

## **Educating Women for Management**

Na'amat, in cooperation with Bar-Ilan University, is sponsoring a graduate course to educate women for advancement to executive positions.

The decision to launch this new course was made following a recent survey of Israeli women in top managerial positions. The study revealed that in 310 public companies in which there are 470 top executives, only two percent are women; in government agencies, with 741 executive positions, only five percent are held by women.

The half-year course includes general management skills, financial management, accounting and analysis of financial reports, work ethics, structure of the financial market and the economy. Candidates must have a B.A. degree and some management experience.

Na'amat approached large companies and industries, institutions of higher learning, bar associations and CPA firms in order to recruit suitable candidates for the course. The hope is, according to Na'amat secretary general Masha Lubelsky, that the various employers will make a commitment to include those women who complete the course as candidates for executive positions.

## **New Programs for Russian Immigrants**

New programs for Russian immigrants are constantly being inaugurated by Na'amat to help integrate the *olim* into the Israeli community.

Many groups of single-parent Russian *olim* have been organized by Na'amat, providing both a social outlet and a support system for the newcomers. The groups also provide a framework for Na'amat to learn about and seek solutions for the various problems and concerns of this sector of the population.

In addition, Na'amat has introduced an ongoing series of cultural, informational and musical evenings throughout Israel, in cooperation with the Russian language newspaper, *Vremiya*. This

program is handled through the local Na'amat branch's immigrant absorption committee. Through notices in the newspaper, the public is invited to attend special evenings that feature discussions of current events, presentations on a variety of subjects by Russian-speaking experts, musical programs or art exhibits. There are usually three or four representatives of the newspaper present at each evening in addition to representatives of Na'amat, who speak about the movement.

These events, held in Na'amat facilities, have met with great success, with usually over 200 people attending.

## **Na'amat Demands: Restore Child Allotment**

Na'amat is demanding that the Israeli government restore the National Insurance Institute's child allotments for the first and second child in all families. This request follows the recent revelation that extra maintenance payments are being made to yeshiva students by the Religious Affairs Ministry.

For the past several years, parents with less than three children have not been eligible for NII allotments unless their income is 95 percent or less of the average monthly wage.

Calling the revelation "a scandal," Mrs. Lubelsky said there was no justification for providing extra income maintenance to those who do not work and do not serve in the Israel Defense Forces, while young families struggling to make ends meet have been denied these NII benefits, which would come to NIS 170 a month. She also deplored the fact that religious day care centers "benefit from special allocations."

## **Therapy for Jailed Wife-Abusers**

A program for training prison social workers to counsel men jailed for wife-beating was recently initiated by Na'amat. This follows a successful trial of group therapy sessions in the Ashmoret prison last year.

Na'amat psychologists will train social workers in methods proven effective in counseling violent husbands out-

side of prison. These include sessions to help the men raise their self-esteem, express frustrations verbally and redirect their anger into positive channels.

Na'amat psychologists have treated more than 500 wife-abusers since their programs for these men began five years ago.

In 1991, Na'amat provided counseling and other aid to some 5,000 women who were being abused by their partners.

## **New Playground Dedicated**

A new playground for the Kiryat Yovel Na'amat Day Care Center was dedicated in memory of Mercedes Benita. Mrs. Benita, one of four women murdered by a terrorist while waiting at a bus stop, worked as a *metapelet* (child care worker) at the center for 16 years. A very caring person, she was known as the "mother of the neighborhood."

The equipment for the playground was purchased through contributions made by family and friends, with the bulk of the funding coming from Na'amat's Sophie Udin club in Jerusalem.

The Sophie Udin club, organized 40 years ago, is comprised of immigrants from English-speaking countries — many former members of NA'AMAT USA and NA'AMAT Canada. Through monthly meetings, study days and field trips, members are kept informed of and involved in the day-to-day activities of Na'amat. Throughout the years, the members have assumed responsibility for refurbishing and/or repairing one or more of the Na'amat day care centers in Jerusalem.

