

# AJR INFORMATION

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Suzanne Franks: AJR Interview

## THE MAN WHO LISTENED

### Invaluable Work with Survivors

"I found that I was able to help just by listening to them", Professor Davidson remarked as we settled down for the interview. "Society's response to them was such—they just didn't want to know—that the witnesses of the greatest genocide in history could now only bear witness in the confidentiality of the psychiatrist's consulting room."

Shamai Davidson believes that the survivors of the Holocaust deserve better than this. Over the past thirty years he has devoted himself to helping them and to persuading society of its own role in listening and accepting. He has regarded the latter task as so important because he realised that "no society wanted to deal with the survivors. The subject was too painful for society, which preferred instead that the survivors be dealt with by experts."

A gentle, softly spoken man who has retained his native Glaswegian accent, Shamai Davidson completed his training as a psychiatrist in his country. In 1956 he emigrated to Israel and began to practise there. He became particularly involved with the problems of Holocaust survivors because the majority of his patients had been victims of Nazi atrocities, which continued to affect them. In fact not only his patients, but many of Shamai Davidson's colleagues had experienced the Holocaust; it was so common that he noticed how they almost seemed to take it as "a matter of course". Coming from Scotland, Shamai Davidson was an outsider to these experiences and perhaps it was this that heightened his sensitivity to the problems. In particular there was his observation that society did not want to listen.

Today, alongside his post as medical director of the "Shalvata" mental health centre, Professor Davidson holds the Elie Wiesel Chair for the Study of Psycho-Social Trauma of the Holocaust at the Institute for Holocaust Studies at Bar Ilan University. And over the years he has published many scientific papers dealing with the problems of survivors and their families.



Professor Davidson

Earlier this year he arrived in Britain to spend a sabbatical at the Oxford Centre for Post-Graduate Hebrew Studies. He had intended to devote plenty of time to writing a book. But over the months he was overwhelmed instead by the demands on his experience and skills. It was apparent that this was a subject which had perhaps been somewhat overlooked in Britain.

Over the months Professor Davidson has spent considerable time with groups of social workers both from the Jewish Welfare Board and the Raphael Centre, which is a Jewish counselling organisation. He has advised them on the treatment of cases of elderly people who still suffer from the consequences of former traumas. In addition he was asked to do similar work with the British Refugee Council.

In a slightly different area he managed to set up a Second Generation Group in London, for the children of Holocaust survivors. Many similar groups already exist in the United States. And arising from this Professor Davidson established a research project to study the families of survivors. He now wants to develop this interest further and is keen to find suitable researchers to participate. During the summer term at Oxford he ran a seminar series entitled "Inter-disciplinary Approaches to the Holocaust". It was extremely successful and well attended. So much so that he has been asked to return each summer in order to repeat it.

### AJR's concerns

During his stay here he has been particularly concerned to stress the experiences and needs of those who came to Britain as refugees in the period before the war. In Britain they form a much larger group than people who survived the Holocaust on the continent. He feels that this group has to some extent been overlooked at the expense of the more extreme experiences of concentration camp survivors. The Chairman, Mr. C. T. Marx, and the Treasurer, Mr. L. Spiro, of the AJR, have been in contact with Prof. Davidson and have arranged further discussions with him in connection with the application of his work to the AJR's concern for the needs of elderly refugees.

Professor Davidson emphasises that those refugees who did not actually confront death in a camp, but nevertheless lost everything, including family members, must not be overlooked. This is particularly true of the elderly, for the end of active working life can sometimes trigger off a period of remembering and sorrow. Early psychological scars may sometimes not reveal themselves until years later.

Professor Davidson cites as an example those

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## MAN WHO LISTENED

children who came here on transports in the later 1930s, who never again saw their parents and who have never been able really to mourn their deaths.

So on the one hand he is concerned that professional help is extended to all those who need it. At the same time he wants to stress another area, which has constantly arisen out of his research. And this is the remarkable strengths and resources displayed by survivors of the Nazi period both in overcoming their former experiences and in adapting to a new life. It is *most important* that these extremely *positive* observations are not overlooked, and this is why he believes that research into the families of survivors is valuable.

Interestingly enough, in recent years demands on Professor Davidson's experience have come from further afield, well beyond the Jewish community. He has, for example, been invited to lecture by the Swedish Red Cross and to advise on the establishment there of a rehabilitation centre for torture victims. He is also co-director of the International Conference on Holocaust and Genocide. In this way he has been able to apply his knowledge of the Jewish experience to the treatment and care of other groups.

Like many other people today Shamai Davidson believes that the Holocaust must be as widely taught as possible, both within and outside the Jewish community. And he has of course played his full part in doing this. But, in addition, the survivors themselves must be able to talk, to bear witness within a society that is willing to listen. Thus the message is not only one of atrocity but of individual human experience, both in suffering and in *overcoming* adversity.

## BRITAIN'S DEBT TO EXILES

The invaluable contribution of Jewish refugees to British life is depicted in "Exile in Great Britain", a collection of essays published by Berg of Leamington Spa, edited by G. Hirschfeld. The German edition was reviewed in *AJR Information*, May 1984. Among the scientists, Max Born, Ernst Chain and Hans Krebs won Nobel Prizes for their work in Britain, while in the field of the visual arts, Ernst Gombrich and Nikolaus Pevsner are only the best-known of those who brought their talents to this country. The contributions of Rudolf Bing, Fritz Busch and Walter Goehr to music can scarcely be overestimated: in literature, Elias Canetti won his Nobel Prize for "Auto da Fê", written in Hampstead. The list is, of course, far from exhausted by these few names. Publishing, for which Lord Weidenfeld and Paul Hamlyn may serve as examples, was perhaps the sphere of greatest impact and it was German refugees who introduced the modern illustrated book, with a wealth of relevant pictures incorporated in the text, the pioneer being Bela Horowitz of the Phaidon Press. In commerce, too, the book points to the 500 factories founded by immigrants and operating in 1940, and to the employment (in 1974) of 50,000 people in North-East England alone in the firms established by the exiles rejected by their native country. (See Herbert Loebel's "View from the North" in *AJR Information* of August 1981). Berg Publishers are at 24 Binswood Avenue, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 5SQ and the price is £19.50.

## KORMIS AT NINETY

The sculptor Fred (Fritz) Kormis has just celebrated his ninetieth birthday and, after such a long and eventful career, one would imagine that he would be content to sit back and rest on his laurels.

Not at all! A recent visit to his studio in St. John's Wood shows that he is still extremely active and has lost none of the skill that has brought him international renown. A commissioned portrait medallion for a leading member of the Royal family is only one of his present works in hand.

Fred Kormis was born in 1894 in Frankfurt-am-Main and his early artistic training (he was not destined to be a painter) was terminated by the outbreak of the 1914-18 war. After an adventurous war career, including four years as a prisoner-of-war in Siberia, Kormis managed to return to his native town where he started working as a professional sculptor. In 1933, foreseeing the events in Germany, he moved to Holland and subsequently to England where he has remained ever since.



