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Abstract

The musical film, "The Heart that Sings" (2011), written and directed by Robin Saex Garbose, is part of a genre of films created by and for Orthodox Jewish women. *Heart* provides a case study that illustrates the depth and breadth of Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson's (1902-1994) influence on Jews and Jewish life well beyond his own community members. Schneerson's outreach work via his *shlichim*, or emissaries, to unobservant Jews is well-recognized. The extent and nuance of his influence on a broad cross-section of Jews, however, has yet to be fully traced. *Heart* tells its viewers that Jewish women from all backgrounds can create an empowered, unified community, *if* religiously observant, Orthodox practices are in place, perpetuating Schneerson's message with a feminist bent and musical twist.

Keywords

Jewish women, musical, film, Orthodoxy, Lubavitch, Chabad

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Introduction

The musical film *The Heart that Sings* (2011), written and directed by Robin Saex Garbose, is part of a genre of films created by and for Orthodox Jewish American women (referred to herein as the “by and for women” genre). The film’s DVD case appears relatively unremarkable until one looks more closely and reads the printed message at the bottom: “Intended for women and girls only.” The back of the DVD specifies that the “content is suitable for girls ages 8 and up” and further instructs viewers “Please do not play on Shabbos or Yom Tov.” These messages are reiterated on the DVD itself. In the event that these requests might somehow be overlooked, the film opens with a brief cartoon: Members of an all-female audience are talking with one another while awaiting the start of a movie. When a bearded, yarmulke-wearing man walks in to the theater, the women point to the message “for women and girls only” that appears on the screen before the movie. He replies, “Oops, sorry.” When he has been successfully shooed away, the discussions recommence among the women on screen.

Garbose’s *The Heart that Sings* provides an example that illustrates the depth and breadth of Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s (1902-1994) influence on Jews and Jewish life well beyond his own community members. Schneerson’s outreach work via his *shlichim*, or emissaries, to unobservant Jews is well-recognized.¹ The extent and nuance of his influence on a broad cross-section of Jews, however, has yet to be fully traced. Schneerson and his teachings

significantly influenced Garbose to become not only a *baal teshuva*, or a Jew who has become religiously observant later in life, but also a filmmaker who draws on her secular filmmaking experiences to make films with a religious feminist message. Garbose's films are suitable for viewing by observant Jewish women and are intended to appeal to, and indeed, hold insight for those women who are not. As Garbose told *The Jerusalem Post*, she hopes "to see women with double hair-coverings [a modesty practice indicating rigorous traditional religious observance] sitting next to girls in jeans" while watching *Heart*.²

Undergirding *Heart's* storyline is an emphasis on the unifying power of faith in God, prayer, and Orthodox Jewishness for Jewish girls from all backgrounds. The setting, a girls-only, Jewish summer camp, is familiar to many Jews who have attended similar camps, while the film's timeframe, 1950, allows Garbose to deal with the emotionally charged aftermath of the Holocaust and its young survivors. In what follows here, I first clarify the various branches of Jewish Orthodoxy and contextualize the emergence of the "by and for" film genre. I then turn to a consideration of *Heart's* production, summer camp setting, key protagonist, and use of song. Ultimately, *Heart* tells its viewers that Jewish women from all backgrounds can create an empowered, unified community, *if* religiously observant, Orthodox practices are in place, perpetuating Schneerson's message with a feminist bent and musical twist.

Orthodox Jews

Non-Orthodox Jews view the observance of rabbinic law as optional and/or in need of significant adaptation to the modern world. These Jews may identify as Reform (approximately 35 percent of Jewish American adults), Conservative (18 percent), no denomination (30 percent) and other (six percent%, including groups such as Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal).³ In Israel, non-Orthodox Jews may identify as Masorti (traditional) or Hiloni (secular).

Orthodox Jews (often referred to as “religious Jews”) are committed to the observance of rabbinic law. In the United States, Orthodox Jews are approximately 10 percent of the total American Jewish population (5.3 million adults), including six percent who identity as Haredi, or, ultra-Orthodox, and three percent who are Modern Orthodox.⁴ Haredi Jews include Hasidic and non-Hasidic (Yeshivish/Lithuanian traditions) groups, both of which are further subdivided into a variety of sects. Modern Orthodox Jews tend to be more culturally integrated into the larger society and have more secular education than the ultra-Orthodox, who tend to marry younger, have larger families, and educate their children exclusively in Jewish schools.⁵ In Israel, Orthodox Jews number approximately one in five Jewish adults; they are Haredi (including Hasidic and non-Hasidic groups) and Dati, a group that is analogous to Modern Orthodox Jews in the US. In both the U.S. and Israel, “Haredim tend to view their strict adherence to the Torah’s commandments as largely incompatible with secular society.”⁶

Lubavitch Jews are a subgroup of Hasidic Jews founded by Israel Ben Eliezer, referred to as the “Baal Shem Tov” (1698-1760), who established Hasidic Judaism in 18th century Eastern Europe. Emphasizing “joyous communication with God through song, meditation, harmony with nature, and attachment to the charismatic ‘rebbe’ and his dynastic tradition,” Hasidic Judaism quickly grew in adherents.⁷ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, one of the few Hasidic Jews who escaped the Holocaust, arrived in 1941 in Brooklyn, New York. In 1951, Schneerson succeeded his father-in-law, becoming the Rebbe for Chabad, or, Lubavitch Jews.⁸