## **Finally, Agunot Get Divorce**

Two Israeli women whose husbands had refused for over ten years to give them a divorce were finally granted them. In both cases, Na'amat attorneys took credit for the success.

Bracha Habara, a 43-year-old mother of two, got her divorce after 12 years

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**BRIDGE OF LIGHT: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds.** By J. Hoberman. New York: The Museum of Modern Art and Schocken Books, \$40, 401 pp.

The most ambitious Yiddish movie ever made, and arguably the best, was the 1937 *Der Dibek*. The most ambitious Yiddish movie never made was Jules Dassin's *Last of the Just* (based on the Andre Schwartz-Bart novel). Dassin, director of such American hits as *The Naked City* and *Rififi*, and a veteran of the left-wing Yiddish theater group Artef, acquired the film rights to *Last of the Just* in 1964, and began to negotiate with United Artist. He wanted, naturally enough, to make the movie in Yiddish. United Artist demurred, and that was that. But what a film it might have been! If nothing else, there would have been enough money to do the thing right. Usually, as J. Hoberman shows in his fascinating history, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*, most Yiddish movies were made on a shoestring, often shot in a week or two, and sometimes on a weekend.

*Yidishland* — the destination of these films — was a nation without borders, whose inhabitants shared a common language and culture and resided mainly in Russia, Poland and America. The Yiddish film, as Hoberman tells us, was one of the cultural links between these geographic entities. Over a hundred of them were produced during a 40-year period, beginning in 1911, with the Russian-made *A Brivela der Mamen*. Always, he says, it was a cinema uneasily suspended between traditional Jewish culture and Western civilization.

My mother took me to scores of Yiddish films while I was growing up, and some of them drove me nuts. Take the U.S. 1940 *Der Vilner Shtot Khazn* (The Vilna Town-Cantor) for example. Based on the play, *Der Vilner Balebesl*, the film starred Moishe Oysher — he of the golden voice — as the doomed cantor. And what doomed him? Beethoven and Chopin, what else? Seduced by these *goyish* composers, Strashunsky, the cantor, leaves wife, child and synagogue to become an opera star in Warsaw. This, despite the dire warnings of



Scene from the "The Jazz Singer," 1927. Mary Dale (May McAvoy) entreats Jack Robin (Al Jolson) to return to Broadway while Yudelson (Otto Lederer) prepares to hand the singer his father's tallit. Jack's mother (Eugenie Besserer) looks on. (From *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*.)

his stern father-in-law, Reb Aaron, and the rabbi. In Warsaw he becomes an overnight success. Utterly led astray by *goyish* culture, he takes on a *goyish* mistress. But you think this guy's happy now? Forget it! "I'd give my life to sing in a synagogue," he moans. Don't worry, he's about to get his wish.

Hoberman tells us, "Back in Vilna, the *Balebesl*'s little son cries for him in vain. When the child is taken ill and dies, his death scene is intercut with shots of Strashunsky cavorting onstage in some goofy, *goyish* antics. Like an avenging angel, Reb Aaron appears backstage. 'The Almighty has punished you!' he shouts and rips his clothes as a symbol of mourning. 'There is a God!' Strashunsky drifts out in front of the footlights, near-catatonic. Then he disappears." Sure enough, the cantor finally returns to Vilna. He wanders into the synagogue on Yom Kippur eve, chants *Kol Nidre*, and drops dead!

What's a little kid to make of all this? Obviously, the music of Beethoven and Chopin, Oysher's operatic arias — although, actually, his most ardent vocalizing is reserved for the *Kol Nidre* — and the posh Warsaw settings, are the

highpoints of the movie. And here we are, being asked to turn our backs on all that and return to the *shtetl* and *shul*. Still, this wasn't quite as gulling to a kid as that other pair of standard messages: Mother is always right, and parents, alas, sacrifice their lives for their kids.

