



Remember the Women Institute
in partnership with
Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan
& National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene
present

2022 Yom HaShoah Program

Excerpt from *The Bird of the Ghetto*
by Chava Rosenfarb, translated by Goldie Morgentaler

Excerpt from *Oh, I Remember the Black Birch*
by Dr. Velina Hasu Houston

Excerpt from *I Was a Stranger Too*
by Cynthia L. Cooper

Production Partners



This **Women, Theater, and the Holocaust** Yom HaShoah program is an annual project of Remember the Women Institute. A related publication, ***Women, Theater, and the Holocaust: A Resource Handbook***, was written and edited by Rochelle G. Saidel and Karen Shulman and is available on-line on our [website](#).

Founded 25 years ago and based in New York City, [Remember the Women Institute](#), a 501c3 non-profit organization, conducts and encourages research and cultural activities that include women in history. Special emphasis is on women's experiences during the Holocaust, including sexual violence, with domestic violence a more recent additional focus. Through research and related activities, the stories of women -- from the point of view of women -- are made available to be integrated into collective memory. The work of the Institute has influenced academic research and publications, as well as popular culture, by encouraging the inclusion of all of humanity in historical and commemorative representations. Projects include co-publishing books, creating exhibits, organizing groundbreaking conference panels internationally, and cooperating with individuals and other institutes and organizations for programs, films, and exhibits. Donations to further our work are welcome via the donate button on our website.

Dr. Rochelle G. Saidel is the founding executive director of [Remember the Women Institute](#), which since 1997 has conducted research and cultural activities dedicated to including women in history. Her focus is on Jewish women, especially women during the Holocaust, as well as violence against women. She is the author, editor, or co-editor of eight books including *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, and *Women, Theater, and the Holocaust: A Resource Handbook*. She was the coordinator and catalog co-editor for the *VIOLATED! Women in Holocaust and Genocide* international art exhibition, shown in 2018 in New York City. She has organized conference panels, curated museum exhibitions, presented papers, contributed to anthologies, consulted for films, and lectured internationally for more than forty years. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from The Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York.



WEBSITE: mmjccm.org

OUR MISSION:

Together with our community, the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan creates opportunities for people to connect, grow, and learn within an ever-changing Jewish landscape.

OUR VISION:

The Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan imagines Jewish life that is diverse and engages meaningfully with its values, culture, and ideas in everyday lives.



The Award-winning National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene [NYTF] is the longest continuously producing Yiddish theatre company in the world. The company presents plays, musicals, concerts, lectures, interactive educational workshops and community-building activities in English and Yiddish, with English and Russian supertitles accompanying performances. NYTF serves a versatile audience of approximately 100,000 individuals annually, comprised of performing arts patrons, cultural enthusiasts, Yiddish-language aficionados and the general public, while also using the arts as a vehicle to educate youth and adults about Jewish heritage. The NYTF outreach program takes events around the region, nation and world, bringing programming annually to over 18,000 individuals.

Our Mission

National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene's mission is to celebrate the Yiddish experience through the performing arts by transmitting the rich cultural legacy in exciting new ways that bridge social and cultural divides.

- Sustaining Yiddish culture through the arts
- Bridging diverse communities through multicultural programming
- Dramatizing the Jewish experience
- Educating future artists and audiences
- Strengthening cultural identity in each generation

Acknowledgments

Remember the Women Institute thanks everyone who helped to make this program possible.

We thank our partner, the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan and Rachel Kunstadt, Director of Adult Jewish Learning, for inviting us to share their virtual space and providing technical assistance.

We thank our partner, National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene and Sabina Brukner, Literary Manager, for allowing us to present excerpts from Chava Rosenfarb's Yiddish play, translated into English by Goldie Morgentaler.

We thank playwrights Cynthia L. Cooper and Dr. Velina Hasu Houston for allowing us to present excerpts from their moving plays.

We thank Dr. Meghan Brodie, Cynthia L. Cooper, and Dr. Velina Hasu Houston, our Women, Theater, and the Holocaust project colleagues, for generously sharing with us their time, talent, and love of meaningful theater.

We thank all of the talented playwrights, directors, actors, and dramaturgs who took part in the performances.

We thank Dr. Meghan Brodie, Cynthia L. Cooper, Samantha McLaughlin, and Karen Shulman for creating on-line material to promote and enhance this event.

The Bird of the Ghetto Production Note & Bios

The Bird of the Ghetto (*Der Foygl fun Geto*) פֿױגל פֿון געטאָ was written by Chava Rosenfarb and translated from the Yiddish by Goldie Morgentaler.

