

FEATURE STORY

A black and white photograph of a concrete wall. A horizontal concrete ledge or sign is attached to the wall, featuring the words "STAGE DOOR" in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The wall itself is made of large, rough-textured concrete blocks with visible joints and some staining. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

STAGE DOOR

THEATRICALS that BIND

*Lipinsky Family Jewish Arts Festival seeks
to unite Jews of all ages with its repertoire*

BY JESSICA DURHAM

In celebration of Jewish culture, philosophy, history and spirituality modern and ancient, local and worldwide, the 15th annual Lipinsky Family Jewish Arts Festival returns to San Diego in June. This year, the festival explores international influences on Jewish art and altering traditional art forms to appeal to a contemporary culture, said Todd Salovey, artistic director of the festival.

"We're really interested in a vision of the Jewish community which is international," said Salovey, who also serves as associate artistic director at the San Diego Repertory

Theatre year-round, where most of the performances will take place. "Over the course of time we've had artists from nine different countries and five different languages presenting work on the stage."

The festival, which runs May 27 to June 30, already opened with a special concert honoring Israel at 60 and two solo performances by comedic monologist Josh Kornbluth, as well as ongoing performances at the Old Globe Theatre by pianist and actor Hershey Felder, which will continue through June 29. He'll perform his one-man shows "Beethoven, As I Knew Him," "Monsieur Chopin" and "George Gershwin Alone."

Still to come, though, are perhaps the depth and breadth of the festival's exploration of Jewish thought and philosophy.

The festival moves to the North Coast Repertory Theatre June 16 and 17 for the First Festival of New Jewish Plays, which Salovey said he hopes to see "become the birthing place of the major new works of the American theater that are Jewish themed," since, he said, there is a shortage of new Jewish plays being written that speak to Jewish issues with pride.

Steve Lipinsky, director of "Bluish" and "The Wondering Jew," the festival's two plays, sees the plays' themes as a force to unite different generations.

"The Jewish people in their teens and 20s and 30s aren't as interested in Jewish

If we can just start with this festival, get topical issues in there, get teens interested with stories they can relate to, that would be great.

Jewish Music With Some Spice

Argentinian Gustavo Bulgach performs Latin-infused Klezmer



In a city like San Diego, where Latin culture influences so much of everyday life and every other culture, Klezmer clarinetist Gustavo Bulgach and his band Klezmer Juice performing as the final act of the Lipinsky Family Jewish Arts Festival seems very apropos.

Argentinean-born Jewish Bulgach explains his unique combination of Jewish Klezmer and Latin dance music as coming about by necessity.

"All music evolves by need," he said. "My Jewish tradition is my need, but because of my Argentinean background I play a lot of Latin music. When I started performing in a Klezmer band, I realized if I mix that with Latin music, people really like it."

The ultimate goal, he said, is to create a rhythm that is danceable.

"Some of the elements of niggunim and Klezmer can be applied to Latin music," he said. "Mixing Brazilian samba with Jewish Klezmer is danceable."

Klezmer Juice isn't the only band that's

explored the possibilities in the combination. Other bands in Los Angeles and New York are mixing jazz and tango with Klezmer, Bulgach said. Even in Mexico, Bulgach has fans.

"I know people in Mexico City who love the music, he said. "Mexico by tradition is a very friendly country to Argentina, so I went there a lot and I love it."

Bulgach is confident, he said, that not only will San Diego Mexican Jews come to the Klezmer Summit, but San Diego Mexicans in general.

"When I perform in L.A., the biggest crowd is Mexicans and South Americans," he said, "and they tell me they know the music, and they dance to it."

Sometimes, Bulgach said, it doesn't matter where his music comes from. If it serves its purpose — to make listeners want to dance — then anyone can like it.

This new West Coast Klezmer movement, Bulgach said, is what happened to jazz in the 50s: a musical genre popular within a specific culture catches on and reaches beyond cultural boundaries to gain popularity across a nation. In the case of Klezmer, Bulgach thinks he has the key to expanding its popularity.

"The rest of the world is really eager to listen to what's going on on the West Coast in the Klezmer movement," he said. "California is known for being a very diverse state, and that may be the bridge to connect Jewish life to mainstream life."

Another benefit to the expansion of modern Klezmer, Bulgach said, is the possibility it brings for peace.