Reb Schneerson’s main goal was “the spread (‘u-fartzta’) of the wellsprings (‘ma’ayanot’) of the Torah to every Jew regardless of his or her personal level of observance,” a goal that stood in sharp contrast to the isolationist tendencies of other Hasidic sects.⁹ Schneerson spearheaded a variety of outreach efforts, including distributing free Shabbat candles and menorahs, building mikvehs (traditional ritual baths), establishing Jewish schools, and dispersing his *shlichim*, young, married Lubavitch couples to locations all over the world to work as activists and resources for local Jews. Under Schneerson’s leadership, Lubavitch embraced “radio, television, video, and the Internet, always doing so on its own terms, and thereby further distinguishing itself from other Hasidic communities” to spread its message of Jewish observance and traditional teachings.¹⁰ Notably, Schneerson encouraged the wives of his emissaries to play key outreach roles by

combining their domestic roles with activism.¹¹ Schneerson's emphasis on expansive outreach to non-observant Jews became a hallmark of the Lubavitch branch of Hasidic Judaism and has continued to be carried out by many of the members of his community.

Although both Hasidic and non-Hasidic Orthodox groups are often at odds with aspects of Schneerson's theology and his followers' views, Schneerson's outreach methods have impacted the wider American Orthodox Jewish establishment significantly over the past five decades. Many Orthodox groups have shifted to "a world-view reorientation from a formerly sectarian direction toward a more inclusive, outreach posture."¹² This process, the "*Chabadization* of American Right-Wing Orthodoxy," can be seen in a comparison of the key institutions of each group, the Chabad house [the home of the Chabad emissaries that usually functions as a mini-community center and study hall] and the Orthodox "*kiruv kollel*," or, outreach-oriented center for Talmud study.¹³ Orthodox and ultra-orthodox women have become key to a range of outreach efforts and are increasingly adopting authority and leadership roles.¹⁴ These women receive formal training, attend meetings for women activists, speak publicly, organize Israel tours for other women, and more; ultra-Orthodox women do not, however, take on traditionally male ritual roles, as some Modern Orthodox women may.¹⁵

Genres of Jewish Film

The vast majority of popular mainstream films would be considered inappropriate for viewing by many within the sub-groups of Orthodox Jews; religious objections include the injunction against idolatry, theaters as places of frivolity, and movies' portrayals of immodestly dressed and behaved men and women.¹⁶ Non-Orthodox Jews and, to be sure, some Orthodox Jews in any case, see how Hollywood has featured a range of Jewish characters. Scholarly analyses of the representations of Jewish characters, identities, and stereotypes in both past and contemporary Hollywood films diverge in their conclusions regarding the representation of Jewish characters on screen.¹⁷ Abrams, for example, argues that prior to 1990 and the pivotal emergence and remarkable success of the television series *Seinfeld*, representations of American Jews in films had typically fallen into four categories: "hidden entirely; idealized and replaced by the gentile playing the Jew; stereotyped; and victimized and humiliated."¹⁸ Post-1990, Abrams asserts, the portrayal of American Jews in film has more frequently reflected the American Jewish community's sense of its metaphorical, comfortable "arrival" in mainstream American life, assertive ethnic and religious pride, and distinctiveness from Israel and Israeli Jewishness. These perceptions, coupled with significant success in television portrayals of Jews being and acting Jewish, have contributed to the ongoing, self-confident presentation of American Jewishness in more recent films and documentaries.¹⁹ On the other hand, Reznick argues that Jews in contemporary

Hollywood films continue to be represented in the all too familiar, centuries-old, mass media stereotypes of the “‘meddling matriarch,’ the ‘neurotic nebbish,’ the ‘pampered princess,’ and the ‘scheming scumbags.’”²⁰ Audiences are hungry, according to Reznick, for characters who represent “the good ol’ days.” Hollywood’s willingness to cash in on the popular appeal of such stereotypes, and the tension that characterizes American Jewish identity, may be possible reasons for the persistence of Jewish stereotypes in contemporary Hollywood films.²¹

Films produced by Orthodox Jews about Jews and Jewish life are significantly distinct from mainstream Hollywood productions’ portrayals. A pivotal development for Orthodox Jews’ film productions was the establishment in 1989 of the Ma’aleh School of Television, Film and The Arts in Jerusalem, the first film school to accommodate religiously observant male and female Israelis. This training has allowed religiously observant graduates of the program to produce high-quality films about Jewish life (and beyond). Important to note, however, is that films produced by Orthodox Jewish women about Orthodox Jewish life may very well not be part of the “by and for” genre. Films not intended for ultra-Orthodox women are marked by the fact that they break “the rules of Haredi cinema by presenting men and women together on screen”²² and/or address topics considered to be unsuitable for traditionally religiously observant women.

Thus, while many of the films produced by the Orthodox women graduates of Ma’aleh present “a woman’s perspective on religious matters,” they are not

considered appropriate for viewing by the ultra-Orthodox. These films often focus on religious practices centered on women's bodies that are also focal points for Orthodox Jewish feminists.²³ Many of these Israeli Orthodox Jewish women filmmakers are "devoted resisters," filmmakers who use filmmaking to "choose not to exit but to stay and critique by engaging in dialogue with Orthodox Judaism."²⁴ Religious practices focused on in the films include ritual purity, sexuality, modesty laws, marriage and divorce, sexual abuse, and the pressure to have many children, among others.²⁵ For example, Efrat Kaufman's (2011) film *Why Does the Sun*, Chen Galon-Klein's (2005) film *The First Night*, and Miryam Adler's (2009) film *Shira* respectively address and critique the discourse of female modesty, abstinence before marriage, and the duty to procreate. Beyond Ma'aleh graduates, other Israeli Orthodox female filmmakers have created films about Orthodox life, including well-known films such as *Ushpizin* (Giddi Dar and Shuli Rand, Israel 2004) and *Fill the Void* (Rama Burshtein, Israel, 2011), that do not take an explicitly resistance- or feminist-oriented focus but are also intended for mixed-sex audiences.

