

In gentrified Greenwich Village, one link remains to a Jewish folk past

NEWS

What ultimate Frisbee can teach us about Jon Ossoff

LETTER FROM L.A.

Is Pudu Pudu Nazi pudding? How Dr. Oetker came to terms with its past

CULTURE

A fond farewell to Bob Fass, rabbi of a radical radio congregation

From 'Shtisel' to 'Tiger King,' the secret TV bingeing pleasures of America's Jewish clergy

Culture

In gentrified Greenwich Village, one link remains to a Jewish folk past

By Andrew Silverstein

In 2017, Amanda Foley, the location scout for “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel,” needed a place to shoot a record store scene. It’s a challenge to find interiors that fit the storyline of the series’ main character Midge Maisel, a wealthy Jewish housewife who dives into the Village scene of the late 50s and early 60s. On the outside, preservation laws ensure Greenwich Village looks the same, but step inside and it’s clear: This is not the Village of bohemians and cheap rents.

When Foley walked into The Music Inn – a cramped world instrument shop with a forest of Russian balalaikas, Japanese kotos and African harps dangling from every inch of the ceiling – she knew she found her spot.

“It’s authentic and iconic and perfect for the time period,” she says.

The Music Inn at 169 West Fourth Street opened in 1958, the same year the show was set. It became one of few locations to appear as itself, showing up in several episodes. At most filming locations, the crew must redress the set with period pieces, but not the Music Inn. “It was already there: the instruments, the records, the shelving,” Foley said. “It’s so awesome. Every time I walk in there, somebody’s playing some instrument – just people hanging out, socializing. It’s what I would imagine the Village was actually like.”

Her instincts are right. Suze Rotolo, in “A Freewhellin’ Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties” recalls the shop in 1961 as “an impossibly cluttered store that sold every kind of musical instrument ever made in the entire world.” Rotolo, who was Bob Dylan’s girlfriend, recounts the couple’s time living down the block. According to her, “Musicians would just come and play at Allan Block’s,” a sandal shop next door that was a folk epicenter. “If they didn’t have an instrument, they could go to the Music Inn and borrow one.”

“The store was very successful and booming,” says Jeff

Slatnick, 77, the store’s second owner in 63 years. “It was always crowded with people buying records.”

But, even before the pandemic, competition with chains and online businesses had taken a toll on the store and the music business in general. Guitar Center, the nation’s largest music retailer, filed for bankruptcy in November. The landlord has been supportive, but after being closed for three months because of COVID, Slatnick has struggled to pay rent. Nevertheless, he still can be found at the store six days a week, picking at his sitar or repairing an African djembe. Slatnick, with his unkempt white beard, holds court to the regulars and curious passersby visiting the old wise man of the Village.

‘A SECULARIZED JEWISH WORLD’

1958 was an opportune time to be in the folk music business. That year, “Tom Dooley” by the Kingston Trio topped the Billboard charts. Suddenly, folk music didn’t just mean singing around a campfire or passing a hat in Washington Square Park; you could also make a living. Jerry Halpern, the son of Polish Jewish immigrants to the Bronx and a Korean War vet, took advantage. He returned to New York after bumming around the country for two years. Between his GI Bill benefits and savings from his wife (the poet and artist Janet Richmond), he scraped together enough to open his hole-in-the-wall music shop.

Halpern was far from the only Jew on the scene. Next door was Allan Block, the violin-playing cobbler whose sandals became the de rigueur footwear of the 60s. Over on MacDougal, Izzy Young, Dylan’s future mentor, had just opened the iconic Folklore Center after quitting his family’s kosher bakery in Borough Park; Moe Asch, the son of Yiddish writer Sholem Asch, headed the influential Folkway Records; and Ramblin Jack Elliot, a Jew from Brooklyn, passed as a singing cowboy. “Many second-generation Jews tried to escape their fairly insular Jewish families. They

escaped that by plunging into what they saw as counter culture Americana,” said Jonathan Karp, a historian who studies the connections of Jews and American popular music, “but the irony was that they were entering into another kind of secularized Jewish world.”

In the early 60s, the folk revival's focus expanded from Americana to international music, and Halpern established the Music Inn as a world music destination. Slatnick, the son of Jews who had immigrated to Newark, first visited the store in 1967. He had a gig playing sitar at the groundbreaking rock and roll disco, the Electric Circus and he needed strings. Impressed by Slatnick's knowledge of instruments, Halpern hired him to be a salesperson. For Slatnick, the job was a way to meet other musicians. “I can remember playing with people who were famous like Phil Ochs and David Van Ronk, jamming with them and then getting gigs,” he says.

After a few months, Slatnick moved to California to study Indian classical music under the legendary Ali Akbar Khan. He returned to work at the shop in 1976. By then, Halpern had accumulated an instrument collection worthy of a museum but in a setting akin to a family's cluttered attic: priceless heirlooms haphazardly mixed with decades-old tchotchkes. “This zarb is probably 450 years old. It's from the Persian Jewish community of Isfahan,” Slatnick tells me, pointing to an exquisite drum with inlaid turquoise stars of David outlined in gold. It sits next to a Swingline stapler and near child-sized ukuleles. Halpern found the instrument at a flea market. “It was blackened from a fire, and they thought it was a vase,” says Slatnick, who painstakingly restored it decades ago.