"If people get to understand each others' background and get to know the culture of the other communities, they'll stop hating and a peaceful revolution is going to happen," he said. "If you dance to music, it's impossible to hate them, because you dance. San Diego is in itself a very Mexican American community, and I'm glad to reach out to it."

PHOTO BY YEVA DESHEVSKY



HOT AS EVER: San Diego favorite Yale Strom will perform in Lipinsky's Klezmer summit.

productions," said Lipinsky, who has also acted in other plays at the REP. "We don't have a resurgence like other religions do. If we can just start with this festival, get topical issues in there, get teens interested with stories they can relate to, that would be great."

In "Bluish," which premiered in Atlanta in 2007 but has never been performed on the West Coast, a young woman engaged to be married to a Jewish man discovers she was born Jewish, and her growing interest in Judaism leads the couple to examine what being Jewish means. The second play, "The Wondering Jew," will premiere in the festival for the first time in front of an audience. The comedy tells the story of

a young Jewish man who brings his very Catholic date to his family's Passover Seder, and his later struggles in identifying with his Jewish background when he marries her.

In the past, Salovey said, plays that have premiered as part of the Jewish Arts Festival have gone on to play in the main-stage season at the REP, then to show nationwide.

Following the Festival of New Jewish Plays, the Arts Festival returns to the Lyceum stage at the REP with "A Musical Tour of the Jewish Calendar," starring Benny Friedman, virtuoso pianist Sha-rone Kushnir and the Los Angeles band 8th Day.

Kushnir epitomizes the artist who unites ancient Judaic musical traditions with

contemporary forms, Salovey said. As a contemporary pianist, Kushnir transforms the mystical, dreamy-sounding Chassidic niggun into a piece of music modern Jews can relate to by performing them on a classical piano.

"These niggunim are something that's really unusual," Salovey said. "I'm really interested in contemporary artists who perform Chassidic music, in part because I'm really interested in how art can be spiritual. I think that's one of the things that make the festival unique and really special. Art is a vehicle to touch people's souls. I'm looking for music and performance that people can feel a real inspiration to, that they can feel touched by larger forces with and that they can feel the sort of beauty and order and harmony of the world through. And so I think that Sha-rone is one of those artists who does that really beautifully."

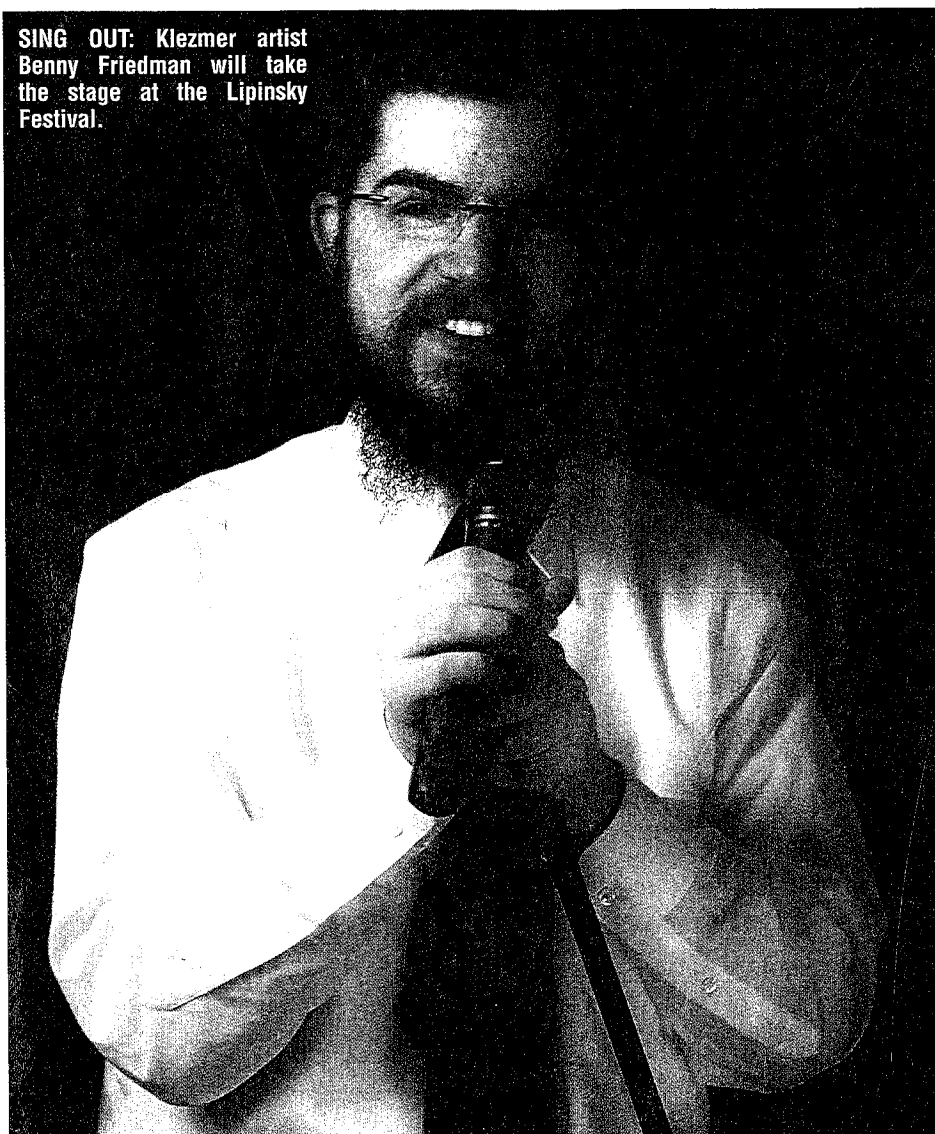
To round out a month of performances that unite young and old, modern and ancient, the Eighth Annual Klezmer Summit will return to the Lyceum stage June 30 with two performances. First, native to the festival Yale Strom and his band Hot P'stromi will return for yet another year of newly rediscovered and updated Klezmer music. This time, the group will perform its brand new act "Absolute Klezmer," including gems from *Papirossen* to *Bay Mir Bistu Shyen*. Strom will take traditional forms that he's found in Eastern Europe and express them in contemporary ways to both Jewish and non-Jewish worlds.