Many Orthodox Jews who view the "by and for" films have undoubtedly seen films by Ma'aleh graduates as well as popular and Hollywood films. However, it is the context of an array of media engaged with and produced by ultra-Orthodox communities in the United States and Israel that is most significant for understanding the emergence of the "by and for" genre. While ultra-Orthodox

communities are well-known for rejecting television, movies, the Internet, and media from the “outside,” secular, and non-Jewish world, in practice they are more discerning, approving carefully monitored media uses for community members. For example, in Israel, audio cassettes of sermons, educational lectures, and lessons for Haredi women and men are available for purchase in shops;²⁶ in New York, lectures recorded and circulated on cassettes emphasizing the importance of contentment with what God has given are considered “one of the least threatening, more ‘kosher’ media in the [‘nonliberal’ Jewish] community.”²⁷ English language Internet forums allow Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox women around the world to “reproduce knowledge about, synchronize activities pertaining to, and educate/involve regarding the ritual use of, the Orthodox female body.”²⁸ “Kosher” cell phones (phones that lack Internet, SMS, cameras, or video options), video equipment, and computers may be used by some community members.²⁹ Schneerson encouraged his emissaries to use a range of media technologies to reach one another and for their outreach work to other Jews, including the Internet, television, and radio.³⁰

In Israel, ultra-Orthodox women began producing films for female-only audiences in 1999, and in 2007, male producers began to produce films intended only for ultra-Orthodox male audiences.³¹ These women filmmakers emerged from the women’s religious education system while their male counterparts frequently came with experience in IT and business.³² The “by and for” films from ultra-

Orthodox producers are typically screened three times a year, including the allowed days of Sukkot, Passover, and summer vacation, at temporarily converted banquet halls in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods; actors are both ultra-Orthodox and secular.³³ The films must receive approval from the community's rabbinical authority before being shown (typically based on reading the film's script, not viewing the film itself), not include men or, if necessary for the plot, men must appear without women, not focus on men's and women's relationships, and always "embed a clear and direct religious message."³⁴

In 2000, Garbose founded Kol Neshama, a Los Angeles-based performing arts conservatory for Orthodox Jewish girls. Kol Neshama is "dedicated to providing professional artistic training and performance opportunities for girls and women in a Torah-observant setting and to developing an emerging artistic voice through the creation of distinctly Jewish film and stage productions" (<http://www.kolneshama.org/about/>). More than 400 girls from Israel, South Africa, Argentina, Germany, and the United States have participated in Kol Neshama's summer camp and school year programs. Kol Neshama has run summer camp programs for girls in Sfad, Israel, and hopes to host another program there in 2021. Garbose's goal is to "produce a cadre of new, observant talent that will 'turn Hollywood into Holy'wood.'" ³⁵ Participants at Kol Neshama have produced ten original plays, five musical DVDs, two CDs, and three "for women only" feature films, including *The Heart that Sings*, *Operation Candlelight* (2014) and *A Light*

for *Greytowers* (2007). All of the films produced by Kol Neshama participants are intended for female-only audiences. Garbose commented, “Our Biblical tradition teaches that the Jewish People and all humanity were not annihilated following the sin of the Golden Calf in the merit of the faithful women who did not participate in the event.”³⁶ Rather than bear witness to the Golden Calf, or, in this case the content of inappropriate films, Garbose argues that “by shining the spotlight on observant women and telling the truth about our very public role, though cloaked in modesty, we will finally emerge as we again lead our people into a more civilized and harmonious future.”³⁷

Production

Garbose grew up in Massachusetts in a Conservative Jewish household and attended both Zionist summer camp and a drama camp, experiences which she clearly draws on to portray *Heart’s* summer camp setting.³⁸ Garbose had a lengthy career in theater, including teaching at both Juilliard and New York University; she directed 35 plays in Los Angeles and New York, as well as television’s *Head of the Class*; and, following her decision to become observant, she directed the television program *America’s Most Wanted*. In our phone interview, Garbose described herself as a “*frum* [religiously observant] feminist”;³⁹ she considers herself to be “an Orthodox woman – hassidic, even,”⁴⁰ and a *baal teshuva*. Garbose told me that, for her, *frum* feminism means that she deeply values Judaism’s emphasis on respect

for women; the practices of women's modesty (including modest dress, carrying out only those ritual practices traditionally done by women) that, in her view, honor women; women's voices when exercised in a correct (female-only) setting; and that the matriarchs of the Torah (such as Devorah, Sarah, and Yael) are the best role models for Jewish women. Garbose further told me that she feels that she must figure out her own religious path (within an Orthodox framework) rather than join or follow the teachings of just one specific group/sect or teacher, as there are few Jewish women positioned as she is: A *baal teshuva*, *frum* feminist, artist, and filmmaker.⁴¹

