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Cellist Uri Vardi brings Fusions Continuum Concerts to the Midwest

By Allison Bloom

Professor of Cello Uri Vardi (Music and Jewish Studies) has performed as a recitalist, soloist, and chamber player across the United States, Europe, South America, Asia, and in his native Israel. In addition to his teaching and performing activities, Vardi has been active in developing the Fusions Continuum project. This project brings together the oud (a lute-like string instrument), cello, and piano in a rarely heard combination of instruments and Arabic and Jewish musical styles. As part of the Jewish Studies Semester of the Arts, Fusions Continuum will be giving concerts in Madison on April 5 and 6, and in Milwaukee on April 6. I asked Professor Vardi to give us his perspective on the Fusions Continuum project.

Q: How did you become involved with Fusions Continuum?

A: In 1996, pianist/composer Menachem Wiesenberg, oud artist Taiseer Elias, and I created the first Fusions project of Jewish and Arabic art music. This project culminated in a US tour in 1997. The initial project was a result of the curiosity of the three members of the group.

Q: What have you learned from working with this unusual combination of instruments?

A: The beautiful sonority of the blend between the cello and the oud fascinated all three of us. This fascination led to the later commissioning of a double concerto: The Forty Steps for cello, oud, and symphony by Joel Hoffman, which was premiered by the Madison Symphony Orchestra (conducted by John DeMain) with Elias and myself as soloists.

Listen to a sample
Q: How is the music you play with Fusions Continuum related to Judaism or Jewish culture?

A: There is a close relationship between traditional Jewish cantillation—the chanting of the Torah (*Ta’amei ha’mikra*)—and Arabic music, a relationship that we show in our programming.

The program of the Fusions Continuum concert will include Jewish music (written by both Jewish and non-Jewish composers), traditional Arabic art music, and new compositions written for the unique combination of oud, cello, and piano. It will also include a world premiere of *Arabesque*, a duo for oud and cello by composer Jan Radzynski.

Q: What do you hope the audience will learn or feel when they attend a Fusions Continuum concert?

A: Our hope is that the audience will enjoy the unique new sonority that our three instruments produce, as well as appreciate the experience of listening to the combination of two different cultures under one roof. We would like to show that people who may have political disputes can share the same stage and create a harmonious experience. We hope that the attendees will see that a mutual respect for our two different cultures can create a new experience of harmony and beauty.

Q: What are your future plans for the ensemble?

A: In the near future, we would like to create a professional recording of the project and bring the music to audiences in other countries.

*The Fusions concerts are presented by the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies and the Jewish Federation of Madison. Additional support comes from the UW–Madison School of Music, the Consulate General of Israel, the Anonymous Fund, Global Studies, the Middle East Studies Program, Chai Point Senior Living, the Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center (Milwaukee), the Center for Jewish Studies at UW–Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee Jewish Museum.*
Creating New Opportunities for Jewish Studies Students

Teaching Assistants help Jewish Studies program thrive

By Michele Waldinger

On a Monday afternoon in October, seven undergraduates in an Ingraham Hall classroom break into groups of two or three to scrutinize passages from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, and they find that Passover is described differently in each of the three different festival calendars. Kevin Mattison, their teaching assistant in "Introduction to Judaism," uses this exercise to illustrate the concepts of underdetermination and multivocality present in biblical and Rabbinic texts.

The popular course usually draws 140 students. Without teaching assistants (TAs) such as Mattison, a graduate student in Hebrew and Semitic Studies, the course taught by Professor Jordan Rosenblum would be limited to 60 students.

Michael Bernard-Donals, director of the Center for Jewish Studies, explains that for every TA-led section added to a course, an additional 40 students can be admitted. However, due to budget restrictions, "it's been harder and harder to keep up with demand for our classes."