Performing second in the Klezmer Summit, and for the first time in San Diego, will be Gustavo Bulgach and his band Klezmer Juice, in "Una Noche Yiddische." Bulgach, an Argentinean born-and-raised Jew and clarinetist, and his band take traditional Klezmer and infuse it with the passion and rhythm of South American salsa and Latin dance music.

The hope is, Salovey said, that Bulgach and his band attract the large Mexican Jewish population that resides in San Diego.

"One of the strongest audiences for the festival is the San Diego Mexican Jewish community," Salovey said. "In the Mexican Jewish community, there's a strong focus on community and on art and on music and tradition, and also that all the generations

SING OUT: Klezmer artist Benny Friedman will take the stage at the Lipinsky Festival.



in the Mexican community are still focused on these, so when we do Spanish-focused work, we draw an audience of many different ages, and the community really supports it."

Salovey estimates there are around 800 Mexican Jewish families in San Diego, and they're a really dynamic part of San Diego's cultural landscape, he said, but just another part of the Jewish community he tries to reach through the festival.

"I very consciously try to do work which invites all parts of the community," he said. "Because I'm Orthodox, I think it's made me particularly interested in art that speaks to tradition and spirituality, and so I'm really

proud that I've been able to present a lot of artists that touch people's souls and also that people who are traditional can feel comfortable coming to attend."

Really, he said, that's what the festival boils down to: simcha, joy and soul-searching.

"If we can touch people and awaken emotions and feelings of warmth in them that they associate with being Jewish, then I think we've done a great job." ☆

• To see the complete schedule of performances or to buy tickets, call the REP box office at (619) 544-1000 or visit www.sandiegorep.com.



LIPINSKY FAMILY SAN DIEGO JEWISH ARTS FESTIVAL

JUNE LINEUP

The Old Globe Presents
Hershey Felder

The Old Globe Theatre

May 3-June 8: Beethoven,
As I Knew Him

June 11-22: Monsieur Chopin

June 25-29: George Gershwin Alone

First Festival of New Jewish Plays
June 16-17, 7:30 p.m.

North Coast Repertory Theatre
June 16: Bluish
June 17: The Wondering Jew

A Musical Tour of the Jewish
Calendar starring Benny Friedman
with Sha-rone Kushnir and 8th Day
June 23, 7:30 p.m.
Lyceum Stage, San Diego REP

Eighth Annual Klezmer Summit,
with Hot P'stromi starring
Yale Strom, and Una Noche
Yiddische starring Gustavo
Bulgach and Klezmer Juice
June 30, 7:30 p.m.
Lyceum Stage, San Diego REP