Fred Kormis at work

Kormis is a prolific worker and his series of portrait medallions of famous personalities (many of which are now in the British Museum) are well known. One of the best known is the head of Winston Churchill which was used on the cover of Philip Guedella's biography of the famous statesman. Another, which he showed me with pride, is of Charles Chaplin. This not only shows the sensitive head of the real man, but also the familiar cinema figure, stick, hat, baggy clothing and all, surrounded by the titles of his most famous films.

But Fred Kormis is not only known for his portrait medallions which, in any case, he considers to be only part of his work. In 1970 he produced the great "Prisoner of War Memorial" in Gladstone Park and, when the idea of a British Holocaust memorial was first mooted, he was ready to submit a design. The beautiful figure he produced, two arms stretching upwards from the earth, was not ultimately chosen because, it was felt, the completed design would be susceptible to vandalism! A model of the sculpture has, however, been presented by the artist to Yad VaShem in Jerusalem and, in the words of the curator, "will be an important addition to our museum's collection."

The vast assembly of figures, busts, reliefs and medallions in Kormis's studio represents only a fraction of the output of this most gifted artist.

"*Bis hundert und zwanzig*", and may his work continue to prosper, is our wish for an old friend.

ALICE SCHWAB

## STRAUSS'S LAST SONG FOUND

The last song composed by Richard Strauss, "Malven", was sent as a gift to the Czech soprano Maria Jeritza in 1949. It has never been sung in public and for nearly 40 years was presumed lost. By chance Richard Blackford, a British composer researching for BBC television, heard of the song during conversations with the Strauss family just at the time Madame Jeritza's estate was about to be auctioned in New York. After a hasty search through her papers, Mr. Blackford found "Malven"—but was allowed to look at it for only 10 minutes.

After the Second World War, Strauss's effects were frozen by the American occupation. While still a multi-millionaire, he had to obtain ready money by copying out his manuscripts and sending them to Maria Jeritza to sell for him in America. The song was a gift in recognition for her help at that time.

Richard Strauss and his links with Nazism are still a matter of debate. When others went into exile, he stayed, became president of the Reichsmusikkammer and wrote the Olympic Hymn for the 1936 Olympic Games. But he protested publicly at the removal of Stefan Zweig's name from the libretto of "Die schweigsame Frau". The opera was banned and Strauss was forced to resign from the presidency of the Reichsmusikkammer. It was then that he wrote to Hitler: "Mein Führer! My whole life belongs to German music . . . I believe that I will find understanding from you, the great architect of German social life . . ." Still in disfavour, Strauss moved to Vienna and obtained protection from Gauleiter Baldur von Schirach. This was all the more necessary because his daughter-in-law was Jewish and throughout the war years she was able to live with him working as his secretary. Her children Richard and Christian also survived the war under the protection of their grandfather.

## WAGNER'S JEWISH FRIEND

In Bayreuth, the Richard Wagner Museum has taken a bold step in inaugurating an exhibition on Richard Wagner and Jews. On display are his antisemitic "Das Judentum in der Musik", written as an attack on the successful Giacomo Meyerbeer, and in contrast documents from the life of Joseph Rubinstein. Rubinstein, who died just one hundred years ago, was a pianist and one of Wagner's Jewish friends: but his first letter to the composer begins "Dear Sir, I am a Jew. So you have learnt all you need to know". Although perfectly aware of Wagner's antisemitism, Rubinstein linked his life with that of the composer, lived near to him and sought to popularise his music. Within a year of Wagner's death, Rubinstein committed suicide at the age of 36.

## "AUFBAU" GAINS AWARD

The second annual award of the Walter Meckauer plaque has this year been awarded to the New York "Aufbau", the German-language weekly paper. Last year, the first award was made to Germania Judaica, and both institutions were honoured for outstanding service in the cause of forgotten and persecuted authors.

## HOME NEWS

### RAHEL LIEBESCHÜTZ AT 90

Mrs. Rahel Liebeschütz, widow of the historian Hans Liebeschütz, recently celebrated her 90th birthday with a service in Southport New Synagogue, attended by all her children. She was a qualified doctor in Germany and worked at the Jewish hospital in Hamburg during the First World War. The Liebeschütz family came to England in 1938 and Hans was appointed to a history professorship at Liverpool. Despite her age, Mrs. Liebeschütz organises the local WRVS Meals on Wheels, she shops, cooks and gardens, although failing sight has meant that she can no longer drive. Her son Wolfgang has followed his father in becoming a professor of history, whilst another son, Hugo, has taken up a medical career as a consultant paediatrician.

### SECOND GENERATION EXPERIENCES

Last year the Jewish Women's History Group published its first book, "You'd prefer me not to mention it", an account of the lives of four daughters of Jewish refugees. (Reviewed in *AJR Information*, June 1984.) Identified only as Caroline, Margaret, Ruth and Shelley, the four tell of the feelings of rootlessness, the conflicts about values, experienced by the children of refugees. Now the book has proved so popular that a second edition is being brought out. The four writers say that their joint work has led to better understanding with their parents and it has strengthened them in the fight against racism and antisemitism.

### RARE HONOUR FOR BRITISH ZIONIST

Until this year the medal for "Jewish Education in the Diaspora" issued by the Education and Culture Department of the World Zionist Organisation had been awarded to only two men: President Chaim Herzog and Arye Dulzin, chairman of the Jewish Agency. Now they are joined by a third: Ernest Frankel, founder of the Zionist Federation Educational Trust, which runs 16 day schools in Britain. Mr. Frankel was born in Frankfurt and in Germany became a leader of the Blau-Weiss movement. He and his wife Ella came to Britain in 1933, and during the war he established a zip-fastener firm in Cardiff. His business interests now range throughout Europe and despite his eighty years Mr. Frankel still visits each of his firms, as well as spending some six months of every year in Israel.

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### URO MOVE

The United Restitution Organisation office has moved to a new address: URO, 235 Finchley Road, London, N.W.3. The telephone number is: 01-435 4463/4.

### OPEN UNIVERSITY JEWISH STUDIES

Next year, it is hoped, the Open University will provide a course in modern Jewish studies. Courses will provide a basis for eight modular units. The Open University programmes will also be available to foreign distributors and interest has already been expressed in the United States. The eight units will cover pre-emancipation European Jewry; the history of Jewish emancipation; East European Jewry; the origins of antisemitism; Jews in Islamic lands; Jewish nationalism; American Jewry; and comparisons of Judaism and Christianity.

