

WEEKEND READS

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Opinion

I read a secret transcript of Hasidic sex advice. I've read worse.

By Rob Eshman

All first-time Hasidic grooms prepare for their wedding night by getting blow-by-blow instructions from a rabbi. But one young man did something unique: He recorded their conversation.

The 25-minute Yiddish recording, made in Williamsburg around 2017, found its way to Frieda Vizel, a formerly Hasidic tour guide of the area. Vizel translated the lesson to English, changing just enough details to preserve the anonymity of the groom and his teacher.

“Instead of seeing Hasidic sex as abusive or as perfect and pure, this is just the experience in a very raw form,” said Vizel in a phone interview.

To me, the raw form was a revelation.

My knowledge of Hasidic sex begins and ends with the TV shows “Shtisel” and “Unorthodox.”

“You have a hole inside you, leading to a hallway, leading to a little door,” Esty, the young woman in “Unorthodox,” is told by a “bride teacher” in advance of her wedding night. “When the man enters the hallway with his...”

“No!” Esty interjects, horrified — and scene. Esty’s experiences in the marital bed turn out to be physically painful and emotionally miserable. Ultimately — and not just because she dreads having sex with her husband — she ends up fleeing the Hasidic community.

But the real lesson taught pre-wedding night, as translated by Vizel, struck me as far more sensitive. It is still a man Hasid-splaining a woman’s feelings to another man. But

the groom teacher began well before the actual sex — which was the first pleasant surprise. He detailed what the groom should do in the yichud room, where traditional brides and grooms go for a bit after the wedding ceremony.

“You say to her, ‘Mazel tov, Libby!’ shaking her hand with both of yours. Okay?”

He told the groom what blessing the couple must recite.

“As soon as you finish this with ‘Amen,’ let go of her hand, embrace her. Give her a good kiss here and here. Okay? On the cheek. Not on the mouth. Okay. And as soon as you are done kissing her, you let go of her and you say: ‘Wow! Libby, your gown is BEAUTIFUL! It came out so gorgeous! It came out so stunning! Very, very nice!’”

There’s usually no sex in the yichud room — another urban myth busted. Instead, the teacher instructed his pupil to slow down and talk to his bride.

“‘Libby, how was your day?’” the teacher told the groom to ask. “‘When did you come to the wedding hall? When did you say the afternoon prayers? Were you able to sleep last night?’ But you won’t ask everything because she is going to be asking you back: ‘Yossi, How was your day?’ You’ll say how your day went, and so it’ll go one after the other.”

After the festive meal, the teacher said, Yossi is to escort Libby through the women’s side of the celebration to the men’s side, where she stops.

“When you get to the men’s side, tell your bride, ‘Libby, be well! Enjoy the wedding, I will see you later!’”

The lesson picked up in the apartment after the wedding.

“Say to her, ‘Libby, please come. Let me help you take off your gown because I want you to be more comfortable.’ Then you go into the kitchen, eat a little, chat a little. Then you go get ready to go to sleep. You’ll recite the Shema and take a shower.”

After the shower, more talking.

“‘Libby, do you want me to be comfortable?’” the teacher instructed his student to say. “‘When you are comfortable, I am comfortable. Please, make yourself comfortable, the wig, whatever, but just be comfortable.’”

The rebbe continued with advice for conversation: “‘What do you think of the wedding music? What do you think of the pianist? What do you think of the singer?’ You talk about the wedding.

“After a minute, you’ll take your hand and put it on her shoulder, wrap it around her. And you tell her: ‘You know Libby, I was in here in the apartment today, and you did such a beautiful job.’ And as you say the word ‘such’ you embrace her with both arms. And you are going to give her a few deep kisses on her cheek; here two-three, there two-three. But now, FOR SURE, she returns the embrace.”

There was, in this instruction, a lot of what a therapist would call checking in. The groom’s teacher knew his pupil would be nervous. As Vizel pointed out to me, while Hasidic men may get pointers from their siblings or peers, it’s not like they have any hands-on experience. And the point the teacher kept pressing was: Speak with her. Listen to her. Take your time. It was all very un-”Unorthodox,” where the man swung himself on top of the shaking bride without a how-do-you-do.

“And you talk to her very sweetly,” the teacher continued. “Tell her how much you love her, and how beautiful she is, and how beautiful she looked at the wedding, you can talk to her! Tell her how beautifully she set up the apartment, and how beautiful it is set up inside, in the cabinets. You’ll take your arm off her, you’ll give her a piece of cake, give her something to drink, give her a chocolate. You eat, you schmooze. What do you talk about? You talk more about the wedding.”

Up to this point, it was all, “How to be with a partner,” and not, “What to do in bed” — and is that such terrible relationship advice for any two people?

Eventually, after kissing the mezuzah and undressing — without looking — the two are to lie down in bed. The teacher’s description of what to do there started out, again, very un-”Unorthodox,” a kind of choreography. One step leads to another and before you know it, you’re dancing.

“So what you’ll do is, you’ll touch only her face,” he said. “Stroke her face. Her face, her forehead. You can give her a kiss on her forehead. And you kiss her, and you stroke her face, and tell her how delicious it is, tell her how much you waited for her, tell her how much you love her, tell her how beautiful she is.