Philanthropic dollars generally provide support for between three and four TA-led sections of Jewish Studies courses. "Funding from our friends and supporters means that we have between 120 and 160 additional seats to offer to students who want to take Jewish Studies classes," Bernard-Donals says. This includes popular courses such as Israeli and Hebrew literature and last semester's "Holocaust: History, Memory, and Education." Bernard-Donals explains, "We could probably fill four sections of that course if
we had the wherewithal to do it. Last semester, with one TA position we were able to open up an additional section to essentially double the enrollment, and there was still a waiting list.”

The graduate students who assist professors by teaching discussion sections, assigning and grading work, and counseling and encouraging students play a pivotal role in undergraduate learning. Rachel Gross, a History graduate student who was a TA for “The American Jewish Experience: From Shtetl to Suburb,” said discussion sections provide “the place where students are challenged to speak out loud.” In her small groups, she teaches students how to think critically and develop opinions, and to identify and push their assumptions. Gross described “The American Jewish Experience” as an American history class, in which the history of Jews helps illustrate identity in a larger society. At the eighth week of class, after many discussions of “what is a Jew” and how questions of religion, class, race, and nationhood enter into our assumptions, one student told Gross she had a question that she realized had never occurred to her before: “What is an American?” “That is why I teach,” says Gross.

“These TAs are really good teachers,” says Bernard-Donals. “The University of Wisconsin is known for its exceptional graduate programs, and so we admit only the top people in their fields. Not only are our undergraduates getting the expertise of our award-winning faculty in the classroom, but they’re also having the benefit of learning from TAs who are some of the brightest, most talented, most cutting-edge younger scholars in the field.”
From Chile to Wisconsin and Back Again

Graduate student Valeria Navarro-Rosenblatt examines lives of Chilean and Argentine Leftist Jews

By Allison Bloom

Because our students regularly travel for study-abroad programs and research, the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies has connections to communities all over the globe. But how can Jewish Studies at UW–Madison help students understand where they come from, especially when they come from a place quite distant from Wisconsin?

Thanks to two scholarships from the Center for Jewish Studies, graduate student Valeria Navarro-Rosenblatt is doing just this. Originally from Santiago, Chile, Navarro-Rosenblatt came to UW on a prestigious Presidential Fellowship from her home country and is working on her PhD in Latin American History with Professor Steve Stern. She has taken a number of Jewish Studies courses with Professor Tony Michels and has been an active participant in Center for Jewish Studies lunchtime seminars, reading groups, and the Greenfield Summer Institute. The recipient of the David Sorkin Scholarship for graduate student research and a grant from the Charles and Gayle Mazursky Student Support Fund, Navarro-Rosenblatt is now back in her home region conducting research for her dissertation.

Navarro-Rosenblatt’s research focuses on the lives of Chilean and Argentine Leftist Jews from the 1960s to 1990s. By studying those who contributed to the development of the political Left and revolutionary national projects while retaining their Jewish identity, Navarro-Rosenblatt seeks to understand the choices people make about national, class, religious and ethno-cultural memberships under military dictatorships. She notes that “Jews in Chile and Argentina had multiple and fluid ways to negotiate their Jewishness and their political involvement, notwithstanding the explicit retreat from national politics by mainstream families and the organized Jewish community. The 1960s to 1990s were critical years in both countries, where deep political and social mobilization ended with military dictatorships that shattered the social fabric of each nation.”
In order to gather information about this history, Navarro-Rosenblatt uses a combination of archival research, visits to monuments and memorials, and interviews with the family and friends of her subjects. Her work has taken her to Calama and Santiago, Chile, and to Buenos Aires and Cordoba, Argentina. The interviews have especially helped her understand the very personal ways lives were impacted by human rights violations under dictatorship; each conversation, she writes from Santiago, has “a deep emotional meaning for my research.”