Coincidentally with this news on Jewish education, it has been announced that Leeds University is to close its department of Semitics, which will be incorporated into the Department of Arabic Studies. Three years ago, there was an outcry when the University proposed closure of the Hebrew section: this led to a reprieve conditional upon communal support and the entry of more students interested in the language. But the number of students of Hebrew is dropping throughout the country and the threatened department simply did not receive enough backing to keep it going.

## CONCERT SUCCESS

The Queen Elizabeth Hall was full again for the annual Self-Aid Concert on 21 October. And we were rewarded with a marvellous concert by the Divertimenti String Orchestra with György Pauk as violin soloist. These brilliant young players presented *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* as if it were freshly minted. The high point was the superb performance of Bach's E major violin concerto. Mr. Pauk's purity of tone and perfect intonation, his rhythmic vigour in the outer movements and the rapt introspection of his Adagio, together projected the most beautiful performance of the work I have ever heard live or on record. The debate about Bach's tempi was resolved ideally by Mr. Pauk (who also conducted in the two concerti): his brisk, incisive pace extracted the full potential of the music, its inherent depth and sparkle. He should certainly record it.

One knew what a fine artist Mr. Pauk was, but it is increasingly clear that we must now rank him among the very top violinists, an elite company indeed.

At its own less exalted level, Vivaldi's 'Autumn' from 'The Four Seasons' was equally enjoyable. Samuel Barber's 'Adagio for Strings' reminded us how direct and moving some modern music can be and Mendelssohn's early string symphony (No. 9 in C) showed off the orchestra's disciplined virtuosity under its very impressive leader Paul Barritt. Need one add how heartening it is to observe the sheer professionalism and true musicality of this ensemble of young players who deserve to go far, and certainly will? Finally, a word of tribute to Mrs. Ruth Neuschul of Self-Aid, whose efficient organisation, hard work, and imaginative programming enabled us to enjoy an exceptional musical experience. M.S.

### RENEWED WIENER LIBRARY APPEAL

Although the bulk of its archives were transferred to Tel Aviv University in 1980, the Wiener Library continues its usefulness to media researchers, academics and students. Retaining much of its former material on microfilm, the Library still receives important documents and books relating to twentieth-century history—it is even possible that it will again run short of space within a few years.

In 1982, the Library, under its director Professor Walter Laqueur, launched an appeal for £1m to ensure its continued existence as a vital aid to scholarship. So far, half that amount has been received, but the contribution of Anglo-Jewry, says Professor Laqueur, has been negligible. Late in October, the appeal was re-launched with a reception addressed by Lord Elwyn Jones, inaugurating a Wiener Library Week of varied activities. It is greatly to be hoped that a more generous inflow of contributions will enable this historic foundation to continue its work, for nowhere else in Britain can enquirers and researchers see for themselves in such a wealth of original documents the history of Nazi Germany from first to last.

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## SOLIDARITY AFTER DISPERSION

### Meeting of Council of Jews from Germany

Like few other groups of Jews from the Continent, the organisations of Jews from Germany built up in their countries of resettlement have retained their contacts with one another. Their common platform is the Council of Jews from Germany with its affiliated organisations in Israel, the U.S., Great Britain and France. Its objectives are two-fold: to act as the spokesman of the former German Jews and to exchange experiences between its affiliates.

Neither of these tasks has lost momentum. This became evident anew in a recent meeting held in London under the chairmanship of Dr. F. E. Falk (London) and Dr. C. C. Silberman (New York).

The activities carried out in the name of the Council since its last meeting two years ago included various steps in the field of compensation and related subjects, a protest against the intended delivery of arms to Saudi Arabia by the German Federal Republic and a dignified Statement on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Nazi regime in Germany.

The old files of the Council were recently transferred to the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. It was regretted that many other important organisations had not kept their material and it was decided to impress on all organisations concerned the need to preserve their archives in the interest of historiography.

Another common task, which was raised by Rabbi Dr. M. Gruenewald (New York), arises from the widely spread distortion of the image of the German Jews. Various steps towards the solution of this predicament were considered.

The Council has also sponsored research work in the history of immigration of the Jews from Germany. In the United States, a special Research Foundation founded under the auspices of the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, and headed by Professor Dr. Herbert Strauss, has published a number of works.

The latest publication, produced jointly with the Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte (Munich), is a three-volume biographical handbook of emigrants. In Israel and Great Britain, research work has been going on and will be concluded next year. In France, a comparatively short history was published some years ago. Meanwhile, the archives have been opened and it would be desirable to prepare a comprehensive scholarly book, but unfortunately so far the necessary funds could not be made available. Lastly, the Council will consider whether a one-volume work ("Sammelwerk") covering all main countries concerned could be produced.

One of the other questions under discussion was the draft of the German "Strafrechts-

aenderungsgesetz" concerning the prosecution of total or partial denials of the Holocaust.

A report on the Research Centre of Antisemitism recently founded in Berlin was given by its Director, Professor Dr. Herbert Strauss. The Institute has a mainly academic staff of six members. Its activities include the arrangement of lectures, the maintenance of a large steadily expanding library and of archives, the sponsoring of doctoral theses on antisemitism, the preparation of publications and personal discussions with frequent individual visitors. Assessing the general situation in Germany, Dr. Strauss stated that there was no noticeable political antisemitism but there was a latent antisemitism in the social sphere.

### Developments in Israel

An essential part of the meeting consisted of reports by the affiliated organisations. In all of them, care for the aged, especially by the erection and maintenance of Old Age Homes and Flatlet Homes, stands in the foreground. One of the Old Age Homes in Israel had been enlarged and now provided accommodation for a further 100 residents. Mr. F. Estreicher, the General Secretary of the Israeli affiliate, the Irgun Oley Merkaz Europa, also reported that with a legacy received a new Flatlet Home could be erected in Jerusalem. Further accommodation was urgently needed. Mr. Estreicher also mentioned that last year's 50th anniversary of the arrival of Jews from Germany was marked by a reception in the residence of the State President, Mr. Navon, and by symposia at the University of Tel Aviv and the Bar-Ilan University.

Dr. C. C. Silberman (New York), Chairman of the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, reported about the social activities of the constituent organisations of the Federation, among them the Jewish Philanthropic Fund, Selfhelp Community Service and United Help. He also referred to the Margaret Tietz Centre for Nursing Care and the administration of three large apartment houses with a total of 700 apartments. A fund of Survivors, derived from substantial contributions by wealthy immigrants, had raised five million dollars.

Dealing with the situation in France, Mrs. Ruth Fabian, Vice-President of La Solidarité, reported that the organisation's house in Limours near Paris had been modernised and changed from a Flatlet Home into an Old Age Home; the solemn opening ceremony took place in the presence of the Grand Rabbin of France and the Federal German Ambassador. The organisation also

owned flats in Paris; this created problems in so far as quite a few residents had aged and could no longer look after themselves.