“Tell her how much you enjoy her. Tell her how delicious it is to be lying next to her.”

“And tell her that you only want one thing: that she should be happy. That this is your single mission in life.”

“How long will you lie with her? However long you want! A half-hour, an hour, an hour and a half. I don’t care. However long you want. Okay?”

“Now. When you feel ready, you want to go, you want to do it, what do you do?”

At this point in the transcript, there's ... an ellipsis.

Vizel herself was married at 18 years old in the Hasidic tradition, and, like all brides, first met with a bride teacher. The sex descriptions in the recording brought back traumatic memories, she said, without going into detail.

“It was,” she said, “a very intense emotional experience.”

So Vizel couldn't bring herself to include the actual sex instructions which, she said, was “like a medical guide. ‘You spread her legs and you lift this and —’ Vizel added some far more graphic terminology — “You're done. That's all.”

She did pick up the translation immediately after.

“The moment you feel that it is finished,” the teacher said, “you must jump out of bed. Jump out of bed. OK.”

This is because the Jewish laws of family purity dictate that any physical touch between husband and wife is forbidden after their first sexual encounter until 12 days later. Vizel explained that the groom must check the sheets for her blood, the presence of which requires a 12-day separation.

If the sex and its immediate aftermath described by the groom teacher are far from what we think of as romantic or satisfying, Vizel said the entire translation offers some sort of corrective.

The groom teacher, she said, has the challenge of “making sure that a couple gets off on the right start. You know, they can figure out sex, they can figure out what's allowed later. It will be fine as long as they don't have this terrible wedding night where they're traumatized by not knowing if they did it right.”

She said many husbands will continue to consult with the groom teacher after the first night, and the brides with their teacher, a kallah teacher. Vizel translated the instructions because, judging by the questions her tour participants ask, people are fascinated by the sex lives of Hasids. I read it intently, because, well, so am I. It's a culture at once so close and so foreign, us but not us. It's also a culture, judging by this transcript, that popular culture tends to caricature. The groom's teacher transcript shows another side, bound, maybe warped, by an antique and male-centric set of rules, but still far more nuanced than I was led to expect.

“It's an effort to try to get people to really give each other a real chance. That was my experience. It's awkward and painful and beautiful,” Vizel said. “And it's much more complicated.”

Michael Twitty's 'Koshersoul' blends history, culture and culinary identity

By TaRessa Stovall

When Michael W. Twitty talks and writes about food, he goes beyond delectable gastronomic creations that tantalize the taste buds. The master chef and renowned culinary historian aims to satiate people's souls by turning his unique blend of culture, tradition, identity and social justice into an irresistible feast that celebrates humanity. His latest book, "Koshersoul: The Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew," explores the foods and traditions of the two diasporas that encompass his identity.

"I wanted 'Koshersoul' to be a love letter to being Black and Jewish in the state that we're in this country in this moment," he said. "This book is like challah: a weaving of food memoir, recipes, personal essays, human vulnerability and about the long story of the intersection of Black and Jewish history and culture. This is not an academic journey, and it's purposely not a cookbook. It's an eclectic recipe file of diverse and complex peoplehood."

Black, Jewish, gay and Southern

Twitty has penned a powerful narrative about the many dynamics of inhabiting his intersections — Black, Jewish and gay with Southern heritage — while always affirming the quest for a more just society.

"My greatest hope comes from the ingredients that Blacks and Jews bring to the table," he said. "Onions and satire. Garlic and irony. For people who have struggled so much and had so much pain, we know how to laugh. We know how to celebrate. We know how to eat. We know how to be hospitable, and we also understand the power of analysis and deep thought and critical approaches. That is so important, and all of that gets woven into what we do. It keeps me motivated to know that these things are part of the recipe."

In the preface, Twitty describes “Koshersoul” as “the second in a three-book trilogy about the intersections between food and identity.” His first book, “The Cooking Gene,” explored race by tracing Twitty’s Black and white ancestry through Southern cuisine from Africa to America, from slavery to freedom. It was named the 2018 James Beard Foundation Book of the year.

This new book “is a chicken soup for the soul,” he said. “I wanted to honor our people and say, ‘Since 1619, here we are. We’re still here, we’re still alive, we still have hope, we still have something to cling to.’ We’re survivors of the West’s original sins. That’s what I wanted to bring to the fore and with other Jews the fact that we’re still dealing with antisemitism.”

Preserving historic foodways

Twitty is one of the few recognized international experts of his craft, the reconstruction of early Southern cuisine as prepared by enslaved African American cooks. He was named one of the greatest food bloggers of all time by FirstWeFeast.com for Afroculinaria, the first blog devoted to preserving historic African American foods and foodways, and one of the “Fifty People Who Are Changing the South” by Southern Living.

