDAN BROWN**, one of his Steiner classmates.

JESSICA PARKER

(Steiner '10, Fellowship '12-14, Tent: Museums '14) returned to the Yiddish Book Center in October as the new museum education specialist. She is excited to be planning and facilitating field trip visits for middle and high school students on diverse topics such as Jewish life pre- and post-World War II, cultural preservation, and immigration.

Last summer, **CHRISTA WHITNEY** (Steiner '07, Fellowship '09-10) was

married in beautiful northern California sunshine to Lance Piantaggini. "Marrying a language teacher with a specialty in modern pedagogy means I've recently been enlisted to use Yiddish as a test case for how to teach a language in a different alphabet through a Comprehensible Input approach. (Yiddish, of course!)" Christa

continues to work at the Yiddish Book Center as director of the Wexler Oral History Project.

ROLA YOUNES

(Fellowship '13-14) is living in Beirut and teaching philosophy at Saint-Joseph University.

She recently taught a mini introduction to Judaism course to graduate students. She writes, "In one of my classes I read to the

students Molodowsky's '*Elkhanun*,' and they really liked it and were moved by it. One of my students is a religious

sister and has decided to write a paper on Jewish influence on monastic rule after noticing many parallels between daily life

halokhes and her own monastic rules (such as the prohibition on sleeping on one's back or stomach). We're also trying to start a Jews of Lebanon oral history project, but we're still looking for funding."

ARIELLE STEIN

(Steiner '13) is living and working as an artist in residence at the Stony Point Center, a multifaith intentional community focusing on peace and social justice in New York.

DAVID WINTER

(Tent: Creative Writing '15) will be a 2016-17 Stadler fellow at Bucknell University, where he'll work in arts administration and literary editing while writing his first book of poems. He's recently published poems in *Day One*, *Meridian*, *Muzzle*, and *The Offing*.

MATTHEW STEIN

(Steiner '13-14) just finished his senior year at Wesleyan, where he wrote a thesis about portamento and individuality of early twentieth-century Jewish violinists. In April, he organized Klezmer Palooza at Wesleyan, a day of workshops and concerts for college klezmer bands from around the Northeast.

MICHAEL YASHINSKY

(Steiner '14, Tent: Creative Writing '13, Tent: Theater '13, Tent: Fashion '14) was awarded the first-ever Applebaum Fellowship

Alumni Profile: Clare Fester

Australia native Clare Fester was a 2011 Steiner Summer Yiddish Program student

What are you up to these days?

I recently began working as the associate director at Yiddishkayt in Los Angeles. I run education and travel programs that explore multinational, multidimensional cultural histories through the lens of Yiddish. I'm studying to become an archivist and I'm active in anti-Islamophobia and pro-refugee movements in Australia. I like to dance, and I blog about the intersection between cooking and life's disappointments.

How did you become interested in studying Yiddish? Do you have family connections to the language or culture?

I came to Yiddish through labor organizing and anti-racist movements. I think far more people interested in the history and practice of social change should know Yiddish. Likewise, I think Yiddishists have much to gain from non-nostalgic treatments of radical traditions born inside this culture. I have no Jewish heritage that I know of, but even if I were to trace some Jewish background among my European ancestors, it would have no bearing on my interest in Yiddish.



What role does Yiddish play in your day-to-day life? What does Yiddish culture look like in Australia? How is it different from what you've experienced in the U.S.?

Yiddish is woven through my everyday existence, but I struggle to find places to use my spoken Yiddish in Australia. In Sydney there are very few Yiddish speakers, little institutional infrastructure, and now no longer university courses in Yiddish. These are familiar troubles for Yiddishists no matter where we live. I spent a year in Melbourne writing a thesis on Jewish socialists who organized migrant workers in 1950s Australia, and there is a secular Yiddish community there that truly serves as an inspiration.

What drew you to the Steiner program? What did you get out of the experience?

I did the Yiddish summer circuit after Sydney University threw a spanner in the works of my Yiddish major by closing the department. Steiner was my breakthrough year from beginner to intermediate. I realized Yiddish was where I wanted to be, got over my terminal shyness for speaking, and made tremendously important friends.

Tell us about your work in archival studies. What drew you to the field? What sorts of projects do you enjoy working on?

There is huge potential for Yiddish on the Internet and there are fantastic initiatives, like my own organization Yiddishkayt's web projects, and exciting new digital journals like *In geveb*, to name only a few. But there is also much nuts-and-bolts work still in process. We need integrated catalogues across all the disparate Yiddish collections and searchable digitized Yiddish texts. We need armies of specialists who know what's stacked away in Yiddish archives and libraries, and who are in conversation with each other, students, researchers, native speakers. I'm interested in these *tog-teglekhe* issues that every Yiddish student confronts at some point: resources, where to find them, how to access them.



Any exciting plans or adventures on the horizon?

In the spring I'll travel to Romania and Moldova on Yiddishkayt's Expedition to folk dance and eat mamaliga. I hope to leave my beloved Litvish at home briefly, and venture onward to new southern Yiddish dialect horizons.