La Solidarité also worked for the benefit of those who were not in Homes. The financial situation of many Austrians was very precarious because, contrary to those from Germany, they did not receive adequate compensation payments. With regard to the general welfare activities of the French-Jewish organisations it had to be taken into account that they were mainly concerned with the immigrants from North Africa.

### Report on social work

Dr. F. E. Falk, Vice-Chairman of the AJR said that it had been possible to maintain the membership by making up for the losses through new enrolments. The monthly *AJR Information* continued to be widely appreciated. Dr. Falk gave some detailed information about the social work, consisting of the administration of the Homes (jointly with the CBF), arrangement of home helps, an Employment Exchange, a Meals on Wheels Service, a Luncheon Club and the AJR Friendship Club. (These activities were described in detail at this year's General Meeting and reported in the September issue of this paper.)

The AJR continued to be active in the field of taxation of German payments. Due to its efforts the annuities under the Federal Compensation Law (BEG) were tax free. In 1974 the AJR succeeded in getting exempted from taxation 50 per cent of the pensions for former civil servants and Jewish communal workers and of social insurance payments; efforts to get a total exemption were still going on. In connection with the reduction of rates for persons with limited income, efforts to have payments from Germany disregarded were successful in several boroughs. The speaker also mentioned that the AJR was one of the sponsoring organisations of the annual Holocaust Memorial Meetings. The fruitful and constructive reports and discussions on a variety of subjects were enhanced by the spirit of personal friendship between the participants. W. R.

### PRINZENALLEE PLAQUE UNVEILED

The son, grandson and other relatives and friends of Rabbi Siegfried Alexander were present in the Berlin suburb of Wedding when the Mayor unveiled a memorial tablet marking the site of the synagogue in Prinzenallee, destroyed in November 1938. Rabbi Alexander, the last minister to officiate in the synagogue, perished in Auschwitz together with his wife.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Friends Found

Sir,—You have helped me considerably. The search inquiry for former friends of the late Walter Landon (Levy-Lingen) in the August issue has brought me four replies and two further addresses of former friends of our student. I thank you very much for your assistance.

Französisches Gymnasium, Dr. C. VELDER  
Derfflingerstrasse 7-8, Headmaster  
1 Berlin 30, W. Berlin

## The Provinces

Sir,—I enjoy reading *AJR Information*, although I am always disappointed that it concentrates on matters in London and completely ignores the provinces. Particularly the advertisements, which are exclusively for the London area. Could you not widen your scope?

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*Most of our members are concentrated in the London area, which means that our services are there too. We would willingly widen our scope. Ads are welcome from everywhere and always have been. Members living in the provinces are welcome to send in brief items of information of general interest. Note the item from Hull in this issue.—Editor.*

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## Fulfilling a Trust

Sir,—A few years ago a friend phoned me asking whether my name had previously been Klestadt.

On answering in the affirmative he said that there was an advert in a German-Jewish paper which he subscribes to, looking for my family and friends of my parents from Sterkrade.

On hearing of this, my brother telephoned the paper and was put in touch with Pastor Diehl.

Our parents and their friends, a childless couple, gave Pastor Diehl some jewellery in 1939 in trust.

Pastor Diehl had trouble in locating us and as you see it is only by chance that he was successful.

My brother and I felt, as there was no trace of our parents' friends, and we are sure that they perished in the Holocaust, that their jewellery should be sold and the money donated to charity; and which better than the AJR?

MARGOT KINSTEAD

## The Jewish Museum

Sir,—We have in London a most beautiful collection of Judaica, located at Woburn House, London, W.C. The Board of the Museum, in spite of financial tightness, and very often lack of time, are doing their level best to embellish the exhibition, which has been in existence for over 60 years, known as the "Jewish Museum of London".

We are, however, so dismayed and distressed at the almost total lack of interest shown by local UK residents. Today, Bank Holiday Sunday, we had a crowded House, with visitors queuing to get in. However, Sir, it is beyond belief that of all the visitors none came from the UK, but were all foreigners, mainly from the USA, Germany and Japan. The contents of the Museum belong to all of us, and it is such a crying shame that local Jewish residents show such total indifference to view what is put together with such loving care. Admission is free, and visiting hours can be obtained by telephoning the Museum.

29 Norrice Lea, JOHN HURST  
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## AWARD FOR DORA SEGALL

The President of the Federal Republic of Germany honored Mrs. Dora Segall on the occasion of her 80th birthday by awarding her the Federal Cross of Merit, First Class. The handing over ceremony took place in the German Embassy and was performed by Ambassador von Wechmar. The Ambassador paid tribute to Dora Segall for her political and Jewish activities. Like her husband, the late Fritz Segall, she had been active in the German Social Democratic movement. She resumed her contacts with her political friends in Germany and served as a link between them and politicians in the British Labour Party. By her assistance to German charitable efforts during the difficult first post-war years she had helped to create a new relationship between Jews and Germans after the Nazi period. The Ambassador also referred to her Jewish activities before and after her emigration. In her reply, Dora Segall thanked the Ambassador and recalled the political and Jewish causes with which she had been associated.

## LEGACY

The AJR Charitable Trust has received a generous legacy from the estate of Miss H Zweig of London.

ASCHAFFENBURG  
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

The former house of the rabbinate has been converted into a documentation centre with about 150 exhibits pertinent to the history of the Jews in Aschaffenburg. In 1933, the town had about 700 Jewish inhabitants—2 per cent of the total population. Now, only very few Jews live there. At the opening ceremony, Mayor Dr Willi Reiland extended a special welcome to the 94 former residents and their relatives who had accepted the invitation of the municipality. He also referred to the visits of former citizens in preceding years.

## ELLIS ISLAND PROJECT

Ellis Island, in New York harbour, is a name with special significance to immigrants to America, for it was there that the majority first set foot on American soil and there that they passed the hurdle of acceptance into their chosen country. Today the buildings on the island are empty and dilapidated, but the Ellis Island Restoration Committee intends to renovate them within the next two years. Phillip Lax, chairman of the Committee, was surprised when he took over in 1978 to be told that 90% of immigrants had been Irish, German, Italian, Polish or Russian, but that no separate register of Jewish immigrants had been kept. Since so many of the five million Jews who landed on Ellis Island had been rejected by their former countries, Mr. Lax intends to ensure that some record of their coming will be included in a projected museum in the great hall.

The late Richard Burton's last film is entitled "Ellis Island" and follows the fortunes of a group of immigrants. It was actually filmed in the old Billingsgate fish market in London.

## TWO HONOURED

Yad Vashem has recently awarded two further medals of the Righteous Gentile. One, given posthumously, was to a teacher, Wilhelm Hammann, who as an inmate of Buchenwald was able to rescue 159 Polish children. The other medal was presented to 81-year-old Mrs. Marie Grünberg of West Berlin. Mrs. Grünberg, married to a Jew, took in her brother-in-law who had escaped from a deportation transport. Then her young nephew Heinz Abrahamson, belonging to an illegal Jewish youth group "Chug Chaluzi", came to her for shelter. Both were hidden in a summerhouse. Heinz's friends, too, came to "Aunt Marie" for help, which she always gave as well as she could.