The Bird of the Ghetto is a powerful drama about the attempted Vilna Ghetto uprising in 1943. The play tells the story of the final days of Isaac Wittenberg, commander of the ghetto resistance group, the United Partisan Organization. The excerpt performed today is from Act 2, scene 1. Under torture, Polish resistance fighters gave up the name of the commander of the Vilna ghetto resistance organization, Isaac Wittenberg. The Germans have demanded Wittenberg's surrender. Yacov Gens, the Jewish ghetto chief, has summoned Wittenberg and his comrades to try to convince them to give up Wittenberg. After this scene, Wittenberg is arrested and subsequently escapes with the help of his comrades. Gens threatens to liquidate the Vilna ghetto if Wittenberg is not surrendered. The members of United Partisan Organization do not want to surrender Wittenberg because they believe the ghetto has already been marked for extermination. The ghetto is hesitant to defy this order and fears the consequences of resistance. Ultimately, the United Partisan Organization reverses course and Wittenberg surrenders himself. He dies in German custody the next day. This reading is performed courtesy of production partner National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene and Goldie Morgentaler.

Chava Rosenfarb—*Playwright*

“*The Bird of the Ghetto* is the only play by Chava Rosenfarb, who is considered one of the greatest post-war Yiddish writers. Born in Lodz, Rosenfarb began writing at age eight. In the Lodz ghetto, her poetry brought her to the attention of Simkha-Bunim Shayevitch, author of the epic poem “Lekh Lekho,” who became her mentor and introduced her to the writers’ group in the ghetto. Upon liquidation of the ghetto (August 1944), Rosenfarb was deported to Auschwitz, and then to Sasel and finally Bergen-Belsen, where she was liberated. In 1950, she immigrated to Montreal. Her literary output after 1947 was prodigious, including the epic, three-volume *The Tree of Life: A Trilogy of Life in the Lodz Ghetto*.” (National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, nytf.org/bird/)

Meghan Brodie—*Director*

Dr. Meghan Brodie is Associate Professor of Theater and a faculty member in the Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies program. She is also a director, dramaturg, and playwright. Meghan directed the English-language world premiere of *In the Underworld*, a darkly comic operetta written by Germaine Tillion while Tillion was imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp during World War II. Her other directing credits include plays by dramatists such as Sarah Ruhl, Charlotte Jones, Diana Son, Kate Hamill, Angela Carter, and Emma Donoghue. She has previously written about queer casting and consent-oriented theater practices, coedited two anthologies of performance pieces written by LGBTQ youth and allies, and partnered with the Remember the Women Institute on several projects about women, theater, and the Holocaust. She is currently writing a play, *Claude & Marcel*, about queer surrealist artists and resistance fighters, Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe. She holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University. meghanbrodie.com

Evan Chartock—*Gens*

Evan Chartock is a first-year Ursinus student double majoring in Media and Communication Studies and Theater as well as minoring in Legal Studies. Previously with Ursinus Theater, Evan was seen as Peter in Ursinus’s concert reading of Paula Vogel’s *And Baby Makes Seven* and has worked on multiple shows for Breakaway Student Productions. Evan would like to thank the entire cast and crew, especially Dr. Brodie, for an incredible experience.

Kate Isabel Foley—*Esther*

Kate Isabel Foley is a junior majoring in English and Theater and minoring in Creative Writing and Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies. Previous Ursinus acting credits include *The Complete History of Ursinus College (Abridged)*, *9 to 5*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *The Oldest Profession*. She also did dramaturgical work for *The Company of Wolves/Puss in Boots*, assistant stage managed the spring 2022 UCDC concert, and is the president of Breakaway Student Productions. Special thanks to Dr. Brodie for this incredible opportunity.

Ben Little—*Shlomo*

Ben Little is a sophomore majoring in Theater and East Asian studies. Previous Ursinus theater credits include *Company of Wolves*, *Puss in Boots*, *Poe on Poe*, and *Pride and Prejudice*. Favorite past roles have included Mortimer in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. He most recently was the music director and piano accompanist for Paula Vogel’s *The Oldest Profession* at Ursinus College.

Joey Nolan—*Wittenberg*

Joey Nolan is a sophomore Theater and Environmental Science double major with an Education minor. During his Ursinus career, Joey has performed as Egeus in *Poe on Poe*, Hero in *Puss in Boots*, Lieutenant Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Jason in *Sweat*. Joey has performed in over 20 pre-collegiate productions as well, playing roles such as Mortimer Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Seymour Krelborn in *Little Shop of Horrors*, and Amos Hart in *Chicago*.

Annie Zulick—*Narrator*

Annie Zulick is a first-year student majoring in Theater. Her Ursinus College roles include Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Ruth/Henri/Orphan in a concert reading of *And Baby Makes Seven*. Some of her previous theater credits include roles in *Shrek*, *Les Miserables*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Curtains*.