Garbose saw Schneerson once, briefly, in 1985. A few years later she took a class with a rabbi in Los Angeles on Rabbi Nahman of Breslav's⁴² writings; the class was gender-segregated with women at the back and men in the front. When she saw the seating arrangement, she initially announced, "This is not for me at all." Yet, as the class unfolded, "through Rabbi Nahman's stories, I understood that it was possible to work on different levels to bring together the spiritual, the artistic and the Jewish at the same time."⁴³ She told me that it was ultimately Schneerson's recognition of and respect for artistic expression, as well as his understanding of art as a potential source of deep spiritual exploration, that she feels guides her films' production.⁴⁴

Melding her Orthodox religious belief and practice with her filmmaking skills allows Garbose to pursue her goal of allowing "authentic Jewish content to

emerge in the world of film.”⁴⁵ Most of the girls in *The Heart that Sings* trained for acting at Kol Neshama only for the summer prior to the film’s production. The film cost \$350,000 to produce and was shot in 18 days. During the film’s production, no work was carried out on the Jewish Sabbath and all of the actresses conformed to Orthodox Jewish dress codes.⁴⁶ To achieve its summer camp setting, the film was shot at a variety of Los Angeles sites, including a ranch and an RV park for interiors, and downtown to capture the feel of New York-style architecture for its Brooklyn-based scenes.

Heart’s storyline is based on Dr. George Kranzler’s (his pennames for his fictional writings were Gershon Kranzler and Jacob Isaacs, b.1916 – d.2000) six-page short story titled “Miriam’s Lullaby” (1991). The setting for Kranzler’s story is Camp Simcha, a Jewish girls’ summer camp:

Camp Simchah [trans. Camp Happiness/Joy; quintessential *simchas* are weddings, births, and bar mitzvahs, life cycle events clearly requiring the active participation of women] certainly did live up to its name. It was a happy camp for several hundred Jewish girls from New York and other cities, who gathered there every summer to spend four weeks of their vacation in its beautiful surroundings. It was located in the Catskill Mountains, near a crystal clear, cold stream, at the edge of a thick wood that gave it privacy from passing cars.⁴⁷

In Kranzler’s story, Miriam Bogen, a Polish concentration camp survivor, is a beloved singing and dramatics counselor and the most popular girl in camp. Always happy, Miriam is the counselor to whom the campers turn for solving any problem. Chani is a young camper who is deeply unhappy and who catches Miriam’s eye.

Miriam sings an evening prayer she learned from her father to Chani and her bunkmates, only to have Chani suddenly shriek and run away. When Miriam catches up to her, they realize they both know the prayer's tune – and that they are sisters. Kranzler wrote, “The memory of their nightly prayer was the means to a happiness which neither had dreamed possible.”⁴⁸

Kranzler was deeply connected to Hasidic life. A children's author, Orthodox Jew, and committed ethnographer of the Hasidic community of Williamsburg in Brooklyn, New York, his research spanned more than five decades.⁴⁹ For the Hasidic children who were the subjects of Kranzler's research and with whom he worked as a Jewish school principal for 25 years,⁵⁰ Jewish summer camps worked to extend the children's Jewish education through the summer, albeit on a “more relaxed schedule and with some time allotted to leisure and regular camp activities.”⁵¹ He also studied Talmud with leading rabbis, including, notably, Schneerson.⁵²

Garbose expands upon and slightly alters the basic storyline of Kranzler's story, filling out and adding characters, details, scenes, and a more dramatic arc to Miriam's summer camp experiences (young Miriam is played by Sara Rivka Schanzer; Rivka Siegel plays the grown-up Miriam), as well as a musical score (composed by Levi Yitzhaq Garbose, Garbose's husband). The film adds to Kranzler's story scenes focused on the preparations and expectations for the summer camp's yearly musical production, and dramatic tension is built as Miriam

tries to persuade the girls to support her vision of creating a meaningful, Jewish, rather than secular, show. In *Heart*, Miriam is not the most popular girl at camp, but rather an outcast, a status which changes only with the revelation of the miraculous reunion with her sister.

The significance of choosing Kranzler's short story, a story written by an Orthodox man who studied with Schneerson, should not be overlooked. First, Garbose draws inspiration from a religious man's writings, as many ultra-Orthodox women look to the teachings of learned men in their communities. Second, as a *frum* feminist, Garbose feels empowered to significantly enhance Kranzler's storyline with religiously appropriate music and song by and for women in a skillfully created film. Finally, as a *baal teshuvah*, she is able to draw not only on her filmmaking training from secular films, but also from her own experiences of Jewish and other summer camps to help *Heart's* authentic portrayal of the setting.

Camps Zimra, Simcha, and Modin

Heart's 1950 Camp Zimra (*zimra*, in Hebrew, means song of praise and is a girl's name) draws from not only Garbose's fond memories of summer camp, but also from the historical record of post-war, Jewish educational summer camps (which are also mentioned briefly by Kranzler in his ethnographic work). By 1950 Jewish camps were well-established. Indeed, as early as the 1880s, camps for Jewish children had been established to serve the needs of Jewish immigrant children to

escape the city and its ills during the summer months. These early camps were privately owned and run and were far from religiously observant, typically downplaying, if they acknowledged at all, their Jewishness.⁵³ The infusion of Jewish educational content into the camp experience is often traced to the summer of 1919 when approximately a dozen girls from the Central Jewish Institute's Talmud Torah School spent two completely subsidized weeks with their teacher at a Catskills farmhouse located near Parksville, New York.⁵⁴

