

Biographies for Klezmer Divas Poland Tour 2013

FAY SUSSMAN (Short biography)

Fay Sussman is the voice of continuity of Yiddish from a bygone era. Born shortly after the war in Walbrzych, Poland, to a Russian mother and Polish Father, Fay's home language was a combination of Russian, Polish, Yiddish and later Hebrew. Her parents and grandmother, survived WWII by running and hiding from the Nazis occupation of Europe. They returned to Poland and were blessed with a baby girl, who'd inherited a beautiful voice from a long line of singers and Cantors on her father's side of the family. Adella her grandmother taught her to sing in Polish while her father Avraham, taught her to sing in Yiddish. For Avraham, Fay represented both hope in the future for his family and people, and a voice of remembrance for the great losses of the past. When she was four years old, they moved to Israel. On Purim, an ancient festival of Jewish survival in Persia, Fay was dressed, ironically, in Polish national costume, where other little girls went as Queen Esther. Fay's Yiddish name is "Faygele" meaning Little Bird. She sang her way through life, eventually moving to Sydney Australia at age fourteen and was later offered a scholarship to learn opera. It wasn't for Fay. She chose to learn jazz instead. Fay is now one of the leading world-music singers in Australia and Fay's Klezmer Divas band has gained a prestigious reputation. Fay's career also sees her as an active and passionate mentor of youth and worker for peace between diverse cultures. Fay has performed at the Woodford Folk Festival, Bellingen Festival, National Folk Festival, Blue Beat Jazz Club and the National Gallery in Canberra. She is often a guest on radio programmes. The Klezmer Divas CD called 'Deep is the Night' was a great collaborative effort with Daniel Weltlinger, one of the world's great violinists and composers, acclaimed for his distinctive sound and improvisational approach in the genres of Gypsy-swing, jazz and klezmer amongst others. A tour to sing in Poland is scheduled for 2013, which will be filmed as a documentary named "Fay's Journey". The Klezmer Divas on tour will include Fay, Daniel Weltlinger, John Maddox and Emily-Rose Sarkova. Fay is a unique Klezmer Diva, with a compelling, lulling and often haunting voice.

FAY SUSSMAN (Long biography)

Fay Sussman is the voice of continuity of Yiddish from a bygone era. Fay is the current voice in a long line of singers in her family. The cantorial side of Fay's family is believed to have come out of Spain, at the time of the Inquisition. A tradition of singing passed from father to son survived many generations, with stories told in the family of great-grand-fathers and grandfather, and uncles who were Cantors, in later years, their love of music connected them with opera and jazz in America.

The journey of her family across Europe and the journey of her people remains very much part of her. Fay was raised on Yiddish and Polish music. Her grandparents and parents spent the second world war running from persecution by the Nazis. They fled their homelands and struggled to survive war years in hiding. Fay was born shortly after the war, to Sima and Avraham Punim. Her mother is Russian (born in Odessa), her father was Polish (born in Levov). The couple shared the language of love which they blended Yiddish, Polish and Russian.

Fay's earliest memory of music, is a Polish lullaby sung to her by her Grandmother, when the family returned to Walbrzych, Poland where Fay was born. "Pook pook ptaschick v'ochinetchku" which translates to "Little bird knocking at the window". Coincidentally, Fay's Yiddish name is

“Faygele” meaning little bird. Singing and breathing are synonymous to Fay, two things she has done as long as she can remember. While her grandmother Adella taught her to sing in Polish, her father Avraham Punim was teaching her to sing in Yiddish. The blend of eastern European languages plus Yiddish made a unique mother tongue. Later Hebrew and English were added to the repertoire. When it was safe to do so, Avraham sang, and loved to sing and constantly taught Fay new songs and had her sing to him.

When Fay was four years old, the family moved from Poland to Israel where she went to school, and in her spare time she sang. She sang at school, on the balcony of their apartment in Tel Aviv to an audience of neighbours, she sang to children in the neighbourhood and to friends and family in their community. Her father encouraged her talent and worked diligently to ensure that she could speak and sing in Yiddish. He wanted to ensure that this microcosm of the culture and language survived. It was his way, in most difficult times and circumstances of keeping the candle burning for those lost and for those yet to arrive. Despite the sadness and difficulties of the times, there was always singing and Fay has happy childhood memories. Fay had no toys, there was no money for chocolates and the simple luxuries of childhood. Instead, she collected pictures of movie stars from the papers and stuck them in a scrap book. Fay had never been to a theatre or seen a movie or television. She had her Father's singing and the radio to inspire her. Ironically, during the festival of Purim, which celebrates the survival of the Jews in ancient Persia, Fay's mother dressed her in Polish national dress to attend the fancy dress party.

The vision and gift Avraham bestowed on his child have taken Fay into Interfaith work, Courage to Care and Human Rights Work.

