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## **Broadway by Way Of Second Avenue**

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD

Moe Septee, who was a Yeshiva bocher (that is, a student at an Orthodox school) when he was a youngster, came to produce "Those Were the Days," a new musical revue in English and Yiddish, by way of a bolt of inter ethnic inspiration.

Mr. Septee had an idea for a show that would wrap up the music of the Yiddish-speaking Jews all the way from the shtetl to the more formalized hits of Second Avenue, which was the Broadway of Yiddish theater. Hadn't Zalmen Mlotek and Moishe Rosenfeld shaped the latter-day genre with "The Golden Land" and "On Second Avenue," he asked himself. And what about Eleanor Reissa, the choreographer and a star of "Songs of Paradise" at the New York Shakespeare Festival?

"I wonder if you guys could put together a Jewish 'Ain't Misbehavin' ,' Mr. Septee recalls asking the trio.

This bolt of inspiration did not come out of thin air to this most eclectic of producers. Ever since he started out as the man in Newark for Sol Hurok, the legendary impresario, Mr. Septee, who is 65, has promoted black theater. His producing credits include "Bubbling Brown Sugar," "Eubie" and the all-black "Guys and Dolls," as well as such shows as "Yentl" and Elie Wiesel's "Zalman, or the Madness of God."

"Those Were the Days," which opens on Broadway at the Edison Theater on Wednesday, with a cast that includes Lori Wilner, Bruce Adler, and the director, Ms. Reissa (in photograph), has a special appeal to the producer. He remembers the music from his childhood in Newark, where his father was a rabbi. But it has also caught on with audiences that have seen it from its start in Philadelphia last year, and in subsequent stagings on East and West coasts.

"It's a crossover show," said Mr. Septee. "For older folks, it is part of their culture. For younger folks, it is a memory of what they overheard. It touches the soul. I don't believe Yiddish as a language will ever be what it was, but it kept people together in their dispersion. The dialogue is in English, and even some of the lyrics are in English."

This venture may be dearer to the heart than to the box office, although the producer hopes they are not mutually exclusive.

"You can get a little callous as a presenter," he says. "But I take pride in this. For me, it's a combination of nostalgia, Jewish roots and a homecoming."

Photo: Cast of "Those Were the Days" (Martha Swope Associates-Carol Rosegg)

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