

CINEGOGA / 2012 / CINEGOGUE 2012

FILM • MUSIC • ARCHITECTURE

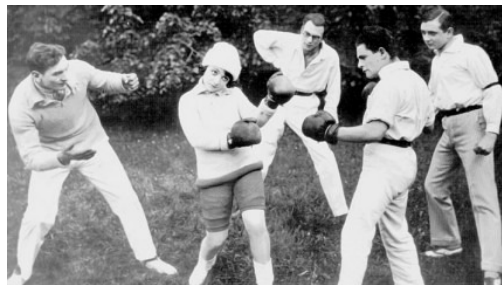
WORLD PREMIERE

מזרח און מערב

15 + 16/10/2012 • 7:30 p.m. | Jewish Museum in Prague – Spanish Synagogue

**East and West**

*(Mizrech un mayrev / Ost und West a.k.a. Mazel Tov)*



Austria, 1923, 85 min, b&w

Restoration and Digitization:

The National Center For Jewish Film

Silent with English, Yiddish and Czech intertitles

Directors: Sidney M. Goldin a Ivan Abramson

Music: Jan Dušek

**BERG Orchestra & Peter Vrábek – conductor**

American filmmakers of the 1920s did not confine themselves to Hollywood and came to the Old World to shoot their movies. These were mostly smaller, documentary productions, but some feature films were made in Europe as well, and **East and West** is a good example of this. Jewish producers, screenwriters, directors, and actors were involved in many of them as they naturally had an interest in Jewish themes, whether it was documenting life in the “old country” (particularly Central and Eastern Europe) or telling a story, often based on a literary work and across a variety of genres, from melodrama to slapstick comedy. American artists many times formed close working relationships with their European colleagues, and this extended beyond the film world to Yiddish theater. There were a number of important centers of Yiddish theater in interwar Europe (Moscow, Warsaw, Lemberg, Vilnius, Kishinev, Bucharest, Iassy, Vienna), and troupes or individual actors from these cities would travel throughout Europe to perform.

Theater played an important part in the life of the star and co-producer of *East and West*, Molly Picon, as it did with her husband, Jacob Kalich. He played a number of male leads while co-starring with Picon (in *East and West* he portrays Jacob the student) and also acted as manager, producer and director. Picon was born in the U.S. in 1898 as Malka Opiekun to Polish immigrants and grew up in Philadelphia. She began her acting career at the young age of five in the theater where her mother Clara worked as a wardrobe mistress, and from that time it could be said she never left the stage. At sixteen she dropped out of high school to devote herself entirely to acting. She joined a traveling theater company, which eventually brought her to Boston where she met her future husband Jacob Kalich (1892–1975). Kalich, a Polish immigrant himself, had quit the yeshiva for the theater. He was seven years older and a bit more experienced than Picon, and she admired the fact that he was well-read and educated. Everyone knew him as Yonkel. Chance brought Kalich and Picon together – desperately looking for work in a city in the throes of the Spanish flu pandemic, she answered a classified ad. Kalich hired her on the spot, and from that time on they worked and lived together until his death in 1975. Molly Picon survived him by seventeen years and died in 1992 at the age of ninety-four.

Picon became legendary as the “star of 2nd Avenue” (the center of the New York theater world in the East Village, at that time still considered part of the Lower East Side, and nicknamed the “Jewish Rialto” or “Yiddish Broadway”). Becoming famous on the stage and later on the screen, she remained a star even after “talkies” became the norm largely thanks to her husband. He organized for the two of them a European theater tour that

would help Molly improve her Americanized Yiddish, about which she later stated: "The Yiddish I spoke was completely bastardized, and part of our plan was for me to learn correct Yiddish with its soft, guttural European accent." The relationship between Picon and Kalich benefitted both sides, as she so trenchantly put it: "I was the all-American girl ... and absolutely illiterate about Jewish culture. Yonkel on the other hand, was the complete intellectual who knew not only classic Yiddish, but its plays, theaters, and writers. ... It was a funny situation. I was trying to make him a real American guy and he was trying to make me a Yiddishe Mama. But it was fun."

Kalich also had ambitions as a film producer. Before leaving for Europe he announced that he would be establishing a production company in Palestine that would only produce films with Biblical themes. The fact that he dropped the idea turned out to be rather fortunate for him and Picon both. Fate brought them together with another American filmmaker, the Odessa native Sidney Goldin (1878–1937) who at that time was trying his luck in Europe with his own production company Goldin Film. Picon first appeared in his movie *Hüttet euere Töchter* (1922, *Protect Your Daughters*) with, among others, the early Hitchcock star and Czech actress Anna Ondráková (Anny Ondra). Her next Goldin film was *East and West*, with Kalich in the lead male role and Goldin himself playing Picon's father. There were many films at that time about the culture clash between old world traditions and new assimilationist lifestyles and the frantic embracing of modern American values, and *East and West* could certainly be categorized as one. But the performances are so excellent that it sets itself apart. In particular, it's Picon's versatility and unique comedic talent that has made the film a classic of both Yiddish and world cinema.

The **new score to the film *East and West*** is the fourth Jan Dušek has composed for Orchestra Berg to be performed as accompaniment to a silent film. This type of work has so captivated him that film music became the subject of his dissertation. As with his scores for the previous two films from the early Hollywood era, he has incorporated American jazz motifs, but this time he has added an extra wrinkle by dividing the orchestra into two sections – classical and jazz – to express the clash of the two worlds contained in the film's title.

Inspiration for the "eastern" world (a Galician shtetl) came from authentic recordings of Jewish cantors, even from Prague synagogues, and the score makes use of passages from hymns sung on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and wedding songs. He has also reworked the popular Jewish song "Mazel Tov" (which was one of the film's alternate titles) and an old Hasidic melody (nigun) commonly known as "Hava Nagila" (Let's rejoice).