A resident of suburban Washington, D.C., Twitty was one of 20 people selected globally as a 2016 TED Fellow for his talk, “Gastronomy and the Social Justice Reality of Food.” His television appearances include “Bizarre Foods America” with Andrew Zimmern, “Many Rivers to Cross” with Henry Louis Gates Jr., “High on the Hog” with Stephen Satterfield, and Michelle Obama’s “Waffles + Mochi.” He is a National Geographic Explorer, and the first Revolutionary in Residence at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

The goal of “Koshersoul,” he writes, is “to remove all the labels, not create another one. I want people to understand it’s not all about cheffing in the kitchen or professional spaces. We need more writings that aren’t just recipes from different people, different cultures, because people are so used to seeing one lens.”

Showcasing Jews of color

“Koshersoul” features the voices of prominent Jews of color including Tema Smith, the director of Jewish Outreach and Partnerships at the Anti-Defamation League; Yavilah McCoy, activist, educator, and founder of Ayecha, a nonprofit providing educational resources for Jewish diversity and advocate for Jews of color; Tony Westbrook, assistant director of the Hillel at Washington University in St. Louis; Shais Rishon, an Orthodox rabbi; and Chava Shervington, a Black Jewish culinarian.

“Much like the people within these pages who have shared something of their lives, ‘Koshersoul’ is not to be taken at face value,” Twitty said. “It’s not just the food traditions of Jews of color that matter – it’s the people and their lives and the legacy they want to leave in two peoplehoods where tradition and the power of heritage loom large, even when the choice is to cast off or change directions.”

‘Living in a Venn diagram’

He writes movingly of his own journey through Judaism, being “Kippa’ed while Black,” and teaching Hebrew school while consistently promoting an expanded perspective of intersectional identities. “The bottom line is people think they can succinctly define Jewish or Black and they know inherently they are bigger than color or religion. So many factors go into those labels. Let’s acknowledge the fact that caste, class, phenotype, ethnotype, genotype, personal choice, geography and region all go into defining these elements of one’s Blackness and one’s Jewishness. It’s living in a constant Venn diagram, in a constant place of many worlds. It’s not that complicated because a lot of people live that way, but it can be really exhausting to deal with other folks’ interpretation of that.”

Twitty is frank about the struggles that come with living his multidimensional life. “I’m using all of my senses and my experience to process traumas and to be a fuller, better human. But I’ve noticed that some people do have a bias against people like me in particular,” he said. “Perhaps they have deep trouble conceiving of someone like me being a full dimensional individual, or that I might have anything to say to them of value about spirituality and food as part of one’s holistic well-being. Sometimes people just want me to tell them little recipe secrets, like ‘Show me how to cook and shut up.’ It’s no different than telling Black athletes to ‘Shut up and play — make me laugh or dance. I didn’t ask you for all that.’

“Well, I’m sorry,” Twitty continued. “I didn’t come in to be that. Food is not apolitical. Food is not acultural. Food is not divorced from our histories.”

Food as a global passport

In “Koshersoul,” he offers food as a passport to better appreciating the complexities of Jewish identity on a global scale. He includes several recipes in what he calls “a community cookbook,” with delicacies such as “Koshersoul” collards, Caribbean compote, yam kugel, black-eyed pea hummus, berbere brisket, kosher-Cajun rice dressing, Senegalese-inspired chicken soup, and “Koshersoul” mac and cheese kugel.

Forward

His work is fueled by a vision of nourishing love and connection. “On multiple levels you have to feed people: physical, mental, spiritual, and social. Feeding is what heals us and what helps bond us as families.”

Some sections of the book are anecdotal, he explains, while others “are more prayer-like. It’s all modeled around the table. I wanted to have a literary structure that mirrored how we converse and relate to each other around a kitchen or dining room table. That setting helps break the ice so it’s easier to have these strong conversations. That’s what I want the book to do.”

The bloody truce between Israel and Hamas

By Muhammad Shehada

“The safest place to hide from Israeli airstrikes is a Hamas military site,” Gazans joked during the most recent round of violence. It was so tragically accurate.

Israel went to incredible lengths to ensure its bombing of Gaza didn’t hurt a single Hamas leader, member or facility while it went on a rampage against the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which in turn retaliated with barrages of projectiles fired into Israel.

Not compelling Hamas into joining the escalation, and thereby turning it into an unwanted war, was the Israeli government’s goal. This way, Prime Minister Yair Lapid and Defense Minister Benny Gantz got to display a tough crackdown on terrorism in a limited and contained escalation, expediently scoring a few points for the upcoming elections without provoking any significant consequences.

But even though its leaders exercised maximum restraint, Hamas, for its part, wasn’t unengaged at all. Hamas did intervene heavily — at Israel’s request — to ensure Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s actions remained within limits that would spare Gaza another ruinous war.

For instance, the PIJ didn’t even use a single one of its medium-range “Buraq-120” projectiles, which carry a warhead with over 600 pounds of TNT, or its “Improved Qassam” projectile with a 900-pound TNT warhead, and it didn’t deploy any of its improvised drones or its Cornet anti-tank missiles.

Hamas also worked around the clock with Egyptian and Qatari mediators to push for the cease-fire that ended this round of fighting.

This was indeed an interesting turn of events for both Gazan and Israeli spectators alike. But it begs the question: Since Israel demonstrated a remarkable ability to perfectly distinguish between PIJ and Hamas in Gaza, bombing 170 targets without hurting a single Hamas personnel, then why couldn’t it show the same mindfulness and regard for human life toward Gazan civilians, especially women and children?