Fay recalls to this day the joy in his eyes when she sang for him and for their friends and family. After Avraham passed away, Fay stopped singing in Yiddish for twenty years. It was too painful. Instead she sang and trained as a jazz singer. Though she won a scholarship to learn opera, it was not to her liking. She began singing again at her daughters wedding, returning to her roots, and to the authentic music of her soul. When she sings, she still sees once more the joy in her fathers eyes, and this joy she wishes to share with her audiences. Fay's mother is 86 and rejoices in how the music links the past to the future and is blessed to have seven grandchildren and ten great grandchildren.

Fay Sussman has had a dream, most of her adult life. The dream is to repair the relationship between the Polish people, and her Jewish heritage. Both share history in the great tragedy of the Holocaust.

As the principal singer of the Klezmer Divas, Fay has been invited with the band to sing in Poland at a number of Festivals. In addition, they will return to some of the small former Jewish towns, known as shetls where all evidence of Jewish life was obliterated. Recently, a brave group of young Poles have sought to re-establish the Jewish Heritage of the towns, against opposition. The greatest symbol of this movement and reconciliation is the History of Polish Jews Museum, which is about to open in 2013 on the site of the famous Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Fay has been invited to be one of the first singers to perform there. This journey will be named ‘Fay’s Journey’. It will be a film about music and healing. Facing up to a difficult past and creating a hopeful future. The film will deal with the hostilities of the past and set a path to move forward, by way of the universal language of music. In this instance, Klezmer and Yiddish music was very much part of the rich fabric of Jewish Culture in Poland before the war. Fay's dream is to return and seek to heal and reconnect young Polish people to this rich culture that is both Polish and Jewish and has been absent from Poland since the war. May her dream be realised.

DANIEL WELTLINGER

Of French-Hungarian-Israeli family background, Sydney-born Daniel Weltlinger is one of the world's great violinists and composers and is highly acclaimed for his distinctive sound and improvisational approach in the genres of Gypsy-swing, jazz, klezmer and experimental/free-improvised music. He is frequently in demand as a solo recording/performance artist with some of the world's top musicians in a variety of different formats and is highly sought after for his technical and musical mastery on his main instrument.

Daniel has performed and recorded in Australia, Europe, China, the US and Israel with a host of renowned artists and ensembles including German-Gypsy guitar legend Lulo Reinhardt, singer extraordinaire Nadya Golski and her 101 Candles Orkestra, the multiple ARIA award winning ensemble Monsieur Camembert, Argentinian bandoneonist Joaquín Amenábar and the Israeli jazz band Swing de Gitanes amongst countless others. His main projects 'Zohar's Nigun' and 'The Asthmatix' brilliantly fuse Jewish themes and Kabbalistic-inspired improvisation within the respective contemporary frameworks of jazz and hip-hop, both groups having released their debut albums in 2012 to rave reviews worldwide. He is also a valuable member of the Klezmer Divas band.

JOHN MADDOX

John Maddox is an eccentric musician. He plays a self-made resonator (i.e. dobro) bass and kazoo. John can move between a solemn, almost classical sound, into jazz and then on to gypsy, ska, Latin, rock, pop or perhaps all at once! He's also a singer and brilliant be-bop style vocal scatter, bringing a cool change of mood to the otherwise fiery gypsy music. John is a born crowd pleaser, as well as being an exceptionally well-respected and accomplished musician. After hearing him play, the most famous gypsy band in the world, the Taraf de Haidouks (who wowed audiences in the 2004 Sydney Festival) requested him to come and play with them in Romania.)

He has taught himself bass, played for 7 years with many different bands. He has recently joined the Klezmer Divas and will accompany them on the Polish tour.

EMILY-ROSE SARKOVA

Emily-Rose is a versatile musician who trained as a classical pianist and now finds musical expression in more than just that. She plays accordion, sings and composes for many projects based in Sydney, Australia. Emily-Rose's repertoire ranges from Classical concertos and Bach Partitas to traditional bulgarian songs, jazz standards and argentine tangos. Emily-Rose is a graduate from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with a Bachelor in Piano Performance. She has also spent a year of study on scholarship in Germany at the Freiburg Hochschule fur Musik.

Her musical collaborations include world/jazz group Chaika, Tango Quintet Tángalo and classical duo with Soprano Susie Bishop. She is also the current pianist and accordionist in 3 time Aria award winning group, Monsieur Camembert. She is a recent addition to the Klezmer Divas and will be joining them in Poland.

JUDY MENCZEL – Producer/Director

Judy Menczel has been involved in the film and television industry for over 30 years as a producer and director for organisations such as ABC Television, SBS and, Channel 9 Television. She has made numerous films, such as *Angst*, *When Friends Were Enemies* and *Old Songs in a New Land*, which has been screened world-wide and won many awards. Judy has also won a Human Rights Award and a UN Media Peace Award for her work.

PAUL GREEN – Cinematographer/Co Director

Paul Green is a Film maker and freelance Photographer specializing in the field of Art and Performance. He received the Diamond Award for his project, *Beyond Sacred* and was nominated for the Blake Prize for religious Art and Travelling Exhibition.