Later, Halpern amassed a treasure trove of African art. With his long red hair and thick mustache, he fit the profile of a Village musician, but he didn't play any instrument, make repairs or even socialize with customers. “He was never a schmoozer. He wasn't a father figure [to young musicians] like Izzy Young,” Slatnick says, explaining why Halpern is mostly left out of history books. Slatnick, on the other hand, readily jumps into deep and personal conversations, is a talented musician and artisan who skillfully repairs,

restores and builds instruments. He filled both a practical and spiritual void of the store.

In the early 2000s, Halpern developed Parkinson's disease. “His wife passed away, he had no children, I took care of him,” Slatnick said. “He stopped coming to the store and found a new life. He started to write poetry.” As his Parkinson's progressed, Slatnick brought him large felt markers to continue writing. When he passed in 2010, Halpern willed the Music Inn to Slatnick.

‘LAST MAN STANDING’

By the time Slatnick took over the store, the 1960s folk music revival was just another line in West Fourth Street's long bohemian resume. Allan Block's sandal store is now Coppola Café. On display is the album cover of “The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan,” featuring a young Dylan and Rotolo walking arm-in-arm just 50 feet out the cafe's front door. Across the street is Amano Café, which serves \$5 lattes. A vintage mandolin banjo and a brokedown brass euphonium serve as taxidermied specimens of an off-beat past. Only at the Music Inn do records and instruments have life in them.

“He's the last man standing.” Mitch Borden, founder of the popular Village jazz club Smalls, says of Slatnick. “It's unbelievable what Jeff is doing: supplying musicians at the lowest cost with instruments. It's a very strange labor of love.” It's not just fair pricing, but the range of options. In 2016, when asked about the more exotic sounds on his album “Stranger to Stranger,” Paul Simon answered: “The Music Inn, down in the Village. They have a lot of unusual instruments... I've known that store forever.” And, when Jimmy Fallon played odd instruments for his “Random Instrument Challenge” with Pete Davidson on a recent show, who did he rent them from? Slatnick, of course.

These days, out of work musicians aren't buying instruments. “It's terrible. They lost all their gigs,” says Borden, who with his wife, jazz musician Rie Yamaguchi-Borden, started Gotham Yardbird Sanctuary, an organization funding jazz shows for unemployed performers. With less sales revenue, another film shoot could be a lifeline for the store. In recent years, in addition to “The Marvelous Mrs.

Maisel,” CBS’s “God Friended Me” and Apple TV+’s “Little Voice” have filmed at the store. But Foley says production companies are still hesitant to shoot in cramped spaces due to social distancing. Only instrument repairs have held steady. “People staying at home find old dusty instruments,” says Slatnick, “or a musician who can’t afford a new guitar just fixes the old one.”

Sales have started to improve, Slatnick says, but the pandemic has highlighted “the digital divide” in the music world. While brick-and-mortar shops suffer, Reverb, the world’s largest online music marketplace, reported record sales. Slatnick, who uses the store’s original 1958 mechanical cash register, says he can’t compete against Amazon, nor does he want to. “Music needs real human connection,” he argues.

“Some guy comes and says, ‘What’s that drum?’ I’ll say, ‘Jansen go play it,’” Slatnick says, referring to Jansen Bennet, a regular who tours playing the Indian tabla and Albanian çifteli, amongst other instruments. “He’ll play and sing in Arabic for 20 minutes. The guy will see what you can really do with the instrument and pick up some tips. You can’t do that online.”

If not Bennet, there’s always someone to strum or bang on the store’s hundreds of different instruments. Neighborhood old-timers come to play tunes and pass time playing chess. Before the pandemic, younger musicians grabbed ouds off the wall or freestyled rap at the weekly open mic. Often, at Slatnick’s side is Chuck Williams, a boxing journalist who hosted a YouTube show from his housing project hallway.

Since Slatnick fell from a ladder a few years ago, the taller Williams reaches for the high-hanging instruments. The two met in the 1990s on the famed West Fourth Street basketball court where Slatnick was nicknamed “Rabbi.” On the weekends, Slatnick and Andy Dowty, a graphic designer, handcraft electric sitars and zarodes with unique horseshoe shapes. Almost daily, Slatnick’s 32-year-old son Coulee and his friends come by.

The Music Inn is more than a clubhouse for musicians and artists. It’s a place of community support. Throughout the pandemic, Slatnick has occupied himself by creating a comic book series about the 10

plagues. He commissions Isaac Bois, a young artist who lives in temporary housing in the Bronx to make the illustrations. It isn’t just pocket money, Slatnick gives the isolated artist a sense of purpose and a creative outlet. The store owner himself, however, is hesitant to ask the community for help. He hasn’t done any fundraising like the GoFundMe campaigns of many small businesses. Borden, who has owned three successful jazz clubs, isn’t concerned for his friend Slatnick. “Tell him not to worry,” he says with the confidence of a jazz man. “He’s a rich man. Rich with music.”

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News

What ultimate Frisbee can teach us about Jon Ossoff

By Talya Zax

It's a muggy day in Atlanta, sometime in 2004 or 2005. Jon Ossoff takes off toward the disc. He's sprinting, but it stays just out of reach.