Between 35 (Israeli estimates) and 44 (Palestinian estimates) Gazans were killed during the latest hostilities, including 15 children. Israel claims that at least eight of these fatalities were caused by errant PIJ rockets.

In the few hours preceding the cease-fire on Sunday, a single blast at al-Falluja cemetery took the lives of five children between the ages of 5 and 14 while they were sitting next to their grandfather's grave.

Four days before the escalation, and during the hostilities, Israel hermetically sealed Gaza's borders to pressure the PIJ. This meant cutting off workers from their jobs, patients from urgent care, and fuel supplies to Gaza's sole power plant, which was eventually shut down on Saturday.

With no electricity to turn on a fan or air conditioner in 90-degree heat and 75% humidity, Khalil Hamada, 19, was one of five youngsters in Jabalia who went out onto the street late Saturday to escape the unbearable indoor heat. His parents had tried for 15 years before they were able to conceive their only child through IVF. But in a matter of seconds, his life, and the lives of the four other children, were stolen in another blast (some Palestinians claimed it was an airstrike while Israel claims it was an errant PIJ rocket).

The same night, a half-dozen wounded children were rushed into an ambulance after they were snatched from under the rubble of a building that Israel bombed in the densely populated Rafah refugee camp. One was crying "my father," the other "my brother," referring to loved ones that were missing at the time. After eight hours of searching under the rubble, eight people were found dead, including a senior PIJ commander, Khaled Mansour.

The Lapid government rejoiced that it took out Mansour. This was the victory it needed to finally bring the escalation to an end. But targeted killings in Gaza always lead to the same results: a more radical and more popular PIJ with a base more unified around revenge and retaliation, and greater legitimacy for armed groups and armed resistance in general.

Once the cease-fire came into force on Sunday evening, the most predictable and tired speeches of victory on both sides quickly followed. Lapid and Gantz boasted, "We restored deterrence," while the PIJ Secretary General Ziyad Nakhalah argued that his movement made a "great achievement," "defended" the Palestinians, and taught Israel a hard lesson.

How many children should be killed, maimed or orphaned, how many homes should be destroyed, and how much hatred and bitterness should be created and fueled until those leaders realize the emptiness of their victory speeches?

The solution to the conflict can only be diplomatic, a case demonstrated most clearly in Israel's understandings with Hamas by which Hamas provides calm and Israel eases the blockade.

Military actions might showcase some machismo and grandstanding, but it only makes the next round of fighting a mere matter of time, dooming us to a cycle of periodic and never-ending violence, destruction and pain.

Thankfully, this escalation ended before turning into an all-out war. But as Israelis emerged from shelters to resume normal life, Gazans went back into their every day abyss of non-life: darkness, misery, poverty and confinement. An abundance of rubble stands in every corner — from this escalation, the previous one in 2021, and even the 2014 one.

Working to heal the beleaguered city's wounds instead of periodically rubbing salt in them anew is the only way Israel can guarantee sustainable calm in the south.

He lobbied for Nazis — why did a Jewish museum honor him?

By Arno Rosenfeld

Michael Millenson was puzzled after stumbling on an exhibit about Gen. Julius Klein during a spontaneous visit to the National Museum of American Jewish Military History in Washington, D.C., this spring. The modest museum has devoted a room to Klein as one of its three permanent exhibits: “Major General Julius Klein: His Life and Work.”

The small, wood-paneled room is constructed almost like a shrine. It features a bust of Klein and his personal battle flag. Placards along the walls provide a fawning description of his colorful career.

“Julius Klein was a remarkable individual who achieved great heights as a soldier and a statesman,” the exhibit’s introduction reads.

Millenson, a Chicago healthcare consultant, knew perhaps more than most visitors about Klein. His father, Roy, briefly worked for Klein’s public relations firm in the 1950s and left with a sour taste in his mouth over his boss’s work to help German companies launder their extensive ties to the Nazi regime.

After distinguishing himself as an officer during World War II, Klein spent the 1950s and 1960s as one of the top American lobbyists for the West German government. This work included defending a former top Nazi official, and severely damaged Klein’s reputation at the time, forcing his resignation from the Jewish War Veterans of the United States — the very organization that operates the museum. But the exhibit glosses over this history in a few lines that don’t mention Nazism and attribute the controversy to a simple case of bad publicity — perhaps because the exhibit was essentially a gift of Klein’s estate.

Pamela Elbe, director of collections at the museum, said Klein left his personal archives and military memorabilia to the museum along with funding to display it following his death in 1984. The exhibit opened in 1991.

“Information on his work with West Germany is noticeably minimal,” Elbe said in an email interview. “The exhibition is well overdue for an update.”

But Elbe said that the museum has limited resources – two employees and an annual budget of less than \$500,000, compared to more than \$100 million at Washington’s Holocaust museum, for example – and was prioritizing other exhibits.

“As Klein is generally not a well-known figure,” she noted, “we have received very little feedback from visitors.”

Millenson lodged his complaint with the museum and also contacted the Forward. “It’s kind of, ‘Aren’t we proud of this Jewish guy?’” he said. “Other than the whole fact he’s helping people try to rehabilitate the reputation of proto-Nazis.”