Swing music represents the "western" world of America and its lifestyle. The scene in which Molly teaches the local boys how to dance the shimmy inspired Dušek to dig up Spencer Williams' famous 1917 song "Shim-me-sha-wabble," which gave the dance its name. It is paraphrased here as the leitmotif of the "West."

And for the finale, a bonus. One of the movie's main characters reminded Dušek at one point of the composer Dmitri Shostakovich, and so he decided to have a little fun with this – and pay homage to one of the greatest composers of silent film music – by imitating Shostakovich's style for the score that accompanies this scene, even discreetly including two bars of his Piano Concerto No. 2.



**Jan Dušek** (\*1985) graduated from the Teplice Conservatory (piano, composition), between 2004 and 2009 studied composition with Hanus Barton at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, where he has very recently finished his doctoral studies. As a pianist, he has participated in several master classes and was awarded with prizes in various competitions (Concertino Praga, International B. Smetana Piano Competition, Conservatory Competition Display, Zdeněk Fibich International Melodrama Performance Competition). Twice he was awarded 1st prize at

The Generation Competition: in 2006 for ...*seven days from now I will send rain on the earth...*; and in 2007 for *Gradation for Organ*. He was awarded with Gideon Klein Prize, in the NUBERG competition he won twice the audience prize (2008: *Chalomot iehudi'im*, 2011: *Child of the Ghetto – new music for silent film*). His works are regularly commissioned by Czech festivals (International Festival of Concert Melodrama), international and Czech soloists (oboist Bart Schneeman, clarinetist Irvin Venyš, Ahlert & Schwab Duo...), and chamber ensembles (Nederlands Blazers Ensemble).

[www.jan-dusek.com](http://www.jan-dusek.com)



One of the fresh stars of the Czech music scene, **BERG Orchestra** presents to audiences original and attractive projects with an emphasis on 20th century and contemporary music, the performance of which is combined with other art forms, such as film, dance, theatre or visual arts. The orchestra often performs in venues other than traditional concert halls and regularly commissions premieres, primarily with the best young Czech composers. As such, it is instrumental in creating new value and investing in the future of music and the arts. Until today it has presented dozens of world premieres as well as many Czech premieres of works by world-class composers. The concert activities of the orchestra include performances at international festivals and important Czech stages. It collaborates with the National Theatre (in premiere productions *Goldilocks* and *Ibbur*). It has created plenty of recordings for the Czech Radio, Czech Television, CDs or a DVD with *Goldilocks* ballet performance of the National Theatre in Prague. BERG Orchestra also devotes itself to promoting music among the youngest generations. New staging of *Schwarz auf Weiss* (Black on White) by German composer and director Heiner Goebbels, live performance of new music by Lithuanian composer Bronius Kutavicius for a famous silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, staged oratorio *King David* by Arthur Honegger or staged concert *timING* represent a few of recent projects.



Conductor **Peter Vrábel** (\*1969), a native of Slovakia, lives and works in the Czech Republic. He founded the Berg Orchestra, which thanks to him has become a respected ensemble of contemporary and twentieth-century music. Collaborating with the very best young Czech composers on various projects, Vrábel has created opportunities for the younger generation of composers and performers. Until today he has presented dozens of world premieres as well as many Czech premieres of works by world-class composers. His concert activities include performances at international festivals and important Czech stages. He collaborates with the National Theatre Ballet (premiere productions *Goldilocks* and *Ibbur*). He has created plenty of recordings for the Czech Radio, Czech Television, for CDs and DVDs. He also devotes himself to promoting music among the youngest generations. New staging of *Schwarz auf Weiss* (Black on White) by German composer and director Heiner Goebbels represents one of the most important recent projects. He is the recipient of the Gideon Klein Prize. In 2010 he was commended for artistic excellence and the promotion of Czech music by the Czech section of the International Music Council of UNESCO.

### **CINEGOGUE: Between Oriental Fantasies and the American Dream**

The Jewish Museum in Prague's CINEGOGUE project combines film, music, and architecture. Once a year the series premieres a silent film classic accompanied by live music specifically composed for the occasion, or original music newly interpreted. Through this project we hope to uncover little known aspects of Jewish life and culture in the post-emancipation period, which saw the beginnings of the international Zionist movement, the large waves of immigration from Central and Eastern Europe to America, and the frenetic growth of the avant-garde.

The unique space of the Spanish Synagogue is a perfect venue for the CINEGOGUE series. Built in 1868 in the spirit of the period's eclectic oriental-occidental style known as Moorish Revival, the temple is not only the most stunning of all Prague's 'houses of prayer' but also has the best acoustics. Long the natural spiritual center of the city's German-speaking Jews, its interior design from the 1880s brings to mind ornate theater interiors and Nickelodeons. It is an interesting coincidence that it was built around the same time as another quasi-sacred structure, the National Theater in Prague. While the latter embodied the cultural emancipation of Czechs, the former was a firm aesthetic statement of the rebirth of the Jewish nation.

The CINEGOGUE film series is curated by Michaela Sidenberg, curator of visual arts at the Jewish Museum in Prague, and its films are selected from the collections of leading international institutions and archives devoted to Jewish cinema.



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View of the central dome of the Spanish Synagogue, built in 1868 following the plans of Vojtěch Ignác Ullmann. The magnificent interior ornamentation, designed by architects Antonín Baum and Bedřich Münzberger, dates to 1882–83. Part of the interior is a recently restored, fully functional organ (lower right corner of the photo). Unlike Christian churches, organs are not traditionally found in synagogues. They are common, however, to Neologue synagogues established by "Reform" congregations who have been inspired by Protestant liturgy.

Texts: Michaela Sidenberg, Eva Kesslová