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## Connect with music

CYNTHIA RAMSAY



The Oot n' Oots band helps launch Mission Folk Music Festival.

Family band the Oot n' Oots helps kick off the Mission Folk Music Festival on July 21, as part of the main-stage lineup that opens the weekend of concerts and workshops. Several other Jewish community members are also participating over the weekend, including Boris Sichon, Jesse Waldman and Abigail Lapell, who helps close out the annual event on the evening of July 23.

The theme of this year's festival builds on last year's, said artistic director Michelle Demers Shaevitz, also a member of the Jewish community.

"In 2022," she said, "I programmed a festival that reflected the experience of homecoming, the coming back together of our community, our festival family. This year, I'm digging into the process and ideas of connection and reconnection, as we move through our experiences beyond that initial homecoming and return to the festival. For me, the idea of reconnection speaks to getting to know who we are as a community post-pandemic and how we have changed/emerged as a result of our experiences."

"I was drawn to our 2023 artists through the ways they express their connection to their homelands, their languages, their heritage and cultures, and musical traditions," she continued. "It's how Okan celebrates their roots to their homeland of Cuba and her languages and stories, while Terra Spencer sings of the Maritime landscapes and communities around her."

"It could be reconnecting to language, as Cedric Watson and Jourdan Thibidoux explore their roots in the Creole community based in Louisiana alongside Wesli, who sings in his Haitian Creole of home and in French from his newly adopted community in Quebec."

"It's the ways that Leonard Sumner and Twin Flames sing their connections to their heritage or how Alysha Brilla presents her identity in her songs."

And, she said, it's how the Jewish musicians weave their Jewishness into their stories and songs.

Sichon, a classically trained percussionist, plays more than 400 different instruments from around the world, many of which would send most of us to the internet to find out what they are, such as mayuri, zurna and agogo bells. He can also make music from wrenches, plastic containers, kitchen bowls and even rocks

Please see **FESTIVAL** on page 10

## Love and concern for nature

CYNTHIA RAMSAY

Painter, printmaker and mixed media artist Sidi Schaffer has a new show at the Zack Gallery – a photography exhibit with one of her sons, Nathan Schaffer. *Eye Love Nature* invites viewers to see the beauty and wonders of the natural world, and for us to recognize the dangers we pose to it.

Rather than nature as something separate, we see ourselves in the Schaffers' photos. Sometimes, the animals are doing something that we enjoy doing, like the three whales in Nathan's "Family Swim," only their fins visible in the misty ocean. Other times, we can empathize with what a tree has endured, but also our part in hurting it, as in Sidi's "Embraced and Loved," which shows a gnarled tree not only tightly wrapped by a vine, but also scarred by the initials, including a pair in a heart, that many people have carved into it.

The titles of some of the photos bring a smile, but also a sense of responsibility. The overall feeling of the exhibit, however, is uplifting, hopeful.

"I have a fondness for word play and puns as a way of expressing humour. I find it helps keep a positive environment when interacting with others and, at times, deal with sensitive issues in a less threatening manner," Nathan told the *Independent*. "Artistically, my goal is to engage the audience both visually and with language. 'The Pepsi Challenge' [in which two horses tussle over a Pepsi cup] in my mind 'can'didly raises concerns about human garbage and pollution straight from the 'horse's mouth,' so to speak. In 'I'm Stumped,' there is also a bit of fishing line on the stump under the bird's foot – again a reminder that human pollution is unfortunately prevalent in the lives of wildlife and sometimes it can feel like we are stumped trying to deal with it."

*Eye Love Nature* is the first photography exhibit for both Schaffers. Sidi said, "as I age, I wanted to see my photos on a gallery wall and share our joy creating them with the people in the community." Nathan writes in his artist's statement: "I very much hope the viewers enjoy the photos and that positive emotions arise and carry forth."