So he digs a cleat into the ground and throws himself forward horizontally, a lithe streak in flight.

Faster in air than on foot, Ossoff gets his fingers on the disc and clutches the rim. He lands on his torso; it's graceful, or as graceful as you can be when you've just flung your body at the ground at full speed. There's no time to bask: young Ossoff jumps up, passes and takes off running again.

That's a layout – one of the flashiest, most rewarding plays in ultimate Frisbee. There is nothing like it, the glory when it works and the defeat when it doesn't. It's a bold move, high-risk and high-reward. And Jon Ossoff, varsity ultimate player at Atlanta's Paideia High School and future United States Senator, could really kill a layout.

"If he was a 6 or a 7 out of 10 on a whole slew of skills, then he was like a 9 in that moment where you're closing and actually leaving your feet," recalled Grant Lindsley, a Paideia teammate of Ossoff's and a member of the U.S. men's national team. "He could lay out pretty big."

"You could make the parallel that's exactly what happened in the election," Lindsley said.

At 33, Ossoff is now the senior senator from Georgia, a Democrat who eked out a victory in a longstanding Republican stronghold in January's historic runoff.

Picture the race literally: Ossoff and the incumbent, Sen. David Perdue, dashing down a field, aides straggling sweatily in their wake. Ossoff, who first made national headlines when he lost his bid for an open House seat in 2018, started from behind. Somehow, when the dust cleared, he held the disc, winning by just over 1%, or some 55,000 votes.

Ossoff's other great ultimate skill was defense –



Greg Bluestein @bluestein · Apr 27, 2021

"If he was a 6 or a 7 out of 10 on a whole slew of skills, then he was like a 9 in that moment where you're closing and actually leaving your feet." The @jdforward has a look-back at @ossoff's Ultimate Frisbee playing days #gapol #gasen



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which, like laying out, is the realm of those who just refuse to quit.

"I could put him on really strong players on really good teams and he would do really well," said Michael Baccarini, who created Paideia's program in the early 1990s and still coaches it today.

You could do worse in the department of political metaphors.

All sports shape character, but, as almost any semi-serious player will tell you – I was one, once, so I know – ultimate Frisbee does so more intensively than most. And at Paideia, a scrappy private school that during Ossoff's tenure managed to field one of the best teams in the nation, that was amplified.

"We were a small school going against juggernauts," Baccarini said. "We knew we had to train harder, not just physically."

Part of that training, he explained, was in learning, deliberately and sometimes painfully, how to push forward as a group, with players making the big individual moves – the ones that end up in highlight reels – only when they served the team.

"Ultimate," Baccarini said, "gives us the practice of being better citizens."

If you think of ultimate – the sport's official name, since "Frisbee" is trademarked to a toy company – as the kind of goofy pastime reserved for summers at Camp Ramah, a sort of athletic cousin to hacky sack, you're not alone. In 2008, the tragically defunct blog "Stuff Jewish Young Adults Like" deemed it "the unofficial sport of the Jewish people." It was ranked fourth, beaten only by ironic Jewish-themed t-shirts, Isla Fisher and voting.

But while ultimate may remain a goofy pastime in some quarters, it's also much more.

Invented in the late 1960s by a New Jersey teenager, Joel Silver – who went on to produce "The Matrix" – ultimate is an international phenomenon. There are quadrennial world championships, run by the wonderfully named World Flying Disc Federation; 39 countries from six continents [participated in the 2016 games](#). American college and club tournaments air on ESPN.

And, sometimes, players do the kind of astounding athletic things that fuel lifelong devotion among both players and fans. In my early teens in Denver, I thought ultimate sounded kind of dumb. Then my brother made me watch a video of a University of Colorado game in which [Beau Kittredge jumped straight over a guy](#) standing at full height, and I

reassessed.

The Paideia School, which currently has about 900 students in preschool through 12th grade, was in the vanguard of schools to develop serious ultimate teams. Baccarini, who began playing in the 1970s, came to the school as a physical education teacher; introducing the sport was a natural extension of the job.

By the time Ossoff arrived as a middle-school student, Paideia's high-school squad was about to become the kind of team that teenaged ultimate players across the country talked about in hushed tones. If you played on a moderately good team and came across Paideia at a tournament, you tried to talk yourself out of assuming you would lose. Usually, you lost anyway.

"Paideia didn't have a football team, so in place of the number of athletes that might have played football, all of those numbers were occupied by ultimate players," explained Lindsley, who last saw Ossoff at a wedding shortly after the unsuccessful House race in 2018. "Something like a quarter of the entire high school was probably playing ultimate."

That included Alisha Kramer, who began playing at Paideia in sixth grade, went on to captain her college team at Georgetown and play highly competitive club ultimate, and in 2017 married Ossoff. "What do I value above all else about ultimate?" she wrote in a [2010 essay](#). "It is without a doubt the people and the community."

The pair began dating Ossoff's senior year, when Kramer was a freshman. "It definitely was a little scandalous," said Lindsley.

Ossoff, a gifted athlete, didn't get sucked into ultimate right away, instead focusing on baseball. Once he made the switch, he started on the junior-varsity squad, then carved out a place on varsity his senior year. He went on to [play at Georgetown University](#) through his junior year.

