

Images and Sounds of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe at YIVO

By Robert L. Liebman

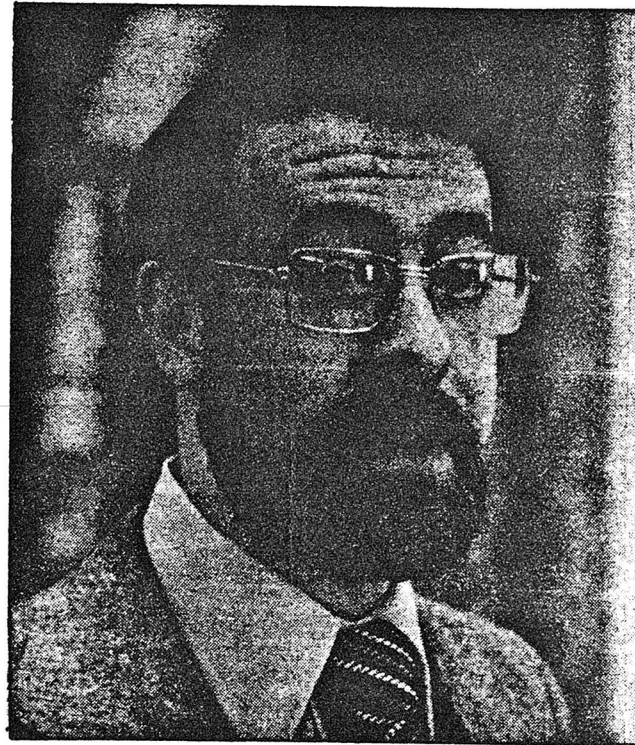
Beginning on Nov. 18 and featuring one program per month thereafter, YIVO is presenting a four-program series under the rubric "Images and Sounds of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe and the United States." Guest speakers will be present at each session.

The opening program is "Film: The Shtetl in Fact and Fiction, directed by David Roskies," a misleading title that warrants qualification.

Some time ago, Dr. Roskies narrated a 45-minute TV show in which he discusses the shtetl against a backdrop of vintage still photographs. As Roskies himself is quick to point out, the "film" is nothing more than a 16mm blow-up of that show. At best, the film is a glorified slide lecture; at its weakest, the narrator's presence distracts us from concentrating on the pictures, thereby reducing even further the visual aspect of the program.

Fortunately, the program is enjoyable and informative as a chatty, amusing (Roskies sings when need be and, when appropriate, hams up his narration) slide lecture. The photographs are consistently interesting, and the narrator makes some fascinating observations on shtetl life and art (as well he might: Roskies is assistant professor of Jewish Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary, co-author of *The Shtetl Book*, and editor of *YIVO Annual* and the Jewish literary magazine *Prooftexts*.)

For example, shtetl Jews distinguished themselves from the neighboring gentiles by concocting a double vocabulary, using different words to describe otherwise identical religious practices or geographical locations. Roskies reveals that "a community wasn't independent until it had its own cemetery," and he notes the enormous sway which the "evil eye" held over much of the shtetl's populace. And although



David Roskies, director of "Film: The Shtetl in Fact and Fiction."

Roskies cannot do justice to the scope of Yiddish literature, his discussions of both the Peretz and Sholom Aleichem stories convey the essence of each.

Following the showing of the film, Roskies will lead a discussion; his presence should enrich an already entertaining event.

For further information, contact YIVO, 1048 Fifth Avenue (at 86th Street), New York, N.Y. 10028, (212) LE5-6700.