A contested biography

The museum, in Washington’s DuPont Circle neighborhood, is free to visit, and consists of two floors in a building that also houses the headquarters of the Jewish War Veterans. Its top floor features a modern exhibit on the various U.S. conflicts that Jewish soldiers have fought in. The basement level is more dated and includes the Klein exhibit, a hall honoring Jewish recipients of the Medal of Honor, and a handful of other displays and research terminals.

The details of Klein’s biography are murky. The exhibit says he was born in Chicago in 1901 before relocating with his family to Germany, where he may – or may not – have worked as a journalist and even as an American spy during World War I. Klein returned to the Midwest following that war, and joined the Illinois National Guard. He worked for a series of newspapers and dabbled in politics before relocating to Hollywood in the 1930s.

He enlisted in the Army in 1941, the exhibit says, and used his media expertise to craft a manual on psychological warfare. Klein climbed the ranks and by 1955 he had been promoted to major, according to the exhibit, although a Washington Post article said the governor of Illinois awarded him the National Guard rank as a political favor.

During the 1950s, Klein somehow became connected to leaders of both the Israeli and West German governments and helped establish diplomatic relations between the two

countries. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, wrote kind letters to Klein, and the exhibit includes a photo Ben-Gurion signed to him "in deep friendship."

Klein also became close with several members of Congress, including Sen. Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut. He used these relationships to lobby on behalf of a series of West German interests, according to both news coverage at the time and an extensive description of Klein's activities in a 2007 book chapter by Jonathan Wiesen, a scholar of modern German history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Some of those interests had clear, direct connections to Nazism. Some of his clients had been Nazis themselves. Klein's contracts with them proved lucrative.

Work for Nazi figures

The Society for German-American Cooperation, a group of West German politicians and businessmen, paid Klein \$150,000 per year — \$1.6 million in today's dollars — beginning in the 1950s to promote the interests of companies like IG Farben, which produced the cyanide gas used to murder Jews during the Holocaust. The chemicals conglomerate also operated a rubber factory at Monowitz, a Nazi slave labor camp opened near Auschwitz at the company's behest.

While the depth of German industry's complicity in Nazi crimes did not gain widespread attention until the 1980s, Klein's work was deeply controversial even at the time. He defended German companies during mediation with the Claims Conference, which was seeking restitution for victims of the Holocaust, and he sought to polish the image of Hans Globke, a West German official who had helped implement antisemitic policies at the Office for Jewish Affairs during the Nazi regime.

Globke became Klein's "closest confidant" in Germany, according to Wiesen's book chapter, and Klein convinced Dodd to deliver a 1960 speech on the Senate floor defending Globke and other former Nazi officials serving in key roles in the West German government.

"It's puzzling that he really went to bat for these former Nazis," Wiesen said in a recent interview. He said that he, like Millenson, was struck that the most controversial aspects of his career have received such little attention in the museum exhibit when he visited it as part of his research.

Broadly, he said, Klein is not well known: "He's gotten away with some bit of anonymity."

Backlash

He did not get away with it at the time. Klein's work for the Germans drew the ire of both Jewish groups and government officials in the 1950s. He was forced to resign as a member of the Jewish War Veterans organization, which he had served as president in 1947, after Drew Pearson used his nationally syndicated Washington Merry-Go-Round column to take Klein to task.

Pearson claimed that "a free-spending German lobby" had enlisted Klein to "work with Hitler's former financier," the banker Hermann Abs, and to convince the White House to pay Germany \$125 million as compensation for property seized during the war.

"Klein is an influential gentleman with friends in high places," Pearson wrote in 1958. "He sold Secretary John Foster Dulles on the phrase 'sanctity of private property' which President Eisenhower later used in describing the new policy for the payment of German property."

The exhibit includes a yellowed copy of Pearson's column, but the caption refers to it as "controversial" and the accompanying placard is defensive of Klein. It says Klein supported returning German property in order to "energize West Germany's allegiance in the fight against communism."

"Julius Klein continued to believe that by helping Germany he was helping the United States even more," the exhibit text states. "Klein was not swayed from what he believed was right."

Interrogating the 'Image Builder'

Klein was eventually hauled before a Senate ethics committee over his relationship with Dodd, and a Washington Post exposé in 1966 questioned elements of Klein's purported biography.

"The Image Builder Was Always His Own Best Client," the Post headline declared.

The article asserted that Klein's claim to be a "war correspondent" during World War I amounted to writing a single article for his German high school newspaper, although Klein had said he was writing for Chicago newspapers. The museum exhibit includes a German press card apparently granted to Klein when he was 13 years old.

The exhibit also describes Klein having had "a very successful career as a journalist," saying he served as editor of a chain of Hearst-owned German newspapers and wrote investigative pieces that "contributed greatly" to the downfall of Chicago gangster Al Capone.

But the 1966 Post article said Klein actually worked as a “promoter,” overseeing stunts to boost newspaper sales. It cited sources who disputed Klein’s claim, repeated in the museum, that hostile political leaders had disbanded his National Guard unit to sanction him for supporting Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who had recently been fired.