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### KUSCHNITZKYS' 65th ANNIVERSARY

Ernst and Marianne Kuschnitzky recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in their home in Hull. Ernst Kuschnitzky was 91 last July, and both he and Marianne still lead a very active life. Only last year Ernst Kuschnitzky presented a paper, 'Comments on Literary Criticism', to the Hull Literary Club, of which he is an active member.

Marianne Kuschnitzky was one of the founder members of the Hull Women's Literary Club.

They arrived in England in May 1939 from their home town Gleiwitz, Upper Silesia. Ernst Kuschnitzky was the Senior Partner and General Manager of the family enterprises 'Ernst Kuschnitzky', in Gleiwitz and associated companies in Sprottau and Neumark. They included a tannery and the manufacture of belting and textile leathers. Ernst Kuschnitzky took over the management during the 30s from his father and uncle.



When the Kuschnitzkys came to England he started work as a foreman in a tannery in Keighley, Yorkshire. Within two years he had become a Manager, and after the war he led in the modernisation of tanning, not only in England but also in North America. He was instrumental in developing in 1956 the modern long-lasting sole leather.

In the 60s he was Chairman for five years of the sub-committee for textile leathers at the British Leather Research Association. From 1952 until his retirement in 1968 he was Managing Director of one of the leading tanneries in Hull, and continued work for his company as a consultant until 1973.

Marianne née Weinberg is a daughter of Landgerichtspräsident Weinberg in Oldenburg, where she married Ernst Kuschnitzky. Both enjoy good health considering their age, and Marianne still tends her sizeable garden, and they regularly entertain their many friends from all over the world. Mr. Kuschnitzky has been a member of the AJR since its inception.

### US SALE RUNS INTO TROUBLE

Following the sale by Sotheby's in New York of rare Hebrew books and manuscripts formerly belonging to the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, the New York State Attorney General has instituted charges against the auction house alleging "persistent fraud and illegality". He says that the sale was held although Sotheby's were aware that the seller could not prove that he was the owner of the books, and calls for nullification of all the transactions, the return of the purchase price and the placement of the books in some institution with public access.

Sotheby's say that the still anonymous seller made an affidavit to the effect that he was given the books on condition that he smuggled them out of the Third Reich. This he did at great personal risk. However, the Attorney-General points out that the Hochschule rules provided that three members of its Board must approve any disposition of its property.

### MENDELSSOHN ANNIVERSARY MARKED

1984 sees the 175th anniversary of the composer Mendelssohn's birth and the event has been marked in a number of towns and cities. In Wuppertal, where the former Mendelssohnstrasse was converted into Brahmsstrasse under the Third Reich, the municipal council unanimously decided to name another street after the 19th-century composer and musical prodigy. Horchheim near Coblenz has set up a memorial to Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in Mendelssohn Park. It was here that the composer's uncle Joseph had a country house and vineyard, where Felix wrote several of his works. Recently published, too, is Wolfgang Stresemann's "Eine Lanze für Felix Mendelssohn" (Stapp-Verlag, Berlin, 29.80 DM), whose aim is to give a picture of the life, family surroundings and work of the musician, also gifted as a writer and painter.

### OLYMPIC MEMORIAL IN LOS ANGELES

Shortly before the opening of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Mayor Tom Bradley unveiled a memorial tablet honouring the eleven Israeli athletes who were murdered at the Munich Games in 1972. In the name of her colleagues, the long-jumper Maya Ben-Zur said that the Israeli team's efforts would be dedicated to the memory of their fellow-citizens.

### RECONCILIATION



Herbert Sulzbach OBE (right) and James Clegg

Survivors of the 'Old Contemptibles', the First World War infantrymen who proudly adopted the phrase from Kaiser Wilhelm's 1914 reference to General French's 'contemptible little army', held their last reunion in an Ipswich (Suffolk) church on August 26. AJR member Herbert Sulzbach OBE, who had been an officer in the Kaiser's army and had faced the 'Old Contemptibles' directly in the front line—and was a captain in the British Army in World War II—was invited to take part in the ceremony. The highlight of the occasion was an 'act of reconciliation' of the enemies of 70 years ago, in which 'old contemptible' James Clegg, 91, gave a copy of the history of his army group to Mr. Sulzbach, 90, who gave a copy of his own book 'With the German Guns' in exchange to Mr. Clegg. Mr. Sulzbach gave a brief and moving address to the assembled participants. Afterwards the congregation sang 'Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken' to Haydn's tune for the German national anthem. In a special report to his Foreign Minister, the West German Ambassador, Rüdiger von Wechmar, wrote: 'The fact that this was possible shows how much has really changed in Europe.'

ITV television will broadcast part of the ceremony in November, the exact date not being available at the time we went to press.

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## BRILLIANT EXPRESSIONIST PRINTS

There are a number of important and interesting exhibitions in London at the moment.

"The Print in Germany 1880-1933" in the British Museum (North Entrance, Montague Place), until 6 January 1985, is the first comprehensive exhibition of German Expressionist prints to be seen in London for a long time. Nearly all the prints come from the Museum's own collection which has been greatly increased over recent years. All our old friends, Klinger, Kollwitz, Corinth, Kirchner, Heckel, Pechstein, Beckmann, Kokoshka, Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluff, are well represented, as well as many others not quite so familiar.

There is also a related section of illustrated books from the British Library. These alone are well worth studying. The catalogue by Frances Carey (Assistant Keeper) and Anthony Griffiths (Deputy Keeper) is an invaluable source-book of information on this period (price £12.95). It contains not only detailed descriptions of the prints and books exhibited, but also biographies and bibliographies of the artists concerned.

In an adjoining room (Room 74) of the British Museum there is a fine exhibition of Japanese paintings from the collection formed by the late Ralph Harari.

Annelly and David Juda have once again produced a superb exhibition "Dada-Constructivism. The Janus Face of the Twenties" in their gallery, 1 Tottenham Mews, W1 (until 15 December). The subject matter and object of these very lively paintings and constructions is not easy, but they are still exciting to look at. Those willing to study

the voluminous and well-produced catalogue (£15), with its learned essays and descriptions of the pictures, will not be wasting their time.



Käthe Kollwitz: Self-portrait

A large number of artists is represented in the exhibition, with varying styles and messages. Particularly attractive are the works of Hannah Hoch, especially the "Auf Goldpapier" and the "Charlotte Cubiste" relief by Fernand Léger. The exhibition includes important works by Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, "Ich, Du, Er Triangle" in ink and watercolour by George Grosz, as well as many others.