Ossoff's time on the Paideia team was a pivotal moment in its ascension, with a younger group of players, including Lindsley, starting to push to the next level. Proof of their frankly insane momentum: Of the

24 players on the American men's squad set to play in this summer's world championships, three – Lindsley, Chris Kocher and John Stubbs – are Paideia alumni from the roughly half-decade of dominance that followed Ossoff's graduation.

"In the grand scheme of things, he was a pretty significant player on a really good team," said Baccarini, the coach.

In ultimate, being a significant player means something slightly different than in other sports. Individual skill matters: if you can, say, launch yourself directly over the head of another human, you will likely be considered fairly good. But teamwork matters more: The rules mandate that the disc be passed at least every 10 seconds, which makes it practically impossible for one or two stars alone to take a team to the highest levels of play.

And what matters equally, making ultimate so uniquely formative to so many who play it, is the spirit of the game.

At every level, from elementary school to professional, ultimate is almost entirely self-officiated. Players point out violations that they see, experience or even cause, and both sides have to agree the violation occurred for it to fully count. If they don't, play resorts to a sort of half-penalty. The disagreement is incorporated into the game, not punted to arbiters on the sidelines. "The grace that allows us to exhibit, if we buy in, is transformative," Baccarini said.

If you don't take the responsibility of self-officiation seriously – if you're inclined to lie, fight, or act the victim – people notice, and stop giving you chances to show off those instincts. It doesn't matter what other skills you bring: Violate that cardinal value, and you're on the sidelines. In ultimate, you're either successful at owning your mistakes, or you're genuinely bad at the game.

It's hard to imagine a more poignant counterpoint to the world of politics, in which the act of admitting a mistake is anything but the coded norm. So for those of us who are alienated by the self-serving cynicism that often seems to define the United States Senate, Ossoff's training in that kind of radically different value

system offers a glimmer of hope.

After all, his wife, while captain of the Georgetown women's team, opened that [2010 essay](#) with a quote from Howard Cosell, as straight a shooter as has ever covered the world of sports.

"Ultimate," he said, "is a refreshing reminder of what sport was meant to be, and on a rare occasion, still can be."

So: Who was Jon Ossoff, member of one of the best high school ultimate teams in the country?

He was "an extremely hard-working athlete," said Baccarini, who always called Ossoff "Jonathan," not Jon. "It makes sense that he ended up becoming what he's become; it's all about determination, grit, being of higher mind. You gotta really elevate your laser focus to be a great defender."

Ossoff particularly excelled at zone, in which players guard a section of the field, rather than another player. He primarily played in the cup, the group of players who try to stop the offense from passing the disc downfield. It's the position that Baccarini himself favored as a player. "I took great pride in sort of being the anchor of the defense," he explained, "because everybody plays off the wall you put in front of them."

In the right moments, when Paideia was at its most playful – part of what defined teams of that time, Baccarini said, "was how much fun we had" – Ossoff fit right in. Ultimate's culture is centered on the ethical core of self officiation, but a large part of the spirit of the game is about being willing to truly *play* with your opponents.

["The amazing aspect of the sport and the defining feature," Kramer, Ossoff's future wife, wrote in that [2010 essay](#), "are the friendships that are made with the opponent."]

Paideia's team, now known as the Pythons, was then called "Gruel," and took delight in the kinds of weird, often nerdy rituals that make up part of ultimate's character. A standard Paideia cheer at the time, Lindsley said, consisted of one person yelling "three!" and everyone responding "point-one-four-one-five-nine" – the first six digits of pi. The culture was,

Lindsley said, “pretty tight-knit, pretty loving.” Ossoff, who he described as “fun and pranky,” fit right in.

It was already clear where he was headed. “Everybody who knew him knew that he was gonna be a politician in the future,” Lindsley said. “Same jawline, same haircut, same kind of demeanor. He is who he appears to be.”

When Baccarini felt, after a 2004 loss to Amherst Regional High School, that Paideia needed to put a more intense focus on physical fitness to keep up, Ossoff established himself as an unofficial leader on the team, despite being fairly new to varsity. He had a knack for spreading his own immense drive and “really demanding,” Baccarini recalled, “that everybody be sprinting every leg of every drill.”

Voters have seen some of those sides of Ossoff, already.

There’s the hard work and infectious ambition: a 2017 JTA article about the so-called [Ossoff army](#), a squad of devoted volunteers, depicted the neophyte candidate getting formerly shy Georgia Democrats entertainingly amped about qualities like being “sane and moderate.”

There’s the sense of play: Ossoff went viral the day he was sworn in for displaying an impeccable, [painfully charming wink](#) on the Senate floor, an unusual moment of real fun in a normally stultifying environment.

Now the question is whether, as at Paideia, Ossoff can jump into a new role and quickly begin to make change.

There’s promise, sure: No Ossoff army, and no Senate seat, would have been possible without his ability to get things moving.

But the stakes are higher now.

What might we hope for? There’s Baccarini’s idea of grace, that ultimate is a sport that, at its best, pushes players to excel in the moment when they must decide how to react. We’ve missed that grace in our politics lately, missed the sense of a leader pausing to make the right choice instead of the easy one.