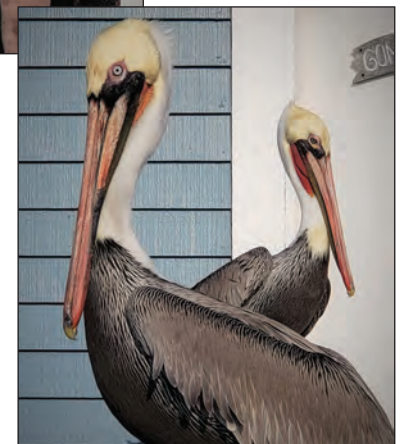
Both Schaffers thanked Zack Gallery director Hope Forstenzer and



Left: Nathan and Sidi Schaffer at the opening of their photography exhibit at the Zack Gallery June 22.

Below, left: "Burst of Colour" by Sidi Schaffer

Below, right: "Some Days I'd Rather Be Fishing" by Nathan Schaffer



the selection committee, as well as their friends and family, "for providing guidance and supporting this," said Nathan, who works as a psychiatrist treating adults at a community mental health clinic.

"The resilience of many patients inspires me to search for strength and marvel at beauty in nature," he said. "I often recommend spending time in nature as a way of reducing distress from inner turmoil, both to patients and family. I also enjoy my photography as a way of expressing latent artistic interests, as I haven't improved my drawing beyond a rudimentary level. It is a counterweight to the stress associated with my work."

For Sidi, who is a career artist, the skills involved in painting/printmaking and photography overlap to some extent.

"The combination of a good eye and imagination can help in both forms of art expression," she said. "[But] the trigger when taking a photo is coming from out-

side. It is your sudden surprise of what your eye sees in front of you at a certain moment, in a certain light or shadow. It can be a landscape, people or clouds in the sky. It can be a design that the power of nature created on a tree bark, or a gentle breeze moving the petals of a flower. You can be enchanted by a flower's seeds that hide themselves from the elements.

"As compared to painting or printmaking, with photography, it's presented to you, you only have to look and explore," she said. "When I am in front of a canvas or paper, it's usually in front of a white surface that waits for my imagination, for my expression of freedom to choose the subject or design that comes from inside me. It takes me even more into my inner self, into a world that brings me satisfaction,

Please see **EXHIBIT** on page 12

# Holocaust

## Theatre that educates

Victoria groups to tour Wendy Kout's *Survivors*.

SAM MARGOLIS

Last year, Victoria-based Bema Productions and the Victoria Shoah Project collaborated on a pilot project: a nine-performance tour to middle and secondary schools of *Survivors*, a Holocaust-themed play by Wendy Kout. The success of the tour, which reached more than 1,100 students and 500 adults in the Victoria area, has led the organizations to broaden their reach throughout Vancouver Island, Metro Vancouver and other Western provinces beginning this autumn.



PHOTOS FROM HOLOCAUSTTHEATRE.COM

Wendy Kout's play *Survivors* is based on 10 real-life stories of young people's Holocaust experiences.

caust-themed play by Wendy Kout. The success of the tour, which reached more than 1,100 students and 500 adults in the Victoria area, has led the organizations to broaden their reach throughout Vancouver Island, Metro Vancouver and other Western provinces beginning this autumn.

"Following our pilot tour in Victoria, we were asked to cover the Western provinces, and I happily accepted the challenge," said Zelda Dean, the director of the play. "We will be touring to 30 schools on Vancouver Island in October 2023. In the fall of 2024, we will tour on the Mainland and in Alberta. Saskatchewan and Manitoba will be toured in 2025 – 150 performances in total will be presented."

Citing a 2018 Canadian survey produced by the Azrieli Foundation, Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Claims Conference, the Victoria organizers offer compelling reasons why Holocaust education is necessary today, particularly (but not only) for youth. According to the survey, 52% of millennials cannot name a concentration camp or ghetto; 62% of millennials did not know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust; 22% of millennials haven't heard or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust; and 23% of all Canadians believe that substantially fewer than six million Jews were killed (two million or fewer) during the Holocaust, while another 24% were unsure of how many were killed.

"I have been alarmed at the on-

going rise in anti-semitism for some years and have been looking for a suitable educational play. I had previously produced a play by Wendy and loved her work," said Dean, regarding the selection of *Survivors*.