Set in 1950, Camp Zimra is positioned in the “crucial decade” of Jewish camp development: Between 1941 and 1952 American Jewish camping dramatically expanded and solidified.⁵⁵ As Jewish parents increasingly moved out of dense, urban Jewish neighborhoods to the suburbs, the synagogue became the center for their increasingly episodic Jewish practice; Jewish summer camps affiliated with those synagogues held the promise of “an attractive island of Jewish living that had no parallel in suburban life.”⁵⁶ This post-Holocaust, second generation of camps⁵⁷ squarely confronted the question of how to make Jewish children into Jewish adults in order to avert a crisis for the continuity of Jewish life.⁵⁸ Many Jewish leaders and theologians in the post-war period viewed Jewish summer camps as a perfect opportunity to create a new generation of Jews — a generation described by theologian Mordechai Kaplan as the “redeemer generation.” This generation would “redeem the future of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Holocaust and must be redeemed themselves from their parents’

[presumed] world of ignorance and apathy.”⁵⁹ Jewish camps were seen by many Jewish educators as potential “incubators of a more authentic Judaism.”⁶⁰

Camp Zimra may most closely resemble the historical Camp Modin, a private, pluralistic (not strictly Orthodox), Jewish overnight camp established in 1922 for boys and 1925 for girls in central Maine.⁶¹ Camp Modin advertised itself as “The Summer Camp with a Jewish Idea,” hoping to attract an upper-class clientele.⁶² It soon became “the traditional Jew’s prestige camp and attracted the children of some of the most Jewish prominent families on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border.”⁶³ In *Heart*, Camp Zimra’s director is Mrs. Stern (Nancy Carlin), a wealthy Jewish woman in Manhattan, a character whose presence recalls the work of many Jewish women in running Jewish educational camps. Mrs. Stern describes Camp Zimra to Miriam as a camp for Orthodox girls who attend public schools, but lack “a type of immersion in *Yiddishkeit* [traditional Jewish life] you [Miriam] must have known as a child. Therefore, we at Zimra aim to provide a summer steeped in Jewish life while giving our rather pampered city girls a little adventure in a fresh, rustic, country setting.”

Also echoed in *Heart* are some of the class-based, problematic social dynamics among campers at Camp Modin, dynamics with which attendees of many Jewish summer camps would also presumably be familiar. Modin camper Israela Schussheim wrote to Bertha Schoolman: “I’ll tell you very truthfully what I think of Modin... There are many girls there that have a good sum of money.

Consequently, everyone tries harder to tower over the next one. I find the girls very snooty.”⁶⁴ Such “snooty” girls are present at Camp Zimra, such as Eva and Ruth Strauss (Miriam and Devorah Sachs), beautifully dressed twins with English accents, who arrive at camp loudly discussing their butler, sailing from Europe and shopping at Bloomingdales in New York City.

Miriam: Holocaust Survivor and Religious Heroine

The opening scene of *Heart* is a collage of black and white photos of Jewish adults and children in Europe, obviously from before the Holocaust. Next, the viewer sees the only scene in the film that includes a man and young boy: three young girls putting on a musical “show” for their parents and younger brother in 1942. The father (Markus Kublin) sings the girls to sleep, “A Jew has one purpose, one true claim, we are partners in creation, with God’s holy name. . . .” A young Miriam then worries aloud about the Germans invading Hungary, although she is temporarily reassured by her father. Miriam’s father plays opposite his fictional as well as real life wife (Miriam Kublin, a fact which makes his presence on screen religiously acceptable). Next, we see Miriam hiding in a closet as we catch glimpses of the Nazis taking away her family, and then viewers hear gunshots.

The film moves quickly to a young adult Miriam, with a number tattooed on her arm, working in a sewing sweatshop in Brooklyn in 1950, supervised by Mrs. Castellano (Rena Korna), portrayed as a mean boss with an Italian accent, a

caricatured and conglomerate portrait of the Jews and Italians who worked in New York City's garment factories at the time.⁶⁵ Miriam lives with an older couple, Rabbi and Mrs. Feldman (Raina Clark), in their modest apartment. Presumably this arrangement is a foster home for Miriam, similar to the arrangements made for many "unaccompanied minors" who survived the Holocaust and emigrated to the United States with the assistance of the European-Jewish Children's Aid agency.⁶⁶ At the sweatshop, Miriam sits at her sewing machine behind her good friend Zeecy Goldberg (Mimi Farb) who tells Miriam that she gave Miriam's name to Mrs. Dora Stern (Nancy Carlin), a woman who runs a girls' summer camp and is looking for a music and drama director for the camp.

It is clear that Miriam is an outsider in her newly adopted world. When she arrives for her audition for Mrs. Stern, she can overhear a young woman who is also auditioning. It is quickly made clear that Mrs. Stern's assistant, Tovi Scheiner (Tova Miller) is close friends with this young woman and looks forward to their reunion at the camp. Miriam sings part of her father's operetta and Mrs. Stern is deeply moved, although Tovi is far less impressed, finding Miriam's song "morbid" and wondering if Miriam will be able to make the girls happy. The implications of Miriam's serious demeanor and foreign background for Tovi are clear: Miriam is potentially a misfit.

Mrs. Stern, however, was moved by Miriam's rendition of a religious, serious song, and decides that Miriam is the right fit for the job, much to Tovi's

consternation. On the bus to the summer camp, as Miriam sits alone reading a prayer book, a pleasant-looking woman sitting near Miriam gives her a friendly smile. At first it seems as though the two women may begin a conversation, but then, when the woman catches a glimpse of Miriam's tattoo, her smile quickly fades, replaced with a look of suspicion and, even, revulsion.