In my own ultimate days, that grace – not the triumph of a big catch or a shutdown defense – was the best part of play. It was a reminder of the point of the thing, a reminder of something to strive for.

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Letter from L.A.

Is Pudu Pudu Nazi pudding? How Dr. Oetker came to terms with its past

By Sarah Fuss Kessler

When Max Goldblatt noticed a high-end pudding shop opening in L.A.'s uber-hip Silverlake neighborhood, he had a few questions. For one thing, a high-end *pudding* shop? Also, did that sign in the window really say: "Since 1894" ?

"In this neighborhood, you see signs on bars and restaurants that brag, 'Since 2011,'" Goldblatt, a seven-year Silverlake resident, said. "It made me wonder, how is it possible that I've never heard of this hundred-year-old *pudding* company?"

To solve the mystery, Goldblatt hopped on the Pudu Pudu website, a slick and bubbly number featuring photos of elaborate bowls of pudding with elements such as edible fresh flowers and blue spirulina. Instead of vanilla and chocolate they offered, "Giggle in the Dark" and "Wow in the Wild."

Clicking on the About section, Goldblatt learned that the name of Pudu Pudu's parent company was Dr. Oetker. And from there, it was a quick trip to Wikipedia where he was taken aback by information about the German corporation's Nazi roots. Not only were two presidents of Dr. Oetker very active in the Nazi party, but the company also supplied Nazi troops with munitions, baking powder – and pudding mix.

Goldblatt saw that Pudu Pudu was setting up more locations on Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice and in Century City. He wondered: Was Nazi pudding coming to L.A.?

Any German can tell you that the Oetker Group is a megacorporation that produces frozen cheese pizzas, Black Forest cake mix, and scores of other prepared foods sold across the globe. Think of it as the Bavarian Pillsbury.

In 2008, the Oetker Group itself commissioned historian Andreas Wirsching and his team at the University of Augsburg to investigate and write a history of the corporation's World War II record. The



Oetker spokesperson who oversaw the project, Jörg Schillinger, told the Forward that with public speculation growing, the family took action as soon as its patriarch, Rudolf August Oetker, passed away.

Schillinger said the family gave the scholars "complete freedom and independence for their research, and whatever they would find out would be accepted by the family, even if it would be painful, and it was, indeed."

Once the 624-page document was completed in 2013, the company made it public.

The history is fraught. Dr. Oetker was founded in 1894 in the German city of Bielefeld by a pharmacist named August Oetker, who is said to have been the first in Germany to sell longlasting baking powder and to package it, as well as pudding mix, into individual servings.

While he did not join the Nazi party, his successor did. Richard Kaselowsky was the stepfather of Oetker's grandchildren, whose father had died in the battle of Verdun. As Kaselowsky helped grow and diversify the company, he joined the Nazi Party around the time Adolph Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933.

Subsequently, Kaselowsky became a member of Freundeskreis Reichsfuehrer SS, an association of businessmen and Nazi officials convened by Heinrich

Himmler, who ran the Nazi's paramilitary group [the SS] and was central to the organization of the Holocaust.

Kaselowsky made large donations to Himmler and, during World War II, supplied Nazi troops with Dr. Oetker's powdered food products as well as grenades and machine gun parts from a Dr. Oetker subsidiary that exploited the labor of enslaved people.

In the meantime, the grandson of August Oetker, Rudolf August Oetker, was drafted into Hitler's army and, in 1941, volunteered for the Waffen-SS, the military branch of the SS that patrolled concentration camps, participated in most major military campaigns, and perpetrated extensive war crimes.

Rudolf August trained for an administrative role in the SS at the immediate vicinity of the Dachau concentration camp. Historian Sven Keller, a co-author of the Oetker study, called Rudolf August's choice an "ideological decision" when he spoke to the [Irish Times](#) in 2014. "You didn't sign up for the Waffen-SS if you weren't convinced that Nazism was the right thing."

Rudolf August never came into active SS service because, at 28-years-old, he was called home in 1944 to run Dr. Oetker when his stepfather, Kaselowsky, his mother, and two stepsisters died in their home during an Allied bombing.

A year later, British forces arrested Rudolf August and held him in a prisoner camp until the denazification hearings. He was permitted, in 1947, to return to the family business.

Under his leadership, the company boomed into a multibillion dollar conglomerate. Not until 1981 did his eldest son, August Oetker, take over as general partner of the executive board. The patriarch, Rudolf August, remained head of the advisory board until his death in 2007.

"The paradox of the Holocaust is that the innocent feel guilty and the guilty feel innocent," said Michael Berenbaum, the scholar who oversaw the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C. and now runs the Sigi Ziering Institute, which explores the ethical and religious implications of the Holocaust,

at American Jewish University.

The "perpetrating generation" felt innocent, said Berenbaum, and the generation now in charge is the one that feels responsible. "Some of the most important work in coming to terms with the Holocaust has been done by them. They have confronted their past in a way that is powerful and honorable."

Volkswagen and Daimler-Benz are two other famous German companies that have commissioned extensive historical reports into their roles in the Third Reich. In 2019, after a magazine expose, the Reimanns, who own Krispy Kreme, Panera, a majority stake in Intelligensia coffee, and so much more, pledged \$5.5 million to Holocaust survivors and \$5 million more to the people forced to work for their company during World War II.