Margrete Marks, painter and potter, whose work is so much appreciated, has recently had an exhibition of paintings, mainly Mediterranean and Indian scenes, as well as pottery, at University College, Cardiff. Lily Freeman, born in Vienna and an old member of the AJR, has just shown her "Happy Paintings" at the Icehouse, Holland Park.

Finally, Leinster Fine Art, 9 Hereford Road, W2, is celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Gallery by mounting an exhibition (until 10 November) of the work of Georg Tappert (1880-1957), a Berlin Expressionist whose work has not previously been seen in England. Tappert was one of that elite band labelled "Degenerate Artists" by the Nazis. He was then 55 years old and at the height of his powers, but until his death some twenty years later he never painted again.

In the early years of the twentieth century Tappert, with Paula Modersohn-Becker, founded an art school at Worpswede, and another school when he moved back to Berlin in 1910. He exhibited with the "Blaue Reiter" and became a founder-member of the Novembergruppe which included Dix, Kandinsky, Klee, Gropius, Feininger, Pechstein, Neuschul, Ziegler, etc. After the Nazi period, Tappert became a professor at the Berlin State Academy and influenced a new generation of artists. ALICE SCHWAB

### NEW UNIVERSITY COURSE

A new departure for an English university has been launched at the University of Exeter, where up to 10 students a year will be offered an MA course in politics with special reference to the Middle East. Future journalists and diplomats are expected to be specially attracted. Difficulties arose some years ago when Israelis were advised not to attend a conference on Saudi Arabia organised by the University's Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, but it is hoped that the new course will be open to all students.

In France, too, the Sorbonne is to establish a degree course in Jewish studies in collaboration with the University Centre for Jewish Studies.



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# THE DANES AND THE DUTCH

ERIC GOODMAN

One of the most charming things about the exhibition of *Danish Painting: The Golden Age* at the National Gallery (to 20 November 1984) is not to be found in the exhibits, delightful as they are, but in the foreword to the superb catalogue by Lars Rostrup, Director of the Statens Museum for Kunst. "A distant great-grandfather," he writes, "would probably find it hard to forgive his descendant, working as a museum director almost two hundred years later, for willingly, indeed gladly, sending the priceless Golden Age treasures of his national gallery for exhibition in a building outside which the hated Nelson stands on his column. Dear great-grandfather: Forgive!"

Memories linger on, for this "Golden Age" was after the bombardment of Copenhagen by the British in 1807 and the loss of Norway in 1814. Yet it reflects a quiet, quasi-provincial life—a people making the best of things, ignoring as best they could, the unfolding scene of European power politics. Golden Age or not, this is not great art and the Danish artists of the time were strongly influenced by contemporary developments in France, Italy and Germany, where many of them received their training. But it is very comfortable, very pleasant and a delight to see.

The small Jewish community in Denmark was closely linked to Hamburg, the great German port nearby. Mendel Levin Nathanson (1780–1868) was born in Altona but spent most of his life in Copenhagen as a banker, economist and philanthropist. It was largely due to his efforts that the

Jews of Denmark received full civic rights in 1814. He was a staunch Jew, but all his children left the faith. In the exhibition there is a fine portrait of Bella and Hanna Nathanson, his children, by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783–1853), one of Denmark's leading painters and, as a professor at the Academy, one who had a profound effect on the development of Danish art.

Another interesting portrait is that of Court Seal Engraver Ahron Jacobson (c1717–1775) by Jens Juel (1745–1802). Jacobson was the first of an important family of Danish engravers, born in Hamburg of Jewish parents. Both his sons were engravers and his grandson Albert was a noted medallist who executed portraits of King Frederick VI of Denmark and of the Emperor Nicholas I.



*Nathanson Sisters by Eckersberg*

The other great exhibition in London is the *Masters of the Seventeenth Century: Dutch Genre Painting*, at the Royal Academy (until 18 November 1984). This exhibition also covers a Golden Age, when Vermeer, de Hooch, Ostade, Jan Steen and many others, described in glowing colours and immaculate detail the domestic—and the low life of their surroundings. Many of the pictures on display are so familiar in reproduction that there is no need to describe them. But the two exhibitions should not be compared—the Danes are delightful, the Dutch stupendous! A.S.

## MISSING COPIES?

Following computerisation of our address list, readers are requested to ask their friends whether they have received their copies of *AJR Information*, and if not, to inform us immediately.

## CAMP PAINTINGS IN COVENTRY

Coventry Cathedral has recently displayed a number of paintings by Edith Birkin, who as a child was sent to Lodz Ghetto from Czechoslovakia. Her parents perished there and she was deported to Auschwitz and thence to Belsen. At the liberation she came to England, where her elder sister was already established, and has made a life for herself here. She now lives in Hereford with her family.

When Mrs. Birkin first came to this country, she endeavoured to overcome her experiences by writing her memoirs. Then, a few years ago, she took up painting, was awarded a local authority grant, and developed a semi-Expressionist style with a strong use of colour. Her haunting and harrowing works depict many scenes from the camps and four of them have been acquired by the Imperial War Museum. Edith Birkin's aim is not the portrayal of cruelty, but rather to show the plight of the individual forced into a mass experience.

The Coventry exhibition has been organised by a young German group, Action Reconciliation, who carry out voluntary work in a number of countries in order to show their consciousness of the past and their desire to work for a better future.

## SPECIALIST GALLERY OF ISRAELI ART

Israeli art has been invited to make a home in Bad Münstereifel, where Manfred Lammell devotes himself to promoting the work of Israeli painters in his gallery. For example, he has lately shown woodcuts and watercolours by Jakob Pins, an artist of German origin acclaimed worldwide. The specialised gallery has already enjoyed considerable success.

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## CZECH COMMUNITIES

Kingston Liberal Synagogue is researching the history of three Czech Jewish communities, those of Rychnov and Wlatow near Klatovy, whose members has acquired. Would any former residents willing to help please telephone Mrs. Fletcher-Jones at 396 5962.

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## OBITUARIES

### ERIC GOODMAN

Whoever had the fate of being thrown twice into a concentration camp during the politically and climatically terrible winter 1938/9 could hardly absorb that traumatic experience without lasting physical and mental after-effects. One of these particularly affected victims was Eric Goodman who recently died in London after long and bravely borne suffering shortly after his 76th birthday. He owed his salvation from further persecution to his admission to the Kitchener Camp. In Berlin, and for some time also in London, he was a business employee. Yet it was his love of the arts, especially of music and poetry, which strengthened his will to live. He shared it with his wife, the singer Franz Coschell from Vienna. The son of the last Potsdam Cantor and teacher, Samuel Guttmann, he was familiar with the Jewish liturgy from his early youth. For many years he was the voluntary and devoted choir conductor of the Belsize Square Synagogue and with his beautiful tenor voice, he sometimes also acted as Cantor on the High Festivals. Last year, he was made an honorary member of the synagogue. Eric Goodman was also an interested member of the AJR since its inception. He will not be forgotten by all who knew him.