“Klein insisted that he was being punished for expressing his loyalty towards MacArthur,” the exhibit states next to a photo of Klein wearing a helmet and standing with a ragtag group of National Guard soldiers under a banner praising MacArthur.

In the Post story, Illinois National Guard Gen. Harry Bolen called Klein’s version a “damned lie” and said his air unit “couldn’t shoot at a kid’s box kite.”

“We need (that unit) like I need a damned buggy whip on my jeep,” Bolen said. “That kind of man is dangerous and we can’t have him in the Illinois National Guard and I threw him out.”

Wiesen said that despite the controversy over Klein’s work while he was alive, he remains a relatively unknown figure even among scholars. He said that it might be possible to understand Klein’s work for former Nazis as part of his strident anti-communism; by cozying up to West Germany, Klein believed the United States could keep Soviet influence at bay.

Klein did not have any children, according to his New York Times obituary, and his siblings, William and Gisella, both died in the 1980s, according to genealogical websites. But one of the few places where Klein’s legacy has been preserved – the basement of a Jewish museum in Washington – does little to unpack his complicated life.

“I remember thinking when I went to the museum that this is an odd little space for this strange kind of figure: Republican-Jewish-Illinoisian-Spy-Lobbyist-for-Germany,” Wiesen recalled. “I just felt like there was something I’m not getting.”

How Tu B'Av, the ancient Jewish holiday of love, was revived

By Naomi Seidman

Sometimes, for whatever reason, the best traditions get left behind.

That seems to have been the case with the minor holiday of the Fifteenth of Av, Tu B'av, the midsummer festival described in the Mishna (Ta'anit 4:8) in which “the daughters of Jerusalem go out dressed in white and dance in the vineyards,” hoping to find a mate. For over a thousand years, this ritual was forgotten by the Jews as they wandered and settled in countries around the globe.

But for us modern Jews, a Jewish holiday of love involving an outdoor rave is too tempting to ignore, so it's no wonder that the holiday was revived in the 20th century. Today even the Orthodox community celebrates the one-day holiday of love, which begins this year on Thursday evening, August 11. In one annual initiative, called “Tu B'Av Together: A Global Day of Shidduchim” (shidduchim means matchmaking), Jews around the world — led by rabbis — gather to pray for all Jewish singles to speedily find their match. For a small donation, any single man or woman can add his or her name to the list of unmarried people hoping to find their bashertn, their “destined one”.

The holiday was first observed, according to reports, in the kibbutzim of Mandate Palestine, where vineyards were a thing again: 1925 saw the first such celebration, among a group of kibbutzim in the Jezreel Valley. In today's Israel, it's known as “the Jewish Valentine's Day.”

This is more or less how the story of the modern revival of Tu B'av is told today. There's just one problem: The story's missing an important piece. Although Tu B'av was revived among secular Zionists in Palestine in 1925, it was also brought back among Orthodox Jews in interwar Poland in 1926. But unlike today's “Global Day of Shidduchim,” this

revival did not involve a parade of men in beards, as is seen in so many other ultra-Orthodox events.

In fact, in a kind of inversion of the contemporary male-only Tu B'av celebrations on YouTube, it included no men at all. The Eastern European revival of Tu B'av began in February 1926, when the political organization of Orthodox Jewry, Agudath Israel, announced the founding of a youth movement for girls, Bnos Agudath Israel (commonly called Bnos). Shortly afterward, the Central Bnos Office in Lodz, Poland, circulated a pamphlet to its members describing Tu B'av as a newly revived "festival of Jewish daughters," and providing instructions on how it might be observed.

By that summer, a periodical published by Bais Yaakov – the network of schools and youth movements for Orthodox girls – reported on Tu B'Av celebrations in 10 locations throughout Poland, including rented halls decorated with flowers and greenery, banquets, speeches by female speakers, singing and dancing.

In her published writings, Sarah Schenirer, who founded Bais Yaakov and was herself divorced at this time, de-emphasized the romantic elements of the holiday. She focused rather on its camaraderie and egalitarianism. This was a holiday in which girls wore borrowed dresses to avoid "the foolish pride that the rich feel toward the poor, and which draws the poor to imitate the desires and pleasures of the rich."

While the first Tu B'Av at Bnos seems to have been observed decorously indoors, Sarah Schenirer later instituted celebrations of the holiday in a more natural, outdoor setting. In a newspaper report for the Bais Yaakov Journal, one student, Hodo Movshowitz, described how Tu B'av was observed in the resort town of Skawa, where Bais Yaakov held a summer program in 1932: through a nighttime hike up a path into the forest. "One hundred and fifteen of us go step by step, hand in hand, along the path, Mrs. Schenirer first among us, our hearts beating with extraordinary joy," Movshowitz wrote.

According to Movshowitz's report, a campfire was lit and the girls watched the flames in deep silence, until someone — a student — spoke of "the holiday that belongs to us, to young Jewish women," her words echoed back by the trees. After another long silence, Schenirer, her face lit up in the firelight, began to speak: "And the fire upon the altar shall be kept burning thereby, it shall not go out." She described the "secret place, the small and hidden flickering flame within each of us," and that "many waters cannot extinguish love," as the fire leapt and dry twigs flamed out in the grass.