But 19 years ahead of the Reimann family's monetary reparations, the Dr. Oetker company gave an undisclosed sum to the EVZ Foundation established by the German government to benefit forced laborers.

In 2015, the Oetker family also decided to audit its extensive art collection for pieces Rudolf August procured unethically, an undertaking more commonly initiated by art institutions. Schillinger said that the project is still underway, and that so far 10 artworks have been identified and settled with the heirs of prior owners, through restitution or compensation.

"If the Oetker report is like the Volkswagen report, which I have read, which was first-rate, and by honorable historians – and if the family has donated funds – and if they have also given back art – then kol hakavod," historian Berenbaum said, using the Hebrew phrase for high praise. "We can't ask any more."

Berenbaum said he wasn't sure how Dr. Oetker could best convey the complicated truth about its past to customers while it expands its presence in distant L.A. Best practices for such a scenario don't seem to have been established yet.

"We don't know how this company will integrate themselves into the Los Angeles community," Berenbaum said. "But we need companies like this as models for precisely what we should do with ill-gotten gains, whether from the Holocaust, or American slavery, or another atrocity. If this company commissioned an honest history, I would welcome them. I would buy from them."

Culture

A fond farewell to Bob Fass, rabbi of a radical radio congregation

By John Kalish

I've been a member of two unconventional congregations in New York.

One was in the East Village and was financed by several lawyers in the Bronx. Hardly anyone paid dues but our Hasidic rabbi still fed his gaggle of converts, Baal Tshuvahs and crusty Lower East Side geezers, including a Jew known as Murphy who once had a pushcart in the neighborhood. The shul's caretaker was a veteran of the East Village squatter scene. He scared the bejeezus out of me one shabbos: after drinking a few l'chaim's, he showed me an AK-47 he kept at the shul.

It may sound hard to top that but the other congregation I've been part of was even wackier. Here's what *services* sounded like: three disparate Hasidic nigunim are chanted simultaneously; congregants expound on the burning moral issues of the day; musicians strum; poets ramble; the wicked rant and the righteous plead. And The Rav, standing at the bimah, baton in hand, conducts it all.

This congregation was known as The Cabal and it mostly existed in the ether over the broadcast signal of WBAI-FM, though there were actually a few occasions where hundreds or thousands of us assembled in Central Park, Kennedy Airport, Grand Central Terminal and the holy streets of the Lower East Side.

The Rav was Bob Fass and, for more than 50 years, he soothed and infuriated his flock at a station that has been viewed with some degree of truth as *not good for the Jews*.

On Saturday, April 24, The Rav left us. His 87-year-old bones will return to dust in a Jewish cemetery in North Carolina, far from New York City where he spent most of his life.

I started listening to Fass' late night show "Radio Unnameable" when I was in college in the early 1970s.



Bob Fass. Photo by Getty Images

Like many, I was entranced by that sonorous voice that could go from gentle to urgent in the course of a sentence. At the time, Fass provided a platform for a west coast conspiracy researcher named Mae Brussel. In my dorm room one night I listened as she reported "troop movements on the mid-peninsula" near San Francisco. Was a coup d'etat underway in America?

Just as riveting were the intimate performances by singers and musicians who sat with Fass in the control room and performed live. The list includes Joni Mitchell, Odetta, Carly Simon, Taj Mahal, the Incredible String Band, Moondog, the Holy Modal Rounders, Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan.

If you want a good example of the musical magic that happened on "Radio Unnameable," find the [Tiny Tim performance](#) on YouTube. Right after finishing one song, Fass asks if he knows the Beatles tune

"Norwegian Wood." Without missing a beat Tiny Tim starts strumming his ukulele and singing a falsetto version. I witnessed another such moment when Loudon Wainwright III was on circa 1985. Fass came out of record and opened the mics in the control room.

"So, how you doin', Loudon?" he asked.

"I'm alright," Wainwright replied. And with that Fass pressed the play button on a CD deck in master control and the title track on Wainwright's then new album "[I'm Alright](#)" started playing. "I woke up this morning/ didn't feel that bad..."

There was live comedy performed as well, some of it by the brilliant satirist Marshall Efron or a new act known as Stiller and Meara. Professor Irwin Corey was still dropping by into his 90s and smoking weed with Fass when the microphones were off.

I brought Jimmy Breslin by one night and as I squeezed by his chair to bring headphones to another guest, bumped into a metal rack full of broadcasting gear. The resulting loud gong, Breslin wrote in a newspaper column soon thereafter, was reminiscent of Radio Peking.

For a spell I served as the show's *choreographer*, arranging the appearances of Breslin, Wainwright and others. It was after Fass' five-year exile from the radio station he loved, beginning in 1977. He had been arrested and carried out of the Upper East Side church that then served as WBAI's home. There had been a bitter staff strike that included an occupation of the station's studios and then its broadcast closet in the Empire State Building.

Fass had ill will for those of us who returned to the station after the strike, some of whom signed a statement apologizing for the revolt. I was a staff reporter at the time and had practically no contact with Fass until he returned to BAI in 1982.