These weren't always the messages of Yiddish cinema. During the silent era, Hoberman points out, Yiddish movies often pointed outward, their makers and audience both young and infused with the spirit of modernism — if not out-and-out revolution. And the audience could even be Gentile and still follow the story. Talkies changed all that. Yiddish films were only for Yiddish speakers now, and the films became more conservative and ingrown as the audience — which left no cultural descendants — aged.

*Der Vilner Shtot Khazn*, message aside, was top-grade Yiddish cinema, part of an era — from the mid-1930s through 1940 — that can be called the Golden Age of Yiddish films. This period saw the production of the pastoral, *Grine Felder*; the mystical, yet strikingly modernist, *Der Dibek*; Molly Picon's

*Yidl mitn Fidl*; the most expensive (\$50,000) and exuberant Yiddish musical film ever made, *Tevye der Milkhiker*, which starred the great Maurice Schwartz in the screen version of Sholom Aleichem's novel. These were first-rate movies by anyone's standards, and even a little kid could appreciate them.

Hoberman's grand book — which is both scholarly and entertaining — puts them, and lesser fare, in their proper cultural context, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Replete with marvelous photographs, rich in detail, it provides a vastly engrossing and rewarding tour of the whole of *Yidishland*. And you might want to catch a couple of Yiddish films while you're at it.

— Isidore Haiblum

**MAUS: A Survivor's Tale II. And Here My Troubles Began.** By Art Spiegelman. New York: Pantheon Books, \$18, 136 pp.

The lowly and humble cartoon. When you think of cartoons, do you envision the "funnies?" Maybe comic books? Possibly those Saturday morning kiddy cartoon shows? It's a medium suited to only simplistic gags and exaggerated slapstick violence, right?

Wrong. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a young group of artists calling themselves "underground cartoonists" set out to challenge the system. Among them were Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Jay Lynch, Bill Griffith, Kim Deitch, Spain Rodriguez. They and others expanded the parameters of the old familiar comic strip until it could accommodate dazzling displays of self-expression and a limitless spectrum of subject matter. One of these pioneers was New Yorker Art Spiegelman. Laboring for little money, he juggled language, story, format and artwork to produce unique comics in this reborn medium. One of his experiments resulted in a comic strip he called *Maus*, German for "mouse."

Spiegelman's parents were Holocaust survivors, specifically of the Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Dachau concentration camps. His distraught mother committed suicide in 1968. Spiegelman and his father continued a strained relationship until the elder Spiegelman's own death in 1982. The personal stories of Nazi atrocities pas-



sed from father to son haunted the cartoonist. Spiegelman sought a public voice for his father's searing personal accounts and a means of untangling his troubled feelings for his parents. He turned to his primary means of expression, the cartoon, and created *Maus*.

Can comics adequately portray such complex subject matter? Spiegelman converts his father's stories into a veritable cartoon fable. And in the manner of a fable, *Maus* represents the Jews as mice, the Nazis as cats and the Poles as pigs. The drawing style is the simple thick-lined look of the 1930s and 1940s black and white comic books. The reader enters a very non-threatening and cozy world. Spiegelman's skill and the importance of his tale then take control and veer off in a different direction.

The cartoonist invests each comic panel with strong human emotion by channeling the sweep of historic events through his father's very human viewpoint. The text comes from tape-recorded interviews Art Spiegelman conducted with his father, Vladek. Spiegelman vividly etches his word balloons with all the idiosyncratic English,

hesitations, frustration, wry humor and sorrow kept intact. *Maus* is gripping storytelling precisely because it speaks with the ring of truth. It is the voice of a concentration camp survivor.

The comic strip deals with the contrast between the story and the storyteller. Spiegelman constantly shifts between the World War II Poland of memory and present day New York City. Here, a young mouse wearing a vest — the cartoonist — questions an older mouse with glasses — his father — about his reminiscences. The obvious antagonism depicted between them provides a tense and poignant counterpoint. Vladek Spiegelman is a traumatized survivor of the Nazi terror trying to stay afloat in a sea of horrific memories.