The intention of the one-hour play, suitable for those from Grade 6 to adulthood, is to provide a vehicle to teach lessons from the Shoah to younger audiences. Based on 10 real-life stories of young people's Holocaust experiences, the play hopes to enable students to recognize the short- and long-term causes and effects of prejudice, discrimination and, ultimately, genocide. It also aims to foster critical thinking and bring the importance of human rights and social justice advocacy to the forefront.

*Survivors* goes through the chronological history of the Holocaust by enacting the experiences of Jewish children and teenagers from Europe. The young cast of six professional actors portrays the survivors, starting at innocence and continuing through the terrifying rise and rule of bigotry, xenophobia and violence, before they immigrate to America.

The play includes the true stories of a teen who watched her boyfriend being taken away to a concentration camp, a girl who was separated from her parents and relocated to England through the Kindertransport and a boy whose family struggled to escape to China.

Dean credited the young actors in the production for their diligence and dedication to their parts. "I put a casting call out and was delighted that a large number of very skilled

Please see **BEMA** on page 15

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# Reflections

## Kindness, friendship

### Editor:

There are many friends and people we connect with throughout our lives. Some leave a lasting impression and, while we lose contact with them, we still think of them fondly. For me, one such person was Susan Landau Chark. A wonderful person. Kind and compassionate with a brilliant mind. I learned that she passed away on June 5 after a long battle with pancreatic cancer.

My first meeting with Susan was in a professional capacity. I was new in Vancouver, the stay-at-home mum of a sweet, active baby boy. We had no family in Vancouver and were struggling financially. My husband Steve was a student and we relied heavily on student loans and bursaries.

Although a little timid to ask for help, we approached Jewish Family Services Agency (now just JFS) for assistance. At that time, Susan was the executive director of the agency. She had the most exceptional staff. There was Isabel, who did every social work task imaginable. And Sonia, who assisted Russian immigrants into settling in Vancouver.

Before long, we were the recipients of a multitude of baby items and clothes that Susan and her staff pulled together for us. I can still remember the beautiful stroller that Susan had just finished using with her own son. JFSA became a second home and Isabel, my cheerleader.

We never forgot the kindness and all the help and support provided to us. When our life stabilized, we spent many years volunteering for JFSA in an attempt to pay forward these beautiful mitzvot.

Our friendship continued and we were fortunate to be included in many Shabbat dinners at Susan and Reb Aryeh's home. We lost touch when they moved to Montreal, where Susan continued her studies at Concordia University.

Eventually, Susan became the associate director of the Max and Tessie Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies at Carleton University, in Ottawa. As they noted in their remembrance of her: "Dr. Susan Landau-Chark was a dedicated and well-respected scholar whose research and service to Jewish studies has strengthened our discipline and deepened our understanding of Jewish life and practice."

I regret losing touch with Susan, and that I had to learn about all the amazing things she did, after her passing. She truly was a beautiful human being and it's a huge loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with family, friends and colleagues as you mourn. May Susan's memory be a blessing to all.

Jenny Wright, Vancouver

## A life of light and of shade

MAX ROYTENBERG

The quality of our lives seems to contain alternating waves of good and bad, hard and soft, light and shade. If we are lucky enough to appreciate that this is the nature of existence, we can bear much better with the shady parts of our lives. We can have faith that, whatever challenges we are facing, no matter how painful, the good times will roll around again. And the good times can be so good, so full of richness, pleasure, joy, lightness and brightness, that they are worth the price we may ultimately have to pay for the good fortune we have the luck to be earning.

The dilemma is that sometimes we do not realize that what we are passing through are the bright times, the good times, the best times. That often comes only with retrospection.

I remember that I left home at the age of 18 to spend a year of work and study in Israel. I did not think to ask for the permission of my parents, I just made my plans and informed them of those plans. I never thought to do otherwise, and I was never questioned. I saved up the money I needed for the odd jobs I performed as I wended my way through my high school years. I applied for the assignment, gathered my pennies and off I went, traveling across the globe.

I was a part of a group, but I felt very much alone. I remember that, being alone, on the ship sailing across the ocean, my mind brimming full of speculations about the nature of the world. I wrote incessantly about that on every scrap of paper I could find.