When the "Doonesbury" musical opened on Broadway in 1983, I helped him get a gig doing the voice-over for a radio commercial promoting the show, which was directed by Jacques Levy, Fass' old pal. I went as Fass' recording engineer to Yoko Ono's home at The Dakota. She had once had a show on WBAI. I was also able to help sell an interview Fass did with her to NPR and

the CBC.

For many years, I wished that I could help Bob Fass make a living at his craft but he clearly wasn't wired to function in the straight world. Many of our public radio colleagues managed to create careers in the audio book industry and I often wondered whether Fass could parlay that wonderful voice and the fact that he was a trained actor into work as a narrator.

But one of his WBAI friends who went on to become a Grammy Award-winning audio book director exemplified the attitude of many that Fass was a huge talent but too much of a dope-smoker and an anarchist to function in the commercial world of publishing.

His wife Lynn had a job as a law librarian that kept them afloat but at one point in the early 2000s she was laid off. So friends put together a benefit in 2005 at a restaurant in Tribeca that raised several thousand dollars. Among the attendees were Steve Post and Larry Josephson, two of BAI's live radio stars who credit Fass with inspiring them, as well as such colorful characters from Fass' counter-culture travels as the Yippie pie-thrower Aaron Kay and A.J. Weberman, the garbologist who many would say became a bit preoccupied with Bob Dylan.

Fass was quite enamored with the Minnesota Bob. He played Dylan records constantly on "Radio Unnameable." Fass told me that someone in Dylan's entourage regularly sent him cassettes with recordings of live shows. Dylan had already arrived in New York before Fass started doing his show in 1963. Go online and listen to a January 1966 [Dylan](#) appearance on "Radio Unnameable" when the great folk singer jokes with listeners calling in.

"I'm a folk singer!" Dylan declares in faux outrage to one caller. "I refuse to be hurt!"

"Why are your songs so long?" a female caller inquires.

"I get paid by the word," Dylan explained.

One year, my wife and I invited Fass and his wife Lynn to a seder here in the Kalish loft. He came bearing videos, one of Bob Dylan performing at the Vatican and another of Abbie Hoffman making gefilte fish from

scratch. In Fass's mind, this was totally appropriate content for the time when we remember the Exodus from Egypt.

I interviewed Bob Fass many times over the last 45 years, the first being for my senior project in college. I have long realized that despite his difficulty cooperating with The System, The Rav is a very wise man. The black hats in Borough Park would surely scoff at the label of tzadik for him but he told me one of the most profound things I've ever heard and that is, "We are all held together with just so many band-aids."

I asked him once how he would sum up his career, The Rav responded: "What I do is entertain and spread compassion. I sit in a room and have great thinkers, musicians and comedians talk to me. It's been great."

The Cabal really does exist. I swear it.

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Culture

From 'Shtisel' to 'Tiger King,' the secret TV bingeing pleasures of America's Jewish clergy

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

We look to spiritual leaders to guide us through challenging moments and inspire us, but where do they turn to for their own source of inspiration? Streaming services.

"This past year has been hard in new ways, and when you live at your job and your job is often to help other people make it through the difficulties of life, I rely on TV and pop culture to entertain me and allow me to sit and consume without effort," said Rabbi Jillian Cameron of Los Angeles LGBTQ synagogue Beth Chayim Chadashim.

"Judaism is engaged in telling the greatest story of all time, the story of the human spirit and our relationship to ourselves, others and God," said Rabbi Joseph Shamash, a 12-year veteran of the TV and film industry who now serves as spiritual counselor and manager of Beit T'Shuvah's Elaine Breslow Institute in Los Angeles. "Hollywood sometimes does a better job of retelling these stories than our religious leaders, myself included. We can typically relate to characters in TV or film and see a part of ourselves in the story or the hero's journey," he said.

Of the 11 Jewish clergy members [Conservative, Reform & Kohenet] surveyed for this article, all had Netflix and Amazon Prime Video; ten had Disney+; nine had HBO Max; eight had Hulu; six Apple TV +; and Peacock, Paramount +, Starz and ChaiFlicks [all submitted as part of the "other" category], all ranked with one each.

Obsessed with 'Shtisel'

The most mentioned series across the survey was the Israeli Haredi family drama "Shtisel."

"Shtisel might be the most outright Jewish content, but that lifestyle seems so foreign to me that it's not relatable," said Rabbi Jason Miller, of MitzvahRabbi.com in Detroit. "I watch it more as an outsider looking in out of curiosity. Truthfully, watching 'SNL' or Seinfeld's 'Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee' feels more Jewish at times."

The show's "insider look into a faction of our religion often spoken about as if they are aliens is really interesting," said Cantor Lizzie Weiss of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, CA. "I think the writers/directors did a fantastic job of giving these characters real problems. It doesn't stray from the everyday real life obstacles that we all experience," she said. Weiss added that the characters are constantly on her mind. "It is hard to get out of the 'Shtisel' fog. I want to know more."

"I love turning off the translations and practicing my Hebrew," Rabbi Sherre Hirsch, Chief Innovation Officer at American Jewish University, said of "Shtisel." "It makes me feel like it is time well spent."

Rabbi Susan Goldberg, founder of L.A. spiritual community Nefesh said she watched the sitcom "The Good Place" – which imagines the afterlife and examines moral behavior through a philosophy lens – with her teen kids, one of whom even did some philosophy reading as a result.

