

Greater Toronto Area

Ashkenaz Festival takes its show on the road

Yiddish artists to tour Europe

By **BILL GLADSTONE**
Special to The CJN

The Ashkenaz Festival of New Yiddish Culture, which has imported scores of international klezmer artists to the popular biennial event at Toronto's Harbourfront, is embarking on an innovative reversal of that formula by planning to take a small group of Canadians to Europe this spring to meet klezmer artists on their home turf.

Toronto sculptor-designer Ian Leventhal,

who has participated in Ashkenaz since its inception, has prepared a two-week itinerary that focuses on the three cities of Prague, Bratislava and Budapest.

The trip is designed specifically for musicians and artists, he says.

"Every two years there's an Ashkenaz Festival in Toronto, so the artists come to Toronto. The idea behind this trip is that we would, in turn, go to visit them in the off years between the festivals, so that we may see them perform and have workshops and dis-

cussions with them in their own studios and concert halls."

The purpose of the trip is "to explore the local emerging present-day Jewish culture," Leventhal says, adding that, of course, the itinerary will not neglect the past. The sightseeing tour of Prague includes all sites related to its rich Jewish past, such as the Jewish quarter, the Altneuschul, the Old Jewish Cemetery and the Jewish Museum.

While in Prague, the group is scheduled to have a Shabbat dinner with members of the Jewish community and to visit the nearby Nazi concentration camp at Teresienstadt.

En route to Bratislava, Slovakia, which is a four-hour coach ride from Prague, participants are scheduled to visit the towns of Kutna, Hora and Trebic. The latter is a UNESCO world heritage site with a well-preserved Jewish quarter.

From Bratislava, it's a six-hour journey by hydrofoil down the Danube to Budapest, where, among other activities, a celebration in the Israeli Embassy on Israeli Independence Day is planned.

Full sightseeing in Budapest is included, as are an excursion to the nearby 18th-century

town of Szentendre, the summer resort area of Lake Balaton and the wine-growing region of Badacsony. Participants are also scheduled to have a Shabbat dinner with members of the Budapest Jewish community.

The tour includes many klezmer concerts and many meetings with local Jewish artists. It is slated to depart from Toronto on April 28 and to return from Budapest, via Prague, on May 11. Transatlantic travel is on Czech Airlines.

"We're looking for filmmakers, visual artists, musicians and writers who want to join us on this exploration of Jewish culture," says Leventhal, adding that anyone interested in the arts is welcome. He would like to get 15 participants.

The cost is \$3,899 per person, based on double occupancy, and includes all transportation, accommodation in three-star hotels and as many meals and sightseeing tours as outlined in the itinerary. Participants must also donate \$50 to the Ashkenaz Foundation.

More details are available from Lynne Lim at Fisher Fremont Travel in Toronto. Call 416-481-3323 or e-mail flyaway@ican.net.



Last year's Ashkenaz Festival in Toronto was a showcase for the best and brightest.
[Jacob El-Baz photo]