I have some of those scraps in a file I have kept to this day. So much of it, seems to me today, to be a load of nonsense. The gist of it was that I was a solitary sailor afloat on the sea of life and that life was incredibly sweet. I was full of wants. I wanted to find a true companion. I wanted a country of my own. I wanted to save the world. I was going to do it all myself if I had to. At the time, I could read it all in the palm of my hand, and it was all going to happen. I was totally free from obligations, except those that I chose to lay upon myself – and included in those was responsibility for creating the perfect world. All of us are heroes in our own eyes, and we have to try as hard as we can to live up to that image of ourselves.

How was that not the most superlative moment of my life to that date? I had not the merest clue as to the nature of the importance of those moments in my existence. I was unconsciously writing an agenda for my life.

I am no different from others, and all of you have had those moments in your lives, those moments whose importance is only appreciated by you with the passage of time and the gleanings of experience.

I remember holding a child of mine in my arms, and feeling like I would burst with joy. I remember when I was leaving my first job, hearing that my superiors were frantic about who they could find to fill the hole I was leaving, I remember when I realized that I had succeeded

in resolving a dilemma that would yield years of success at a seemingly impossible task that I had taken on. I remember the instant when I recaptured the love of my heart after 50 long years of disappointment when I had not found the companionship I longed for. I remember the moments when I began to understand what elements of my behaviour prevented my Bride from feeling the depth of my love for her. All these events, which cast other parts of my life in the shade where they belonged, I could only truly appreciate in retrospect. The thrill they yield when I recall them I relive over and over again. So it must be for so many of you, when you recall your own experiences.

Surely there are lessons to be learned by sentient beings from these experiences. Don't they help us, when we find ourselves in periods when there is shade all around us, know that the moments we hope for and will cherish all the days of our lives will surely arrive for us if we carry on? Just as day follows night, won't our turn at good fortune arrive if we put in the necessary effort to survive what may seem to us to be the worst of times, and if we are lucky enough to have the good health and fortune to do so? Isn't that the secret, that we try, and try again, to confront the challenges we face, and we never, never, give up? ❧

**Max Roytenberg** is a Vancouver-based poet, writer and blogger. His book *Hero in My Own Eyes: Tripping a Life Fantastic* is available from Amazon and other online booksellers.

**BEMA** from page 5

young actors tried out for the roles. Those who were cast were tasked with doing considerable research into the Holocaust prior to rehearsals starting," she said.

*Survivors* was originally commissioned and developed by Center-Stage Theatre in Rochester, N.Y., in 2017, when Kout was asked to write a Holocaust play about survivors who had immigrated to the city. Shortly thereafter, while watching neo-Nazis march in Charlottesville, Va., Kout expressed the feeling that she was not simply writing an historical play but also a "warning play."

The Victoria production in November and December 2022 – which played in school auditoriums, theatres and libraries, and had four public performances – was the first international tour of the play. There are other tours currently on both

coasts of the United States, with Kout, along with the New York company that developed *Survivors*, creating a documentary on how the play came to be.

"Sharing the history of the Holocaust with students provides an important historical example of the dangers of allowing hatred and intolerance to take hold within a society," said former B.C. minister of education Rob Fleming about the Victoria tour.

Additionally, several students who saw the play offered their input concerning how the performance affected them.

"I want to continue to learn more about the Holocaust and people's stories. I've read [Elie Wiesel's] *Night* and seen this play but other than that I haven't heard many personal stories, so I'd like to learn more," said one.

"I learned once again that I should

not judge others selfishly based on race, religion, appearance or prejudice, and I will try to [remember that] whenever I meet new people from now on," contributed another.

The organizers are looking for financial support to fund the upcoming Western Canadian tours.

"Over \$450,000 is required to offer this powerful educational play to so many students, and we are actively fundraising to individuals, corporations, foundations, etc. We are running a campaign inviting folks to sponsor a school in their area for only \$500," Dean explained.

For more information about the play and to contribute, visit [holocausttheatre.com](http://holocausttheatre.com) or email [info@holocausttheatre.com](mailto:info@holocausttheatre.com). ❧

**Sam Margolis** has written for the *Globe and Mail*, *the National Post*, *UPI* and *MSNBC*.



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