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Yiddish Musical Moves From Vaudeville To The Concert Hall

March 11, 2006 | By Jack Zink Theater Writer

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Eleanor Reissa's off-Broadway showcase musical of Yiddish soul, now called Hot, Hip and Heymish, takes the genre out of its more familiar vaudeville and musical [theater](#) environs and places it gracefully into the concert hall. Imagine a lieder recital, but in Yiddish and with distinctive jazz garnishes.

The material ranges from vintage Second Avenue ditties to folk ballads and a few pleasantly surprising interpolations of American pop. In nearly every case, vocalist Reissa and her instrumental quartet reset the songs in a more glamorous and formal setting.

Reissa is an appealing performer with a Broadway voice that she can rein in for carefully sculpted passages -- not your expected delivery for an idiomatic, guttural Yiddish vocal style (in which she's equally adept at self-parody).

[Assisting](#) the transition from vaudeville to jazzy concert is the top-rank instrumental quartet around her. This gal has connections: Pianist and arranger Grant Sturiale is a conductor at Radio City Music Hall, accompanied by New Orleans jazz bassist John Lutz, jazz-classical percussionist Rex Benincasa, and reed player Margot Leverett. Leverett flavors various songs with flute and saxophone as well as the klezmer clarinet style.

The show begins with an [engaging](#) Yankee Doodle Dandy that opens in English before drifting lazily into Yiddish, and then bridging to Long Live Columbus (Lebn Zol Kolumbus), from an early 20th century musical by Arnold Perlmutter and Herman Wohl. It closes, in encore and English, with an evocative Forever Young by Bob Dylan.

Sprinkled in between is the Molly Picon classic Ikh Zing, (I Sing, with music by Abe Ellstein) in a quiet, sweepingly romantic setting, plus [refreshing](#) treatments of other familiars Oh, My Papa, (with Yiddish lyrics by Reissa), Yiddishe Mame and Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn.

Personable and chatty -- heykish ("down to earth," as she translates) -- Reissa introduces each selection with a familial reflection and translation.

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Dorothy's song Soon As I Get [Home](#) from the musical The Wiz is tagged, in Yiddish, on to Slutsk, another Wohl ballad about longing for one's former shtetl. Leverett's clarinet stylishly introduces and then supports Reissa through A Nign, a multihued vocal-instrumental arrangement of a lively prayer song.

The program underwent a slight title change and lost a guest vocalist between New York and the Parker Playhouse. Officially Hot, Heymish and Hip, the concert included baritone Elmore James. What's playing through the [weekend](#), however, is a more than welcome addition to the cultural calendar.

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MUSIC REVIEW

Hot, Hip and Heymish

With vocalist Eleanor Reissa; Grant Sturiale, music director and pianist, instrumental quartet. Performances 2 and 8 p.m. today, 2 p.m. Sunday at the Parker Playhouse, 707 NE Eighth St. (Holiday Park), [Fort Lauderdale](#). Tickets \$35. Call 954-462-0222 or online, browardcenter.org/parker.



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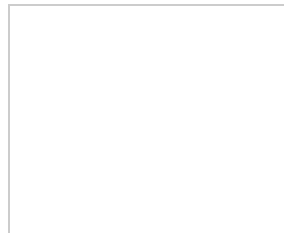


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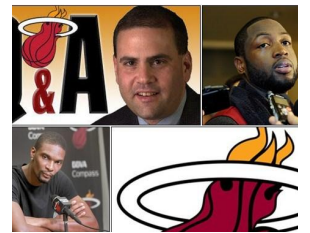
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