Miriam quickly realizes that her status as a poor Holocaust survivor, orphan, and immigrant compared to her campers' and fellow counsellors' comfortable, well-established, American backgrounds makes her an outsider in the camp's well-off, frivolous, and fun-loving world. Soon after camp begins, Miriam writes in a letter to her friend, "We are all Jewish, yes, but we are worlds apart." The campers are unimpressed by Miriam's lack of stylish clothing; after looking her up and down, one camper comments, "I don't know which century she [Miriam] lives in, but my calendar says 1950." Tovi surreptitiously attempts to replace Miriam with the previous years' beloved music and drama counsellor, commenting drily to Mrs. Stern, "Miriam is not the right fit for Zimra."

Miriam's discomfiting, "foreign" qualities, embodied in her plain clothes, accent, seriousness, and tattooed number on her arm, invites viewers to consider the difficulties facing Holocaust survivors in their adjustment to American life. In the early 1950s adult Holocaust survivors were often stigmatized, "suspect as enemy aliens who, like other former residents of the Soviet bloc, were potential threats to American national interests"; child survivors describe being silenced

when discussing their pasts and encouraged by teachers and caregivers to forget the past.⁶⁷ Young survivors faced stigma at both public schools and Jewish religious schools.⁶⁸ The numbers of the concentration camp tattoo were “resonant symbols of persecution”; Americans, including Jewish Americans, often faced those symbols with ambivalence and fear.⁶⁹

Miriam is an outsider as not only a Holocaust survivor, but also a more observant Jew than the other campers.⁷⁰ A highlight of the camp season is the summer’s musical production, much anticipated by all of the campers. The campers show Miriam their rendition of “Indian” drumming, and dancing, while wearing feathers and costumes; Miriam is dismayed, asking the girls to consider singing and performing something that would be more meaningful and have more decorum. The use of “Indian play” at Jewish summer camps was commonplace from the 1920s until well into the 1950s.⁷¹ Indian play worked to critique the demands and constraints of modern civilization and allowed campers to explore their own “reputedly inherent savagery,” display their patriotism, and engage with various forms of spirituality.⁷² Miriam, as an outsider, finds the campers’ Indian play incomprehensible, not meaningful, and, indeed, inappropriate. It falls to her, the more serious-minded Jew, to remind them to be dignified and engaged with their own heritage, while the girls are once again confirmed in their suspicions that Miriam does not understand them.

The Power of Jewish Music

Kranzler's conclusion to his story emphasized that it was "Divine Providence, the will of G-d, that had brought the two sisters together" by means of Miriam singing her "nightly prayer" to Chani.⁷³ In Garbose's film, after Miriam discovers that Chani (Chaya Solika Garbose) is her sister and all the campers are in awe of this miraculous event, Miriam easily persuades the girls to perform her father's operetta entitled, *The Widow's Kaddish*. It tells the story of a Godly miracle brought about by a woman's *mitzvah*, or good deed. The show is a hit.

Creating a musical film based in the summer camp setting is a natural pairing and would strike a familiar chord with former campers. Musical theatre productions at Jewish girls' summer camps have a long, emotionally powerful history.⁷⁴ More generally, singing is a key part of summer camps' creation of unique "soundscapes" that are integral to the creation of a Jewishly-infused atmosphere.⁷⁵ Campers at Modin have long taken part in this musical tradition: Marty Lazar, a camper at Modin for six years in the 1940s, recalls specific Jewish songs as nearly synonymous with his camp experience.⁷⁶ Jewish camps generally have had an enormous repertoire of songs, tailored to their own clientele and goals, including: religious ritual songs (such as songs from the prayer book); Zionist songs; Israeli songs; Hebrew songs; Yiddish songs; translations of songs in English to Hebrew and Yiddish, and vice versa; camp ritual songs, including "secular ritual songs that mark events in camp life"; spirit (*ruach*) songs; and customized songs

and parodies. Jewish camps have also included non-Jewish songs that emphasize political and social causes (including songs from the communist and labor movements, as well as from anti-fascist, civil rights, nuclear peace, anti-Vietnam, and international brotherhood movements); standard camp songs; recreation camp songs; folksong revival songs; Broadway and pop songs; homemade songs; and scatological and bawdy songs.⁷⁷

Heart reenacts the excitement, pressure, and sense of reward for campers who take part in the musical production at camp while asking viewers to consider, as the campers must, what material constitutes a meaningful and appropriate performance for Jewish girls. Miriam's rejection of non-Jewish material and dedication to her father's operetta lead the girls to experience the joy of a religiously-infused, appropriate performance.

Conclusion

Heart has, according to Garbose, been well-received overall, garnering criticism primarily from those who object to her insistence on marketing it as intended for a female-only audience. Garbose hopes that viewers will leave with the message: "When we overcome our fears, Hashem [God] opens up possibilities for us that we could never have imagined."⁷⁸ In 2011, *Heart* was shown in 11 American cities during the permitted days of Passover. The Los Angeles premiere of *Heart* sold out to 600 mothers and daughters when shown at the Museum of Tolerance. All 700

seats were filled at the film's premiere, held at the Jewish Children's museum, headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch youth organization Tzivos Hashen in Crown Heights in Brooklyn. Garbose noted that in New York, "busloads of Satmar [a sect of the ultra-Orthodox] women have come from Williamsburgh to Borough Park to see the movies. It was so beautiful to see. Some of them had never seen a movie before and they were so appreciative."⁷⁹