News from the Yiddish Book Center



David Roskies of Hebrew University and the Jewish Theological Seminary—to the Center for an afternoon on stage discussing and debating their favorite Sholem Aleichem stories in a freewheeling conversation. Filmmaker Joseph Dorman was on hand that day to record their conversation, which was released on the hundredth anniversary of the death of the great writer, as ***Sholem Aleichem: A Conversation with Ruth Wisse and David Roskies***. Watch it at yiddishbookcenter.org/sholem-aleichem-conversation.



“governor,” a move that entails jamming your thumb under your opponent’s ribcage), the exhibit looks at some of the Jewish boxers and wrestlers who were folk heroes in their day but have since been largely forgotten. Read about it at yiddishbookcenter.org/yiddish-fight-club.

Learn more about the life and work of a great Yiddish writer in our next online course, ***I.L. Peretz: Classic and Contemporary***, based on last spring’s popular weekend course led by Professor Emerita Ruth Wisse of Harvard University and Professor Justin Cammy of Smith College, who delve into Peretz’s work, exploring and discussing some of his liveliest writing. The course will take place November 7 to December 2. Watch for details at yiddishbookcenter.org.

Last fall, we were honored to welcome two of the world’s most engaging Yiddish scholars—Ruth Wisse, recently retired from Harvard, and her brother,

Looking for a ***job in fundraising/development***, or know someone who is? The Center is looking for a development officer to help with our campaign to raise \$50 million by our fortieth anniversary in 2020, which will allow us to safeguard our collections, improve access to Yiddish literature (both in Yiddish and in translation), advance our innovative educational programs, and build an endowment commensurate with our vision. The job involves a good deal of travel around the country, meeting with people interested in supporting Yiddish and Jewish culture. We’re especially interested in applicants who understand and support the Center’s mission, and we’re willing to work with candidates who share our passion but lack experience. Might that be you? Check out the job description at yiddishbookcenter.org/about/employment.

Every year when it’s time for our Great Jewish Books Summer Program, we hear from members and friends who tell us how much they wish we offered a similar program for adult learners. Now, we’re happy to announce, we do: The inaugural ***Great Jewish Books Fall Program*** takes place October 30 to November 4, here in Amherst. Participants will read and discuss important works of modern Jewish literature that address this year’s theme, “Power and Powerlessness.” Do you know anyone who’d be interested? Send them to yiddishbookcenter.org/great-jewish-books-fall-program.

In Translation

The Yiddish Book Center's Translation Fellowship Program was established in 2013 to bring more of the treasures of Yiddish literature to more readers. Now in its fourth year, it's doing just that, as seen by the recent spate of publications and projects by alumni and current participants.



Vilna My Vilna:
Stories by Abraham Karpinowitz, a collection translated by HELEN MINTZ, who worked on the project during her fellowship year in 2014, has been published by Syracuse University Press.



This coming fall, Mandel Vilar Press will publish *Oedipus in Brooklyn and Other Stories by Blume Lempel*, translated by **ELLEN CASSEDY**, a 2015 fellow, and Yermiyahu Ahron Taub. Cassedy and Taub won a 2012 Translation Prize from the Center for their work on Lempel's stories. For younger readers, Cassedy recently translated *Yiddisher Zoo*, a collection of early twentieth-century Yiddish poems for children published by the Czulent Jewish Association in Krakow.



As a fellow in 2015, **HENRY SAPOZNICK** transcribed and translated recently discovered cylinder recordings, made at the turn of the last century, that represent the earliest known recordings of Yiddish music. The recordings trace Yiddish theater's journey from Europe to the United States and will be reissued this year as audio recordings by Archeophone as *Attractive Hebrews: The Thomas Lambert Yiddish Cylinders 1901–1904*.



MOTL DIDNER, who translated Yiddish plays during his fellowship year in 2013, continues to bring Yiddish theater to new audiences as the co-director of the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene's acclaimed production of *Di goldene kale (The Golden Bride)*. Didner and co-director Bryna Wasserman were nominated for a 2016 Drama Desk award for Outstanding Director, while the production was nominated for Outstanding Revival of a Musical.



MIRIAM UDEL, associate professor of Yiddish language, literature, and culture at Emory University, is continuing work on an anthology of Yiddish children's literature that she began at the Center as a translation fellow in 2013. Last fall, she and two Emory colleagues received a fellowship for a three-year interdisciplinary study of Yiddish children's literature.



ROSE WALDMAN, a two-time translation fellow (2014 and 2016), is working on a never-before-published Chaim Grade novel, *Beys harov (The Rabbi's House)*, for Knopf Doubleday, based on a manuscript discovered in the papers of the late Inna Grade and now housed at the YIVO Institute in New York.

Stay in Touch

- Connect with other alumni at the Yiddish Book Center Alumni Group on Facebook
- Read alumni profiles, updates, and news at yiddishbookcenter.org/alumni-association
- Drop us a note at alumni@yiddishbookcenter.org.



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Do You Remember?

One of the many perks of Yiddish Book Center educational programs: the beautiful setting, like in this photo we unearthed of an early summer program.

Do you know when this program was? Can you identify any of the participants—maybe yourself?

Let us know at alumni@yiddishbookcenter.org

And please send us your photos from your time at the Center so we can share them with other alumni.



THE YIDDISH BOOK CENTER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Great Jewish Books Summer Program ■ Steiner Summer Yiddish Program ■ Fellowship
Tent: Encounters with Modern Jewish Culture ■ Translation Fellowship