



SCENES FROM BRANDEIS PRESENTATION—(Top left) "The Night of Truths"—Dancers are, left to right, M.C., Midget, Comic and Magician. (On the block): Acrobat. (Top right) The Poet in "The Night of Dreams". (Bottom left) The Magician. (Bottom right) (standing) The Comic. (Dying) The Midget.

## In Commemoration of Spring

By DAVID G. ROSKIES

A tradition has been created at Brandeis University over the past four years. It began very modestly as a fifty-minute Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration Program, grew into a full-length play entitled "Hineni (1967) and was further expanded into a two-hour theatrical experiment entitled "Laughter" (1968). These programs were prompted by the desire to update the standard community commemoration programs (Yizker-ovntn) for a generation that did not live through the camps nor had any conception whatsoever of mass murder.

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silence is indeed the only proper posture toward it. The Holocaust is so agonizing, even ex post facto, precisely because it is the ultimate paradox. It imposes silence even while it demands speech. Elie Wiesel has said: "The full story of the Holocaust has not yet been told. All that we know is fragmentary, perhaps even untrue. Perhaps, what we tell about what happened and what really happened has nothing to do with the other." Stated differently, much of what is told about the Destruction has the quality of Ripley's Believe It Or Not—an oft-quoted source in the Evening of Truths.

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The problem of this generation is that not knowing Yiddish or Hebrew (for the most part), it is intellectually and emotionally cut off from the cultural heritage of Eastern European Jewry and thus, from its destruction. Any Yizker geared to them cannot assume previous knowledge and must "tell the tale" from the beginning.

Four years ago we limited ourselves to presenting a simple narrative of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, interspersed with a few songs and poems of the ghettos. The next year we decided to exploit the theatrical medium, not only by presenting a play—on the Vilna Ghetto—but also by utilizing slides, color film and live music. This was found to be extremely effective.

This year a three part program will be presented in the University's Berlin Chapel in an attempt to combine the setting of ritual observance with dramatic ritual. Each night will have a different theatrical form and may be viewed independently of the others although all together they are intended to form one conceptual unit.

The first night (Friday, April 18) will be simple and subdued. It is called "In the Depths: An Evening of Parables." The title is more or less self-explanatory. A series of five anonymous parables will be presented by several readers, with the inclusion of Yiddish songs. "Of the Dark Night: An Evening of Dreams." Here the mixed media will be used to highlight the "live" action. The cast will create a variety of roles: Carpenter, Poet, Dreamer, Orator, Prophet and Philosopher. Literary excerpts have been culled from various sources ranging from the literature of the Holocaust to philosophical works to contemporary fiction and poetry. The third night (Sunday, April 20), entitled "There is Laughter: an Evening of Truths" is perhaps the most experimental. It will be presented in the form of a cabaret, in a fast-moving Brechtian style. The names of the characters suggest the approach: M.C., Comic, Midget, Magician, Acrobat and Chanteuse. Here, folk songs, original ballads and symphonic music will be used.

The Holocaust is not an isolated event in history. True, its magnitude defies all comparison and leaves one at loss for words. George Steiner has suggested that

silence is indeed the only proper posture toward it. The Holocaust is so agonizing, even ex post facto, precisely because it is the ultimate paradox. It imposes silence even while it demands speech. Elie Wiesel has said: "The full story of the Holocaust has not yet been told. All that we know is fragmentary, perhaps even untrue. Perhaps, what we tell about what happened and what really happened has nothing to do with the other." Stated differently, much of what is told about the Destruction has the quality of Ripley's Believe It Or Not—an oft-quoted source in the Evening of Truths.

"In Commemoration of Spring" is not didactic, for there, is no lesson to be learned. Traditional approaches have ignored the complexity of the event. In fact, the program questions the veracity of the "tale," as does Wiesel. The parable is used to suggest that we are dealing with a dream world where maidens are sacrificed in a yearly spring ritual and where men impose voluntary imprisonment on themselves. This is only one step removed from the world of Auschwitz, described by a survivor as "a dream within a dream, varied in details, one in substance."

Related themes that are explored in the "Commemoration" are those of magic and prophecy. "No hocus-pocus, no poison, no hypnosis," says the Prophet as he discusses the workings of a death camp. The Magician pulls an elaborate array of torture instruments from his bag of tricks but he assures the audience: "We are not here to shock you. We will only tell you lies." The distorted vision of the Comic is essential to the telling of the tale, for all that remains after despair—is laughter.

Why a Chapel? Surely the need for silence negates the use of tradition and ritual. Or is ritual the only means of approaching the unapproachable? Here metaphor has replaced liturgy, as the Poet searches through his experience for visions of nightmare and cataclysm. He finds them in the frozen Murmansk Sea, in the weapons of war. There is song. Not the traditional melodies; not even the laments for the destruction of the Temple. They have been replaced by satiric cabaret numbers, by ghetto songs, by anthems. The metaphor is translated into celluloid. Some of the film and slides are documentary in nature; most are merely suggestive.

Last year the commemoration program was presented the week of Martin Luther King's assassination. Those who attended were surprised to find how immediately relevant the one event was to the other. The parallels available in 1969 are numerous, though none are dealt with explicitly here. There is a misshapen vision of humanity which even Spring cannot undo . . .

There will, of course, be no admission charge. Each program will begin at 8:30 sharp and all visitors are urged to come early, since seating room in the Chapel is limited.