E.G.L.

### DR. MAURICE GRYNFOGEL

Chairman of the World Jewish Congress European branch and president of the WJC in France, Dr. Maurice Grynfogel has died in Toulouse. Although born in Northern France, Dr. Grynfogel moved to Toulouse in the "Free Zone" of Occupied France during the war, but had to escape across the Pyrenees when the Germans invaded the region.

### AIDA FOSTER

Head of the famous Golders Green theatre school, Mrs. Aida Foster has died at the age of 89. The school closed in 1970, after training many famous actors, including Jean Simmons, Barbara Windsor and Jean Marsh.

### BARON JAMES DE ROTHSCHILD

In France the death was recently announced of Baron James de Rothschild at the age of 88. Mayor of Compiègne at the outbreak of the Second World War, Baron de Rothschild joined the French air force and after the Armistice moved his bank to La Bouboule near Vichy. However, Vichy's antisemitic laws forced him to leave the country and he joined the Free French forces in England.

### JEANNE MODIGLIANI

Jeanne Modigliani, daughter of the famous painter-sculptor Amadeo Modigliani (of an old Jewish family in Leghorn), has died in Paris at the age of 66. During the Second World War, she joined the French Resistance and at one point was captured by the occupying forces, though she managed to escape and at the end of the war received the Croix de Guerre. Herself a painter, she had exhibited a number of her works in the 1960s.

### KARL LEWINSKI

Karl Lewinski, a member of the family which owned the department store Kander in Mannheim, died recently in Heidelberg. He was 87. Karl Lewinski entered the family firm at the age of 16 and, after serving in the First World War, rose to high managerial office. With the "Aryanisation" of the store in 1935, he and his family moved to Berlin; they did not leave Germany for Chile until late in 1939. In 1966, the Lewinskis returned to Mannheim, where the former exile was highly esteemed as a consultant on business matters.

### EDDIE STUART

Once a Free Polish army comrade of Menachem Begin, Eddie Stuart died a short time ago. Many of Mr. Stuart's family perished in the Holocaust and he managed to come to Britain only after a period of imprisonment in Siberia. As synagogue secretary, he was well known in the Kingsbury Jewish community.

### COUNTESS OF ANTRIM

Angela Countess of Antrim, who died recently aged 73, translated her hatred of fascism in the inter-war years into a sculpture showing a kneeling woman being whipped by a boy, forced to the act by a colossal figure in a German helmet. She was a trained sculptress and had already exhibited at the Royal Academy. This work, however, was rejected by the Academy amidst some controversy, but was shown at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. During the Second World War, the Countess led a hospital unit set up by the Catholic Women's League to relieve concentration camp victims and her duties took her to Belsen camp after the liberation.

### AMIR GILBOA

A leading poet in Israel, Amir Gilboa has died at the age of 67. Born in Russia, he served in the Jewish Brigade of the British Forces during the war and at that time began to publish his poetry. Among the numerous honours bestowed on him were the Israel Prize and the Bialik Prize.

### BERNARD LANDAU

The Czechoslovakian-born Rev. Bernard Landau died recently aged 67. The spiritual leader of the Margate Hebrew Congregation and Jewish chaplain to all Kent prisons and Borstals, his loss will be deeply felt in the county. The Rev. Landau had served congregations at Nottingham, Stoke-on-Trent and Llandudno before going to Margate.

### DR. ISAAC BER BAJER

Dr. Isaac Ber Bajer of Hampstead has died aged 80. He escaped from Poland to Shanghai and came to Britain in 1941. During the war, he served as medical superintendent at a Winchester hospital. His first wife and son perished in the Holocaust.

### RABBI SOLOMON STARRELS

Rabbi Dr. Solomon Starrels has died in America, where he had lived since 1938. Born in 1895, Dr. Starrels was trained in Cincinnati and came to join the staff of St. John's Wood Liberal Jewish Synagogue in 1928. In 1933, he became the founding rabbi of the North Western Reform Synagogue, Golders Green and remained in that office until returning to the United States.

### OTTO HIRSCH CENTENARY

On the centenary of the birth of Otto Hirsch, 9 January 1985, his son, Hans Hirsch, who lives in the United States, will go to Stuttgart to receive the first award of the Otto Hirsch Memorial Medallion. The medallion has been produced jointly by the City of Stuttgart and the Society for Christian-Jewish Collaboration, and will be awarded annually on 9th January to a person who has distinguished him or herself in the field of Christian-Jewish collaboration.

### CZECH COMMUNITIES

Kingston Liberal Synagogue is researching the history of three Czech Jewish communities, Tabor, Rychnov and Blatna near Klatovy, whose scrolls it has acquired. Would any former residents willing to help please telephone Mrs. Fletcher-Jones at 390 5982.

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**FAMILY EVENTS**

Entries in this column are free of charge, but voluntary donations would be appreciated. Texts should reach us by the 10th of the preceding month.

**Birthday**

**Bennett:**—Congratulations to J. Bennett (Joseph Berger), former member of 93rd Coy. of R.P.C., who will be 80 on 24 November.

**Deaths**

**Adler:**—Dr. Max Adler, dearly loved husband of Annelies, devoted father and grandfather, died in Hull on 22 September, aged 86.

**Bruckner-Karplus:**—Mrs. Helene Bruckner-Karplus died, aged 94, on 18 September. Deeply mourned by her family and friends.

**Erle:**—Fritz Erle, of 33 Marlborough Place, NW8, passed away on 31

August after a long illness. Deeply mourned by his wife Ruth, brothers and their families.

**Gros:**—Gabriella, daughter of the late Dr. Arthur Galliner (Philanthropin, Frankfurt) on September 14 after a long illness. Deeply mourned by her husband Eugene, daughters Josephine and Caroline, son-in-law Alan, beloved grandsons Martin and Sebastian, relatives and friends. Her warmth and talent will always be remembered.

**Imberg:**—Henry Louis Imberg died on 21 September at Unsted Park Nursing Home, Godalming, after a long illness, aged 76. Deeply mourned and missed by his family and friends.

**Kugelmann:**—Recha Kugelmann died in her 90th year in Jerusalem on 1 September after two years of illness bravely borne. She will be greatly missed by her daughter Mirjam, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and her many friends.

**In Memoriam**

**Austin:**—Herbert (Bunny) Austin died on 30 November 1983. Remembered as a loving and caring man who will always be in the hearts of his family and friends.

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## ISRAELI GROUPS IN GERMANY

A number of Israeli groups have recently paid visits to West Germany. A leading Kibbutz Folklore Company delighted audiences at Duisburg with songs and dances performed by a troupe of over 40 singers, dancers and musicians under the leadership of Israel Arieli and Rachel Gross. In return, the group was given many opportunities to meet local people and see something of the area.