After Schenirer finished speaking, the girls were so overcome with the urge to sing that, as Movshowitz wrote: "no power in the world could stop us." They sang, the fire in their eyes growing more radiant. They added wood to the fire and the flames leapt up ever

higher. As the night progressed and the flames glowed, the girls felt moved to get on their feet, and began to dance, hand in hand, with Schenirer among them, whirling until everything disappeared but the dance.

“The dancing lasts for a long, long time,” she wrote. “We dance as we accompany Mrs. Schenirer home, and only then do we ourselves go to sleep.”

Tu B’Av was indeed revived, but not only in the Zionist kibbutzim, and not only as a romantic ritual. Some leaders of Bnos saw the holiday as part of a larger effort to create a generation of observant wives and mothers who would keep their children on the Orthodox path.

But for Sarah Schenirer, the religious experience she was shaping had its own, less instrumental value: It wasn’t about who these girls would become, but who they already were, at that very moment around the campfire. What awakened those long-dormant sparks was the religious genius of a divorced woman, along with the girls who danced her home from the woods.

How a blind Jewish boy from Baghdad became a great musician

By Jonah Nelson and Esther Warkov

One night in Baghdad in 1932, a Jewish toddler looked up at the stars and saw nothing but darkness. He was totally blind.

The odds were that this boy would live a life of poverty and begging.

Instead, he became a renowned musician known as “King of the Qanun.” This is his story, exemplifying the enduring contributions of Iraqi Jewish musicians.

The House of Consoling the Blind

Ibrahim Shahrabani was born in 1930 to a family in Baghdad’s ancient Jewish community. At 5 months old, he contracted an eye infection that blurred his vision. As a toddler, he would look up and see a sky full of clouds when there were none. By age 2, his vision was gone.

He was sent to a school for blind children called Dar Mu’asat Al-’Amiyaan — “The House of Consoling the Blind.” It was founded in 1929 by Eleazer Silas Kadoorie, a wealthy Jewish businessman. Most students were Jewish, but children of all religions attended.

To spare the students from a life of begging, they learned skills like basket-weaving and carpentry. Shahrabani was assigned the vocation of clockmaker, but he only wanted to play music. At the time, the school was the only institution in Baghdad where music was formally taught. Working as a musician was considered a lowly profession, so it was something Jews and other minorities were allowed to do, as ethnomusicologist Esther Warkov describes in her dissertation on Iraqi Jewish musicians.

‘A head full of music’

Shahrabani began to learn qanun, a plucked zither that was popular throughout the Middle East. He eventually memorized thousands of pieces and could perform nearly any genre: traditional suites (called “The Iraqi Maqam”), classical Middle Eastern compositions and Western classical music.

He “has a head full of music,” esteemed Iraqi Maqam singer Salim Shibbeth told Warkov in 1981. “Best in the Middle East.”

Jewish instrumentalists were dominant in Baghdad’s music scene. Every Wednesday, Iraqi state radio’s on-air orchestra would broadcast to eager audiences. One Wednesday, there was silence, and the prime minister demanded to know why. It was a major Jewish holiday, he was told, so none of the musicians showed up.

For the most part, Jews lived peacefully in Baghdad for centuries. Even after a wave of anti-Jewish looting in 1941 during Shavuot in which 180 Jews were killed, Jewish musicians continued to live and work in the city. As a teenager in the 1940s, Shahrabani joined fellow blind musicians in a traveling orchestra called Ikhwaan Al-Fan, or Brothers of Art, founded by Jewish violinist Daoud Akram. Shahrabani remembered those years as “heaven.”

Tensions rising

By 1948, the situation in Palestine was boiling over into Baghdad. After Israel declared its independence, Iraq joined an invasion of British Palestine by Arab states. In the Iraqi city of Basra, Shafiq Ades, a prominent Jewish businessman, was accused of aiding Israeli war efforts and was publicly hanged after a show trial.

Tensions spilled over into an orchestra run by Iraqi state radio. Palestinian conductor Ruhi Al-Hamash and Jewish qanunist Abraham Daud Ha-Cohen got into a fight, and Ha-Cohen was fired. Jewish orchestra manager and virtuoso Yusuf Za’arur recommended that 18-year-old Shahrabani replace Ha-Cohen. Popular singers such as Nazem Al-Ghazali then began to hire Shahrabani for their orchestras. He and other Iraqi Jewish musicians prospered despite the tumultuous times and their low social status. “In Baghdad, the musicians lived like kings,” Shahrabani said.

But conditions for Jews were deteriorating. After mass civil service firings of Jews in 1950, Shahrabani and fellow musicians lost their radio orchestra jobs, according to Za’arur’s great-grandson, David Regev Zaarur.

Around this time, Shahrabani was invited to join a state-run orchestra in Jerusalem. The invitation came from Ezra Aharon, an Iraqi Jew who’d moved to Palestine in the 1930s and became a central figure in the creation of new musical genres and ensembles. As

the situation in Baghdad worsened, Shahrabani reluctantly agreed to emigrate. He renounced his Iraqi citizenship as required by law, and left Iraq alongside tens of thousands of Baghdadi Jews. He never returned.