Oh, I Remember the Black Birch Production Note & Bios

Oh, I Remember the Black Birch by Velina Hasu Houston is commissioned by Bonnie Franklin's Classic and Contemporary American Plays. Keren M. Goldberg, who has worked with the playwright since the play's inception, is the dramaturg and producer. The play is set in September 1940 to March 1941 in Poland, Lithuania, Siberia, and Japan. The main character is Brina Berman, 18, a Polish Jewish woman. When her brother is murdered by Nazis and her parents disappear while urging her to escape, Brina obtains a transit visa from a Lithuania-based Japanese diplomat, Chiune Sugihara. After a long and harrowing journey across Russia to Siberia, Brina ends up in Kobe, Japan, where she's astonished to find an established Jewish community that has been there for over a hundred years. Jewish refugees from Europe are housed in the community by the Japanese imperial army. Haunted by memories of the Nazis and safeguarded by a maternal water spirit who comes into her life when she prays, Brina confronts a world shattered by fascism and war in a new place where Jewish and Japanese cultures mesh. The questions she faces are: Will she survive in a country that is pro-Germany and how will she find "home" when her brother is gone and she doesn't know the whereabouts of her parents?

Rena Heinrich—*Director*

Rena Heinrich is an Assistant Professor of Theatre Practice in Critical Studies at the University of Southern California. A Los Angeles-based theater director and actor, she has been directing and performing professionally for over twenty years. As a scholar, her teaching and areas of expertise include race, representation, and gender in performance; Asian American drama; and performance studies. Heinrich received her Ph.D. in Theater Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Keren M. Goldberg—*Dramaturg & Producer*

Keren M. Goldberg, the play's dramaturg-producer, was a founding member of the former Los Angeles, California, New ARTEF Players Jewish Theatre. She was the Director of Education at the Los Angeles Theatre Center where she created and managed the award-winning Theatre as a Learning Tool citywide program. She is a consultant at various institutions such as American Jewish University and Disney Theatrical Productions (original L.A. production of *The Lion King*). She's been

honored by Theatre Communications Group, was a California Arts Council evaluator, and served at both UCLA and USC. At the International Conference on the History of Jewish Theatre in Eastern Europe (Warsaw, Poland), she presented, “The Meaning of Theatre in Jewish Life in Poland.” She is inspired by her memory of her Eastern European grandparents.

Roni Gayer—*Brina Berman*

Roni Gayer is a third-year student at the University of Southern California double majoring in Theatre and Public Relations. Prior to attending USC, Roni attended the national high school of arts in Israel, Thelma Yellin, and after graduation, she served her mandatory military service in the Israel Defense Forces as a museum tour guide in the IDF History Museum. Roni’s acting highlights include participating in the national tours of *Annie* and *The Sound of Music*.

Yahm Steinberg—*Batya Esbragian*

Yahm Steinberg (they/she) is a soon-to-be graduate of USC’s School of Dramatic Arts. A multi-hyphenate artist, Yahm is an actor, singer-songwriter, photographer, director, dancer, and visual artist. Yahm imbues the art she creates with her Queer, Jewish, and Israeli-American identities. While at USC, Yahm’s acting highlights include playing the Doctors in *Next to Normal*, Rose in *The Secret Garden*, and acting in a production of the postmodern show *Amsterdam* directed by Lilach Dekel-Avneri.

Kiana Taylor—*Stage Directions*

Kiana Taylor is a mixed-race Japanese American actor, artist, and filmmaker dedicated to breaking down race, gender, and sexuality barriers in the entertainment industry through advocacy and empowerment. They are currently pursuing a BA in Film and Television Production with a minor in Theater at University of Southern California. Recent work includes the PBS Origins show, PBS Voices A People’s History of Asian America on YouTube, and their directorial debut with the short film *Majo*.

Velina Hasu Houston—*Playwright*

Velina Hasu Houston’s literary career began Off-Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club, expanding globally. With 30 commissions, she’s been honored by institutions such as the Japan Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and Theatre Communications Group. She founded graduate playwriting at the University of Southern California and directed dramatic writing there for 31 years; she is a presidentially appointed Distinguished Professor, USC Resident Playwright and School of Dramatic Arts/Iovine Young Academy faculty. A Fulbright Scholar, she served on the State Department’s Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission. She is Writers’ Odyssey Associate Artist, Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, Los Angeles, and affiliated with New Circle Theatre Company, New York. Archives: Huntington Library.

I Was a Stranger Too Production Note & Bios

The presentation in this reading is an excerpt from a new, full-length play of the same name, *I Was A Stranger Too*. The play is based on more than 80 oral interviews with people seeking asylum, people helping asylum seekers, and the people and organizations that facilitate the process. The research, undertaken by the playwright with collaborating partner Carolyn Levy, was supported by a grant

from Rimón: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, a program of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation. *I Was A Stranger Too* was a finalist for the prestigious Theatre J Trish Vradenburg Jewish Play Prize and is a finalist selection in the ongoing Jewish Plays Project 2022. Special thanks to the dozens of people who shared their stories about forced migration and resettlement in oral interviews, and to the theatre groups that contributed the play's development, including IGL Workshop, Play Readings with Friends and Julia's Reading Room (League of Professional Theatre Women) in New York, Theater Unbound in Minneapolis, and many thoughtful consultants and colleagues.