The first volume of the story, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I. My Father Bleeds History*, appeared in 1987. Art Spiegelman confounded critics with the compelling power inherent in his cartoon creation. In it, he traced Vladek and his wife Anja's journey from comfortable middle-class family life in pre-war Sosnowiec to the very gates of

claim. With the eagerly awaited *Maus II*, the cartoonist concludes his father's chronicle of survival. Portrayed are the increasing infirmity of the elder Spiegelman and the artist's struggle to deal with the responsibility of being the son of a Holocaust survivor.

*Maus II* includes a summary of the first volume, allowing it to stand alone. Reading both volumes gives the full impact of his riveting and compelling narrative, entrusted, improbably, to talking mice and cats: the memorable characters of a lowly and humble cartoon.

— George Zarr

**TAR BEACH.** By Richard Elman. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, \$12.95 (softcover), 273 pp.

In New York, people sunbathe on rooftops and call this spot tar beach. Richard Elman's strange, funny, very disturbing novel, *Tar Beach*, takes place mostly on a synagogue roof — in Brooklyn, 1947. There, a group of middle-aged men do and don't talk about their lives. They play cards, they provoke one another, they worry, they fantasize, they pretend that the British government sent the Jews to Uganda instead of Palestine; they joke in Yiddish and English and imagined Swahili; they gossip and they discuss sex, money and, once in a while, the world.

What's so odd about these men, this narrative, and all the language that Elman magically captures here is the unexpected familiarity. The story seems as familiar as one of those dreams that all of us supposedly have: floods and chasing elephants. These men could be our relatives. They are more real than characters usually are, and therefore more disturbing. And they are disturbing because we see them as all bravado, all posing and fear, all quick retort and defense. Their inner lives are nonexistent, their existence

**EGALITARIAN HAGADA** by Aviva Cantor weaving traditional seder contents with modern prose and poetry on women and men in the Exodus, Holocaust and Resistance, Israel, U.S. union struggles, Soviet Jewry movement, in non-sexist English. Illus. \$4.95 prepaid by check/M.O. (NYSers add sales tax) plus \$1.05 S&H. Outside U.S., add \$3 and pay by internat. M.O. Beruriah Books/POB 1874 (Dept. N) Cathedral Station, NYC 10025. Bulk rates available upon request.

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based on their need to be responded to by others.

For me, this book was a look at my father's world of first-generation American Jewish men of Eastern European ancestry. Not that I haven't looked before. This time, though, my perceptions were very much colored by Elman's very strong portraits. These men became different in his hands: more vain, maybe, but so charming that disliking them is hard. They may be weak, but their banter is their way of staying alive, their way of coping with a world much larger than they are, as incomprehensible, perhaps, as the desire of the British government to give Uganda to the Jews. Or Palestine.

Izzy is the clear hero here for the other characters. One of the reasons is his sex life. Izzy is very sexy. Women succumb to him, one after another. He is a salesman, and like many, it is always himself that he's selling. Besides his out-of-town lovers, Izzy has a wife and a very devoted mistress, who is the wife of Sam, one of his closest friends. His mistress is in love with Izzy, and he himself might be in love, a little. But it's not love that propels him. It's small victories.

His friend Sam, a lawyer, with money in the bank and all the stability the others give lip service to, still doesn't have his wife, who is truly Izzy's. On top of everything, Izzy has a social conscience. Sort of. In the end, guilty and wanting to begin all over again, he contemplates leaving. He writes letters to his friends, letters he never will send. There's one to Sam: "Please forgive us as Lillian and I have long since forgiven you... all the years wasted and loveless. But you should try to be kind and loving to your wife as she's a very good woman. A regular marriage counselor might also be of some help. Brush your teeth before you make love. Take your time. She likes it slow.... You'll see. You'll get to like it after a while."

There are other engrossing characters. Even an angel named Jezebel, and Peter, Lillian and Izzy's love child, and more quick-talking rooftop men.

There are men who talk continually, not to explain, but to live. Men that Richard Elman seems to know inside out. His book about them is a kind of poem to them. A poem more disturbing than beautiful. An unforgettable poem.

— Esther Cohen