"I think every clergy person and philosophy professor loves this one," said Goldberg. "Such great conversations about ethics and death and dying."

Rabbi David Wise, of Hollis Hills Bayside Jewish Center in Queens, NY, said he's used pop culture content in sermons: citing a scene from "Madam Secretary" in a High Holy Days sermon and using "Kim's Convenience," a Netflix series about a Korean-American family, to highlight the similarities between Korean and Jewish immigrant narratives in response to anti-Asian attacks in the US.

Cameron said she opened a sermon with a recap of an old "West Wing" episode: "Lifelong goal achieved," she said.

Of true crime and 'Tiger King'

True crime documentaries and series were also a draw.

"I appreciate the escapism and relief of other people problem-solving on a high-stakes level," said Rabbi Hilary Chorny, Cantor of Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles, whose favorites included "I'll Be Gone in the Dark" and "Murder on Middle Beach." She added that TV has provided "a reminder of the craft of storytelling alive and well amidst awfulness."

Cameron said crime documentaries, especially the ones about Scientology and the NXIVM cult, teach her more about "both the best and worst of humanity."

"It is so easy to abuse your power as a religious leader, whether purposely or because of ego or thoughtlessness," Cameron said. "We have the ability to help, comfort, teach, inspire people and our communities and we also have the ability to manipulate and harm them. We are given an enormous amount of trust and I think about the privilege and deep responsibility of that trust, about the choices I make and why and the balance I am trying to achieve in new ways after watching the profoundly harmful results of cults."

Early-pandemic Netflix offering "Tiger King" became a national sensation for its story of murder and exotic animal exploitation. For Miller, who blogs about Jewish content in pop culture, it raised questions about *'tza'ar ba'alei chayyim,'* the Jewish guidelines for ethical animal treatment.

"Were these entrepreneurs who deserved to make a buck by running tiger zoos or were they being cruel and abusive to living creatures?" he asked. "How is their tourist destination different than the local zoos we visit and support?"

'Jewish vampire show? Yes please.'

Rabbi Jesse Olitzky, of Congregation Beth El in South Orange, NJ, said he loves Marvel- and superhero-related content for how it enables him "to disconnect with the real world into a world of make believe."

Olitzky, who co-hosts the Pop Torah podcast, added that Marvel's recent TV shows connect to real world events.

"'WandaVision' dealt with grief, at a time during this pandemic when so many have dealt with loss, and 'The Falcon and the Winter Soldier' deals with the racial injustices of this country. Following the murder of George Floyd and the [rise of the] Black Lives Matter Movement, it's important to address issues of injustice in every area of storytelling."

Rabbi Sarah Bassin of Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills said she is drawn to home renovation programs "because I secretly want to be a contractor instead of a rabbi," and to late-night monologues from Stephen Colbert, Seth Meyers and Amber Ruffin because she "loves digesting news through a comedic lens."

Kohenet Ketzirah Lesser, a teacher of the sacred arts and a corporate priestess ordained by the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute, named Canadian sitcom "Letterkenny" as "funny and progressive," Apple TV+'s "Ted Lasso" as "hopepunk in full effect," and has been revisiting "Arrested Development" on Netflix "as a light way to end the day." She also proclaimed NBC's "Young Rock" as "funny with a message," and named Israeli vampire show "Juda" as a favorite. "Jewish vampire show? Yes please," she said.

Goldberg, whose leadership often centers on cross-cultural dialogue and social justice, said she found "I May Destroy You" – Michaela Coel's critically acclaimed HBO series about a writer uncovering the details of her sexual assault – to be "a powerful show [about] memory and reality and trauma and healing and claiming your voice." She called "Last Chance U," "a great docu-series about young people trying to do big time sports in the community college system," and recommended the HBO series "The Lady and the Dale." "I have lots to say about that one: truth-telling and complexity and anti-trans bias," said Goldberg, who was an adviser on the Amazon Prime series "Transparent."

Cameron revisits police procedurals like "CSI," "NCIS" and "Law and Order" for their relative moral certainty. "More often than not, the bad guys are caught and

punished. And I pretend that if I weren't a rabbi, I might have made a good detective."

Weiss, who often talks about TV on her weekly "Think About It Thursdays" program, has been particularly interested in recent portrayals of Jewish doctors on "Chicago Med" and "Grey's Anatomy."

"No longer [are characters] the white, cis gender male Jewish doctor," Weiss said. "These two doctors represent the variety of Jews of color, Jewish people with personality disorders, and Jews of varying sexuality that is more common today."

"Just when you think that there really is nothing new under the sun – thanks, Ecclesiastes! – people surprise you and create amazing things," said Cameron about today's TV offerings. "I love to feel like I'm a small part of that just by watching them do it. Perhaps it is an odd way to find hope for the world and humanity – but I will certainly take it where I can get it."

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Esther D. Kustanowitz is a Los Angeles-based writer, editor and consultant. She co-hosts [The Bagel Report](#), a podcast about Jews and popular culture, and speaks about #TVGoneJewy, a term she invented to describe the increase of Jewish content on television. Follow her on Twitter [@EstherK](#).

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