Cynthia L. Cooper—*Playwright*

Cynthia L. Cooper is an award-winning playwright whose work has been produced in the US, Canada, Europe, and Israel. In New York, her work has been seen at Primary Stages, The Women's Project, Wings, Lincoln Center's Clark Studio, MultiStages, EST, Town Hall, Museum of Tolerance, Center for Jewish History, Art and Work Ensemble, EST, WOW Café, and more, as well as in Chicago, Minneapolis, DC, Philadelphia, Boston, LA, Maryland, Texas, Florida, and elsewhere. Her work in "Women, Theater and the Holocaust" includes *Gretel Bergmann* about a Jewish athlete and the 1936 Olympics, *Silence Not, A Love Story* about a woman resister, *The Spoken and the Unspoken* about sexual abuse of Jewish women in the Holocaust, *The Box, At the Train Station in Munich* (published, Applause Books 2021) and *Here Lived (Hier Wohnnte)* about stolperstein. A two-time Jerome Fellow, her plays are published in 17 volumes. See www.cyncooperwriter.net

Carolyn Levy—*Director*

Carolyn Levy is a freelance theater director in the Twin Cities where she has worked with theaters including Theatre Unbound, Park Square, Pillsbury House Breaking Ice, Penumbra Theatre Summer Institute, the Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company and the Playwrights Center. Her area of focus is using theater for social change. She is a Professor Emerita from Hamline University where she directed and taught acting and directing. At Hamline she created Making Waves, a Social Justice Theatre Troupe where she worked with students to create, perform, and tour interactive theater pieces about topics such as race, gender, sexualities, hunger, and class. She was Artistic Director and Co-Founder of the Women's Theatre Project directing new plays by and about women.

Kirby Bennett—*Rory*

Kirby Bennett is a Minneapolis-based actor and has been seen regionally at numerous theaters including Six Points Theater (formerly Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company), Frank Theatre, Old Log Theatre, Jungle Theater, Park Square Theatre, Paul Bunyan Playhouse, Commonwealth Theatre Company, History Theatre, and many others. Kirby is the Artistic Director of Girl Friday Productions, for which she produced and performed in their acclaimed 2019 production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*, among many others.

Patricia Perales—*Luciana*

Patricia Perales, originally from Texas, is a graduate of the University of Texas San Antonio and Syracuse University. She has been in various theater and film productions in NYC and currently studies at HB Studio with Austin Pendleton. She was Masha in the *The Seagull*, directed by Mr. Pendleton. An avid traveler, she is fluent in Spanish and conversational Italian. She also produced and starred in a theatrical/art show, *3 Scenes in a Studio*.

Jasmine Porter—*Jocelyn*

Jasmine Porter is a local Twin Cities-based actress and devising theater artist. She's been grateful to perform on stages with Theatre Unbound, The Guthrie, Zephyr Theater, and will be at Saint Paul's Park Square Theater in 2023. We all know the pandemic has been hard, to say the least, but Jasmine is thankful and beyond grateful to be back creating art among artists.

Abigail Ramsay—*Shareen*

After two years in Kingston, Jamaica—first on a Fulbright, the second running a COVID-curtailed girl empowerment theater program—Abigail Ramsay has spent the latter part of the pandemic joyously caretaking her elderly parents who retired outside of Atlanta, Georgia. Later in the year, this native New Yorker will be directing a modern day, Atlanta-based version of *Hamlet* and is delighted by this newest adventure. She is honored to work with Cindy and Carolyn again, particularly giving voice and life to beautiful words that tell powerful human stories.

Adara Totino—*Polina*

Brooklyn born and bred, Adara Totino is a New York City-based actress and writer. Adopted as part of the Lincoln Center Theater's Open Stages program during her teen years, she later enrolled in The Actors Studio MFA Program, studying under Elizabeth Kemp and Susan Aston. She has since been involved in projects on stage and screen and is honored to be a part of this project highlighting women's voices. She dedicates this performance to her Grandmother Sophie Rose.

Phasoua Vang—*Channa*

Phasoua Vang is a Twin Cities-based actor. Recent works include short films and the upcoming webisode of *Hmong Organization*. She often works with Mu Performing Arts, most recently in *A Korean Drama Addict's Guide to Losing Your Virginity*, *Immigrant Journey Project* and *Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals*. Other performances include *Poj Laib Laus*, *Confessions of a Lazy Hmong Woman* and various readings and short play festivals.

