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From left: Conductor Dr. Noreen Green, Tenor Cantor David Katz, soprano Shira Adler and composer Lucas Richman

## Flash! Handel's Chanukah Oratorio in Yiddish

By Carvin Knowles, Contributing Writer

**T**his year the December dilemma got just a little easier, thanks to George Frederick Handel and the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony with help from the late, great Max Helfman.

In a concert entitled "The Light of Helfman-Generations of Music from the Brandeis-Bardin Institute", which celebrates Max Helfman, founder of Brandeis Bardin's Summer Arts Institute, the LAJS will inaugurate its sixth season with a performance of Handel's triumphant "Judas Maccabeus" in a Yiddish translation by Helfman.

Drawing on the drama of the Hanukkah Story, Helfman's unique adaptation brings new life to this holiday classic. The concert will mark the first performance that combines Handel's original orchestration with the Yiddish text.

According to Dr. Noreen Green, Conductor and Artistic Director for the LAJS, Helfman's translation was commissioned by members of the American Jewish Choral Society. What he created was an abridged 35-minute version of the oratorio which combined disparate parts of the work and shifted keys up or down to make all the sections work together. For decades, this has been the only version available for performance.

Green has gone back to Handel's original version and adapted Helfman's translation to fit the music, leaving the orchestration as the composer had intended it. This new version will also include the Overture, which was omitted from the older adaptation. Green says that this is her way of combining her love of Yiddish with her love of great music.

And while Handel's oratorio, with its joyous choruses and moving arias, provides great holiday ear-candy, what makes this concert truly wonderful, it seems, is Helfman himself.

"I began hearing these amazing stories from my choir members, musicians and performers about how Helfman had touched their lives when I decided to include his Yiddish version of 'Judas Maccabeus' in our December concert," said Green.

"What I found was that he not only touched people's lives, he changed them. Many of today's top Jewish musicians who are performing throughout the world were somehow connected to Helfman either directly or by the legacy he created at Brandeis."

Considered one of the great choral directors of the day and an authority on Hebrew liturgical music, Helfman was dean of the University of Judaism's School of Fine Arts, music director of Sinai Temple and director of the Hillel Choir at

UCLA. Helfman founded the Summer Arts Institute at Brandeis in 1948 and ran the program until 1952. His impact on the world of Jewish music was enormous and the legacy that he created at Brandeis continues to inspire generations of musicians.

In addition to "Judas Maccabeus," the gala concert at Valley Beth Shalom will include Helfman's stunning settings of "Hashkiveinu" and

### Handel Goes Yiddish

**WHAT:**The Los Angeles Jewish Symphony presents "The Light of Helfman-Generations of Music from the Brandeis-Bardin Institute"

**WHEN:** December 12, 1999, 7:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** Valley Beth Shalom, 15739 Ventura Blvd. Sherman Oaks, CA.

**CONTACT:** Ticket Information (818) 753-6681

"Sh'ma Koleinu."

Works by several composers who were artists at the Brandeis Bardin Institute will also be featured, such as Robert Strassburg's "Homage to Helfman for Cello and Orchestra." The performance will open with Lucas Richman's "Hanukkah Overture" and include the premier of his newly orchestrated "Prayer and Freilach for Cello and Orchestra." Richman who now serves as the Assistant Conductor for the Pittsburg Symphony Orchestra but is best known in Southern California for his work with the Pacific Symphony and the Pasadena Pops Orchestra, has also re-orchestrated Helfman's "The Voice of My Beloved" for this concert.

The soloists for this concert are all graduates of the Brandeis-Bardin program, including Shira Adler (soprano), Ariella Vaccarino (soprano), David Katz (tenor) and Current Director of The Brandeis-Bardin Young Artists Program, David Low (cello).

"It's not what you think of when you think of Handel" says Adler, "A Handel oratorio with a Jewish hero is really just amazing when you think about it." ■