Navarro-Rosenblatt hopes to spend time working on an exchange program in Israel before returning to Chile to teach. Noting that the History program, Mosse Program, and Center for Jewish Studies have influenced her multidisciplinary approach, she writes that “I hope to make a contribution to the way Judaism, Latin American history, and memory are taught.”
Looking Beyond the Nuclear Catastrophe

Exhibition Explores Jewish traces in Chernobyl

By Laurie Silverberg

From February 6–April 6, 2014, Dresden artist Marion Kahnemann’s exhibition Behind the Back of Time: A Chernobyl Project will be on view at UW Hillel. In 2010, Kahnemann was invited by the Ukrainian Union of Jewish Students to participate in a project in Kiev, the guiding idea of which was to engage with the region of Chernobyl and, among other things, its Jewish past. Because of the complexity of the topic, she tried to find a format that would enable her to ask questions without necessarily having to provide answers. One component of the project is an installation bearing the title “Archive of a Contaminated History.” In six chapters, the installation explores the region around Chernobyl from a Jewish perspective. It is not limited to the reactor catastrophe and its immediate aftermath, but is also concerned with questions of its incorporation into the larger historical narrative and the role of these questions in the process of the construction of identity in present-day Ukraine.
Menetekel (2011)

Babel (2012)
The King's Children - An Idyll from the Ore Mountains (Königsfinder - ein Erzgebirgsidyll) 2011, mixed media

Pripiat (Zone of Alienation)
Bio-Grave II (During the evacuation of Chernobyl, residents were forbidden to bring their pets)

Porgroms
David and Goliath (after a Jewish book of Golubok images)

Chernobyl, Synagogue on Lenin Street (Zone of Alienation)
Hornostaypol, Old Jewish Cemetery (Zone of Evacuation)

*Behind the Back of Time: A Chernobyl Project* was made possible through a generous grant from the Anonymous Fund of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. It is also sponsored by Hillel of the University of Wisconsin, the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia (CREECA), the Friends of Chernobyl Centers, US (FOCCUS), the City of Dresden, and the Schusterman Foundation.
**Quiz Yourself: Kugel or Knish?**

*Every spring, Belzer Professor of Classical Judaism Jordan Rosenblum teaches a popular course on Food and Rabbinic Judaism. Think you know all there is to know about Jews and food? Take his quiz and find out.*

Match the terms on the right to their matching definitions on the left. Answers below!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bagel</td>
<td>Some kabbalistic Jews associate this popular Sabbath food item with the divine phallus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Because of its aphrodisiac properties, ancient rabbis associated this food with Sabbath cuisine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyster</td>
<td>Despite urban legend, this zoo animal is kosher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese food</td>
<td>In the late 1800s, some Reform Jews called this creature “ocean vegetables” and declared it kosher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knish</td>
<td>Marrano, a derogatory term for Jews forcibly converted to Christianity in the middle ages, refers to this non-kosher animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giraffe</td>
<td>A famous New York proprietor of these food items was Yonah Schimmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kugel</td>
<td>A popular cuisine for Jews to eat on December 25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>A fine food to send to your boy in the army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salami</td>
<td>According to a famous advertising campaign, you don’t need to be Jewish to love this product made by Levy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickles</td>
<td>According to a famous advertising campaign, a producer of these foods answers to a “higher authority”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot dogs</td>
<td>Although a popular Jewish deli food, this isn’t kosher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye bread</td>
<td>The movie <em>Crossing Delancey</em> included a main character who was a proprietor of this deli product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuben sandwich</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first recorded mention of this food is in a 1610 Sumptuary Law in Krakow | bagel

Some kabbalistic Jews associate this popular Sabbath food item with the divine phallus | kugel

Because of its aphrodisiac properties, ancient rabbis associated this food with Sabbath cuisine | garlic

Despite urban legend, this zoo animal is kosher | giraffe

In the late 1800s, some Reform Jews called this creature “ocean vegetables” and declared it kosher | oyster

Marrano, a derogatory term for Jews forcibly converted to Christianity in the middle ages, refers to this non-kosher animal | pig

A famous New York proprietor of these food items was Yonah Schimmel | knish

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