A new identity

Shahrabani began using a different last name in Iraq: Salman. Once he immigrated to Israel, he changed his first name, Ibrahim, to the Hebrew name Avraham. He soon became a salaried member of the Israel Broadcasting House's Kol Yisrael orchestra, playing under Aharon's direction alongside classmates from the school for the blind. During the 1950s, the orchestra performed 30 to 45 minutes of live music daily, breaking up Arabic-language news or political programming. Salman played any style required: Jewish liturgical songs, Syrian folk songs, songs based on Andalusian Arabic poetry, modern Egyptian hits and the traditional Iraqi Maqam.

Salman also joined the large Iraqi community in the Ramat Gan suburb of Tel Aviv, performing at weddings, b'nai mitzvah and haflat (celebratory parties).

One day, a young Jewish singer named Nahid entered 33 Jaffa St. in Jerusalem to audition for the radio station's chorus. Salman was among those responsible for the audition. Eventually, the two fell in love, they later told Sara Manasseh, a researcher of Baghdad's Jewish traditions. Salman wrote songs for Nahid, and they married and started a family.

Salman increasingly became the face of Kol Yisrael thanks to his solos and prominent position in front of the orchestra during its weekly TV broadcasts in the 1970s. So central was his presence that the public frequently mistook him for the orchestra's conductor, Zuzu Musa, who played in the violin section.

Musicians as state agents

Salman and the orchestra were popular among Israeli Jews from Arab countries. But the station's main audience was external and its central purpose was propaganda, much like the Voice of America.

A self-described member of Kol Yisrael's "propaganda team" told Warkov that the station decided to broadcast Iraqi music and "propaganda" in the Iraqi dialect to a contingent of Iraqi soldiers based in Jordan during the 1967 War. The broadcasts were synchronized to the soldiers' meal breaks. After the war, the station continued to focus externally rather than on Israel's Arabic-speaking listeners. Singer Umm Kulthum's music, for example, was broadcast to appeal to Egyptian listeners.

When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem in November 1979 following the Camp David Accords, Salman and the orchestra performed at a ceremony marking the historic event.

And in 1980, the orchestra traveled to the border town of Kiryat Shmona to perform for the South Lebanon Army, a client militia of Israel. Hundreds of militiamen attended the concert alongside members of the Israeli military establishment. The event was punctuated by Israeli promises of solidarity with SLA forces, Warkov observed.

Palestinians, however, tended to avoid the station and its music so as not to appear to be cooperating with the Israeli state. The orchestra did include a few Palestinians, but they were “totally isolated from the Arab community and its activities,” Palestinian virtuoso Simon Shaheen told Warkov.

An hour in Ramat Gan

In 1980, at Shaheen’s suggestion, Salman agreed to a rare home session in which they played an infrequently performed classical repertoire with complex improvisations. Each one-upped the other with creativity, playing together as Arab and Jewish musicians rarely did.

Warkov had quietly recorded the session. “How did you enjoy it?” Salman asked. “Tarbani,” she responded, meaning that she experienced tarab, “the ecstasy of listening.” Salman smiled, and with Shaheen still humming, the two left with a reel-to-reel recording of the session preserved for posterity.

His one and only album

Throughout the 1980s, Salman was a regular on the religious music scene, performing at Jewish festivals and private events.

Although he had to supplement his modest orchestra salary to provide for his family, he was still better off than many other musicians. The Kuwaiti Brothers, for example, scraped together a living from a small kitchenware shop in Tel Aviv, while oud player Meir from Salman’s Brothers of Art days ended up working as a telephone operator.

Eventually, Salman grew frustrated by inattentive audiences and an Israeli public that he felt didn’t understand music as Iraqis did. In 1988, he left the orchestra, and in the mid-1990s, he joined the fusion group Bustan Avraham. One day, during a concert with Turkish musician Omar Faruk Tekbilek, Salman began to play brilliantly in an ornate Turkish style. Tekbilek started weeping, and Bustan member Avshalom Farjun knew he had to suggest that Salman record an album. Salman liked the idea.

With music director and co-producer Taiser Elias' help, Farjun trawled the orchestra's archives and pulled recordings. Salman supplemented those with newer pieces, including an arrangement of Granados' "Spanish Dance No. 5." The effort culminated with the 1997 release of "Saltana," which brought Salman to an international audience.

The music stops

After Salman had a stroke in 2005, it was difficult for him to speak, but he continued to teach and play religious concerts while gaining new fans. Visitors would hear stories about Baghdad and listen to the enormous tape collection in which Salman precisely memorized the location of each tape.

But his health kept declining. He died of a heart attack in 2014, survived by Nahid and three adult children.

Before his death, Salman lamented that while "people would really cry" when he played qanun in Iraq, modern audiences didn't appreciate his art. Yet his successful late-in-life album won him new international fans in places as far away as Saudi Arabia, the Salmans gleefully told artist Regine Basha.

Today, Salman's music survives, both as a testament to the Baghdadi Jewish community, and to the unlikely story of the blind toddler who became the "King of the Qanun."



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