21 pupils from Jerusalem schools paid an exchange visit to Munich. They joined their West German counterparts in discussions and in a celebratory barbecue in Oberföhring. The two-week visit was initiated by the Munich school authorities. Also in Bavaria, a group from Merkaz Hahazbara was invited by the International Youth Exchange office in Bonn to visit the Academy for Political Education in Tutzing am Starnberger See. There they attended a short seminar, exchanging experiences and discussing the teaching of German history in both countries. The Israelis also visited the site of Dachau and there held a debate with Catholic and Protestant youth leaders.

In Westphalia, the town of Bocholt is running a series of lectures and exhibitions designed to bring better knowledge of Israel in connection with meetings between the townspeople and Israelis.

## FILM WEEK OF JEWISH HUMOUR

Since 1980, Erlangen has held an annual Jewish Film Week. This year's offering, from 11th to 17th November, is a programme celebrating Jewish humour. Salscia Landmann, the well-known writer on Jewish jokes and folklore, will open the proceedings. Two of the films to be seen are "Sallah . . . or will exchange daughter for a home", based on the troubles of a Yemenite immigrant to Israel and "Der Blaumilchkanal" a German-Israeli production. Both films were scripted by Ephraim Kishon. Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, Marty Feldman and other well-known American-Jewish comedians are to appear on Erlangen's screens.

The Jewish Film Week is scheduled to finish on a much more serious note with a seminar on "Latent Antisemitism in the Federal Republic" chaired by Professor Alphons Silbermann.

## LASSALLE REMEMBERED

One hundred and twenty years ago this year, Ferdinand Lassalle was mortally wounded in a duel. Only 39, Lassalle had shown himself a brilliant politician, scholar and man of the world. His lasting memorial is the German Social Democratic Party, jointly founded by Karl Marx and himself. On the anniversary of Lassalle's death, former Chancellor Willy Brandt laid a wreath before his bust at the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation in Bonn, while simultaneously the Ebert Foundation's Chairman, Heinz Kühn, performed a similar ceremony at Lassalle's grave in the old Jewish cemetery in Breslau (now Wrocław in Poland).

## A VISIT TO HAGEN

Former citizens of Hagen who wish to be included in a forthcoming visit to the town should contact Prof. Dr. Zabel, Vorsitzender der Bürgeraktion Synagoge Hohenlimburg, Zum Alten Bruch 6, 5800 Hagen 5.

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## VINTAGE FEYDEAU

*A LITTLE HOTEL ON THE SIDE (L'Hôtel du Libre Echange) by Georges Feydeau and Maurice Desvallières. Translated by John Mortimer. Directed by Jonathan Lynn. National Theatre, in repertory at the Olivier.*

A funny thing about farce is the serious afterthoughts it often provokes, especially when it is as well done as this Feydeau at the Olivier. After laughing oneself silly one is left with a certain image of human life, a sweet-sour sensation. One doesn't want to be portentous about a very enjoyable evening, but reflection creeps in inadvertently.

The action is light, frothy and traditionally farcical. M. Pinglet, hag-ridden by his own haridan of a wife, fancies the neglected wife of his architect neighbour, M. Paillardin. After he reduces her virtuous resistance they arrange an assignation at the seedy Free Trade Hotel. As chance, and farce, would have it, that is just when her architect husband has to spend the night on business at the hotel, to lay the ghost of its reputation as a haunted hostelry. An old friend of the Pinglets, M. Mathieu, a widower with four young daughters, imposes himself on the Pinglets, who inhospitably oblige him to seek accommodation in . . . the Free Trade Hotel.

The ensuing complications, the dashings back and forth, the increasingly intricate fabrications concocted to explain the escalating permutations of compromising situations, can be imagined. There is a particularly hilarious scene in which the architect, double-booked into the same room with the four young girls, is scared out of his wits by their white-nightgowned lark as chanting spooks.

Eros is denied, frustrated at every twist and turn of the plot, as it always is in farce. All is unwittingly resolved by the Inspector of Public Morality. The action is wound up exhilaratingly by a final mimed and danced *Offenbachchanale* by the whole cast.

The music was first class throughout, and the cast uniformly excellent. Pace and timing are everything in farce, and full marks to the director for those. After the fun and games one is left with the eerie feeling that one has seen a compressed and speeded-up version (like the early films) of a real side of human life: people propelled puppet-like by their drives and passions, ingeniously using reason to extricate themselves from one mess to plunge straight into the next. Don't miss the fun.

## EARLY CHEKHOV

*WILD HONEY by Anton Chekhov. In a version by Michael Frayn. Directed by Christopher Morahan. The National Theatre, in repertory at the Lyttelton.* This was Chekhov's earliest play, never revised by him, never performed in his lifetime. He may have been only 18 when he wrote it, more likely 21. It was found without a title page in a Moscow bank vault sixteen years after his death, in 1920. It was at first considered unstageable, not so much because of its unpolished state, but because uncut it would take a full six hours to perform. Thus one can only have versions of it. It was first performed in 1954 in Stockholm (called *Poor Don Juan*), and in Russia only in 1960, the same year as the first London performance, in both the latter cases (though the versions differed) it was called *Platonov*. I saw that London performance, with Rex Harrison and Rachel Roberts, and it was very different indeed from this one.

We are lucky to have this version by Michael Frayn, and one can easily envisage it becoming the standard one. Frayn knows his Russian and his

Russians, and he knows his Chekhov. He is of course a highly skilled playwright in his own right.

Many of the themes familiar to us from the mature plays are there already: the estate that will have to be sold, the emergence of the new merchant class, the drunken doctor, the unhappy wife trying to poison herself. As Frayn observes, it is trying to be simultaneously 'a sexual comedy, a moral tract, a melodrama, a state-of-Russia play, and a tragedy.' There is a strong farcical streak in it too. Those elements are still there, but they have been welded into a coherent whole which works beautifully.

This summer month in the country, on a family estate in the south of Russia, is dominated by the exuberant and erratic personality of Platonov, the local schoolmaster of whom much greater things had been expected. His self-doubts and despair are assuaged by the vigorous and assertive attentions of the ladies around him, from the widowed estate-owner Anna Petrovna, to the newly-married Sofya and the engaged student Marya, not to mention the demands of his wife Sasha. This makes the plot spin and spin about, producing ever greater chaos in the traditional Russian shambles.

Ian McKellen gives a great performance in a very difficult part. Charlotte Cornwell is a perfect Anna Petrovna, the educated lady with no outlet for her talents. The rest of the cast give admirable support. The set exudes summer in the country, and there is a striking *coup d'éclat* which we enjoy twice over, when, with the railway tracks next to Platonov's house facing straight into the stalls, the locomotive engine shows every sign and sound of coming straight over us. MARTIN STERN

*S.B. is on holiday. His 'Theatre and Culture' column, which he has been writing for exactly a decade, will resume next month.*

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