Heart was also shown at numerous secular Jewish film festivals, including the 13th Jerusalem Jewish Film Festival and the Atlanta Jewish Film Festival. At the Jerusalem Festival it was the first time a film made by women and intended for a women-only audience was shown; men were asked not to attend but were not prevented from doing so. Garbose was approached by a man who watched the film who told her he was very touched by it and would encourage his religious female family members to watch it. Garbose wrote about the encounter:

I thanked him, and, though I believe he violated the spirit of *halacha* (the actual law prohibiting a man from hearing a woman sing pertains to live performance) by watching the movie so I couldn't condone his presence, it was clear to me that God wanted him to have this experience.⁸⁰

Ariel Federow, a popular feminist-lesbian blogger who is Jewish but not observant, attended the Brooklyn premier "undercover," wearing "a long black skirt and stockings, and covered-up knees, elbows and collarbones." Federow wrote, "I kept thinking how awesome it is to see women making their own art...not just because there were no men, but because women actually talked about themselves and each

other caringly, and all got to be real characters... I liked that it was a film about girls learning and growing and not a film about girls worrying about boys,” she wrote.⁸¹

Commentators on films of the “by and for” genre typically gloss quickly over their content in favor of noting the unique circumstances of their female-only, “kosher” production and women-only intended audiences. *The Heart That Sings*, however, is significant beyond its immediate, didactic lessons in the power of belief in God, being true to one’s heritage, and the importance of family. By drawing on the history and familiarity of the summer camp setting and the emotional tug of a young Holocaust survivor reunited with her presumed lost sister, Garbose invites her viewers, observant and non-observant alike, to feel a sense of identification with the film’s setting and characters. Featuring young Orthodox girls and their talents allows her viewers to witness and share in their self-confident, appropriate empowerment. Echoes of Schneerson’s outreach to fellow Jews to encourage their observance of Jewish law can be heard and, indeed, seen here in a musical film by and for only Orthodox girls and women.

¹ There are approximately 5,000 full-time, emissary families working in communities around the world, including 2,000 in the United States (Chabad.org). For an in-depth examination of the emissaries and their lives see Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe’s Army* (New York: Random House, 2003); for a study of Reb Schneerson, see Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, *The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010).

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⁵ Pew, "A Portrait."

⁶ Pew Research Center, "1. Comparisons between Jews in Israel and the U.S.," *Religion and Public Life* (2016), accessed January 13, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/comparisons-between-jews-in-israel-and-the-u-s/>

⁷ Sylvia Barack Fishman, *The Way Into the Varieties of Jewishness* (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 73.

⁸ Chabad is a Hebrew acronym for wisdom, comprehension, and knowledge; Lubavitch is the name of a Russian town which was the sect's base in Eastern Europe.

⁹ Adam Ferziger, "From Lubavitch to Lakewood: The 'Chabadization' of American Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 33, 2 (2013): 102, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/43828066>.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 239, accessed January 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt9qgdpt.11>.

¹¹ Ferziger, "From Lubavitch," 152.

¹² Ferziger, "From Lubavitch," 102.

¹³ Ferziger, "From Lubavitch," 102.

¹⁴ Adam Ferziger, "Beyond Bais Ya' Akov: Orthodox Outreach and the Emergence of Haredi Women and Religious Leaders," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14,1 (2015): 140-1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2015.1005877>

¹⁵ Ferziger, "Beyond," 145-9.

¹⁶ Wendy Zierler, *Movies and Midrash: Popular Film and Jewish Religious Conversation* (New York: SUNY Press, 2017), 22-3.

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¹⁹ Abrams, "My Religion," 218, 223.

²⁰ David Reznick, *New Jews? Race and American Jewish Identity in 21st-Century Film* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 141.

²¹ Reznick, *New Jews*, 158.

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- ²⁹ Nathaniel Deutsch, "The Forbidden Fork, the Cell Phone Holocaust, and Other Haredi Encounters with Technology," *Contemporary Jewry* 29, 3 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-008-9002-7>.
- ³⁰ See Sharrona Pearl, "Exceptions to the Rule: Chabad-Lubavitch and the Digital Sphere," *Journal of Media and Religion* 13, 3 (2014): 123-137, DOI: [10.1080/15348423.2014.938973](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2014.938973) and T. Rashi and M. McCombs, "Agenda Setting, Religion and New Media: The Chabad Case Study," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, 4, 1 (2015): 126-145, <http://www.jrmcd.com/journal/issue/view/8>.
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- ³² Friedman and Hakak, "Jewish Revenge," 50.
- ³³ Aharoni, "Eliciting," 96.
- ³⁴ Aharoni, "Eliciting," 97.
- ³⁵ Matthew Wagner, "Movies for the (female) masses," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 10, 2009, Accessed January 8, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/arts-and-culture/movies-for-the-female-masses> Accessed January 8.
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- ⁴² Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) was the greatgrandson of the Baal Shem Tov and is still considered to be the leader of the Breslov Hasidim sect.
- ⁴³ Quoted in Wagner, "Movies."

⁴⁴ Garbose, 2020.

⁴⁵ Sara Trapper-Spielman, "Female-Only Movie Screens in 11 Cities During Passover Holiday," *Charbard.org/news*. April 14, 2011. Accessed March 4, 2020, https://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/1497796/jewish/Female-Only-Movie-Sets-Passover-Schedule.htm.

⁴⁶ Non-Jewish female crew members were allowed to dress as they wished, but tended to do so somewhat more modestly than they may have in other settings. There were a few men on the film crew, as Garbose found it impossible to find women to do certain jobs. Male crew members were instructed not to touch the actresses and to be mindful of their speech.

⁴⁷ Gershon Kranzler, "Miriam's Lullabye," *Seder in Herlin and Other Stories* (Brooklyn: Merkos L'yinyonei Chinuch, 1991), 14.

⁴⁸ Kranzler, *Seder*, 20.

⁴⁹ Kranzler's research on the Hasidic community was a holistic endeavor, broadly documenting residential patterns, Jewish education, family structures, the role of the rabbi, political activism, and the roles of women. See George Kranzler, *Williamsburg: A Jewish Community in Transition*. (New York: P. Feldheim, 1961) and *Hasidic Williamsburg: A Contemporary American Hasidic Community* (Jason Aronson Inc: New Jersey, 1995).

⁵⁰ In addition to his doctorate in philosophy from Urzburg University, Dr. Kranzler earned his MA in 1943 and PhD in 1954 from Columbia University. He taught at Towson University (1966-86) and authored numerous scholarly articles and books as well as 15 children's books. A deeply religious man, Dr. Kranzler studied with Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, as well as numerous other Talmudic scholars and was a graduate of the Rabbinical College of Berlin and Mesifita Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn, New York (Blasi, 117).

⁵¹ Kranzler, *Hasidic Williamsburg*, 60.

⁵² Jacques Kelly, "Gerson Kranzler, 84, Talmudical Academy Principal and Author," March 7, 2000. *The Baltimore Sun*, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2000-03-07-0003070440-story.html>

⁵³ Jonathan Krasner, *The Benderly Boys: American Jewish Education* (Brandeis: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 269.

⁵⁴ Krasner, *The Benderly*, 270.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Sarna, "The Crucial Decade in Jewish Camping," in *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping*, eds. M. Lorge and G. Zola (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006): 37.

⁵⁶ Joseph Reimer, "Shabbat-at-Camp at Three Jewish Camps: Jewish Learning Through Ritual Participation," *Journal of Jewish Education* 84, 4 (2018): 250, accessed January 13, 2021, DOI: [10.1080/15244113.2018.1522578](https://doi.org/10.1080/15244113.2018.1522578).

⁵⁷ Gary Zola, "Jewish Camping and Its Relationship to the Organized Camping Movement in America," in *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping*, eds. Michael Lorge and Gary Zola, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 17.

⁵⁸ Riv-Elle Prell, "Summer Camp, Postwar American Jewish Youth, and the Redemption of Judaism," *The Jewish Role in American Life* 5 (2007), 79.

⁵⁹ Prell, "Summer Camp," 83.

⁶⁰ Prell, "Summer Camp," 86.

⁶¹ Krasner, *The Benderly*, 63.

⁶² It is important to note that many Jewish summer camps during this time did not cater specifically to an upper-class clientele; further, there is a history of strong philanthropic support by Jewish communities for all Jewish children who wish to attend Jewish summer camps. See Daniel Isaacman, "Jewish Education in Camping," *The American Jewish Year Book* 67 (1966), 245-252.

⁶³ Krasner, *The Benderly*, 302.

⁶⁴ Krasner, *The Benderly*, 302.

⁶⁵ Roger Waldinger, "Immigrant Enterprise in the New York Garment Industry," *Social Problems* 32, 1 (1984): 64. See also Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1992) and Nathan Glazer, "The Jews," in *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, eds. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (Boston: MIT Press, 1970), 137-180.

⁶⁶ Beth Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 95-6.

⁶⁷ Arlene Stein, "'As Far as They Knew I Came From France': Stigma, Passing, and Not Speaking about the Holocaust," *Symbolic Interaction* 32, 1 (2009): 49-50.

⁶⁸ Stein, "As Far," 51-2.

⁶⁹ Stein, "As Far," 54.

⁷⁰ In contrast to Miriam's experience at the fictional Camp Zimra, in 1946 a special unit was created at Camp Kingswood in Bridgton, Maine in order to "offer a supportive setting in which the youth 'are able to utilize many of the skills acquired in European experiences to master the rugged environment, which the new campsite offers'" (Cohen, *Case Closed*, 108-10).

⁷¹ David Koffman, "Playing Indian at Jewish Summer Camp: Lessons on Tribalism, Assimilation, and Spirituality," *Journal of Jewish Education* 84, 4 (2018): 416. Accessed January 13, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15244113.2018.1522580>. See also Krasner, *The Benderly*, 312-14.

⁷² Koffman, "Playing Indian," 419-23.

⁷³ Kranzler, *Seder*, 20.

⁷⁴ Stacy Wolf, "'The Hills Are Alive with the Sound of Music': Musical Theatre at Girls' Jewish Summer Camps in Maine, USA," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, 1 (2017): 46-670.

⁷⁵ Judah Cohen, "And the Youth Shall See Visions": Songleading, Summer Camps, and Identity among Reform Jewish Teenagers," in *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth*, eds. Susan Boynton and Roe-Min Kok (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006): 175. See also Celia Rothenberg, *Serious Fun at a Jewish Community Summer Camp* (Maryland, Lexington Books, 2016), 52.

⁷⁶ Krasner, *The Benderly*, 288.

⁷⁷ Sheldon I. Posen, "Lomir Zingn, Hava Nashira: An Introduction to Jewish Summer Camp Song," in *A Worthy Use of Summer*, eds. Jenna Joselit and Karen Mittelman (Philadelphia: National Museum of American Jewish History, 1993), 32-35.

⁷⁸ Garbose, telephone interview.

⁷⁹ Brown, "Women."

⁸⁰ Garbose, "Women-only."

⁸¹ Garbose, "Women-only."

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