

International Film Circuit presents

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Katahdin Productions and More Horses Productions

# HAVA NAGILA (THE MOVIE)

**The song you thought you knew.  
The story you won't believe.**



**Opening Night  
San Francisco Jewish  
Film Festival  
2012**



**Closing Night  
Washington DC  
Jewish Film Festival  
2013**

**Opening Night  
Miami Jewish  
Film Festival  
2013**



**Closing Night  
Boston Jewish  
Film Festival  
2012**

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## **THE FILMMAKERS**

Directed and Produced by.....ROBERTA GROSSMAN

Written and Produced by.....SOPHIE SARTAIN

Produced by.....MARTA KAUFFMAN

Executive Produced by.....LISA THOMAS

Cinematography by.....DYANNA TAYLOR AND MIKE CHIN

Edited by.....CHRIS CALLISTER

## **INTERVIEWS**

**(in order of appearance)**

Johnny Yune

Josh Kun

Henry Sapoznik

James Loeffler

Chazzan Danny Maseng

Rabbi Yisrael Friedman

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

Dr. Gila Flam

Edwin Seroussi

Sheryl Shakinovsky, Devorah Lees and Naomi Kaplan

Jay Starr, Deena Starr and Rachel Nathanson

Ayala Goren

Dani Dassa

Leonard Nimoy

Pete Sokolow

Irving Fields

Lila Corwin Berman

Harry Belafonte

Connie Francis

Glen Campbell

Lorin Sklamberg

Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi

Regina Spektor

## **HAVA NAGILA (THE MOVIE)**

### Short Synopsis

It's to music what the bagel is to food – a Jewish staple that has transcended its origins and become a worldwide hit. Bob Dylan sang it. Elvis, too. And that's only the beginning when it comes to *Hava Nagila*. Follow the infectious party song on its fascinating journey from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe to the *cul-de-sacs* of America in this hilarious and surprisingly deep film. Featuring interviews with Harry Belafonte, Connie Francis, Glen Campbell, Leonard Nimoy, Regina Spektor and more, *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* takes viewers from Ukraine and Israel to the Catskills, Greenwich Village, Hollywood – and even Bollywood – using the song as a springboard to explore Jewish history and identity and to spotlight the cross-cultural connections that can only be achieved through music.

## HAVA NAGILA (THE MOVIE)

### Long Synopsis

<i>Hava nagila, hava nagila</i>	Let us rejoice, let us rejoice☑
<i>Hava nagila ve-nismeha</i>	Let us rejoice and be glad
<i>Hava neranena, hava neranena</i>	Let us sing, let us sing
<i>Hava neranena ve-nismeha</i>	Let us sing and be glad
<i>Uru, uru ahim</i>	Awake, awake, brothers
<i>Uru ahim be-lev sameah!</i>	Awake, brothers, with a joyful heart!

It is instantly recognizable – musical shorthand for anything Jewish, a happy party tune that you dance to at weddings, bar mitzvahs and even at Major League Baseball games. It conjures up wistful smiles, memories of generations past...and no shortage of eye rolling. But as audiences will discover in *Hava Nagila (The Movie)*, the song is much more than a tale of Jewish kitsch and bad bar mitzvah fashions. It carries with it an entire constellation of history, values and hopes for the future. In its own believe-it-or-not way, *Hava Nagila* encapsulates the Jewish journey over the past 150 years. It also reveals the power of one song to express and sustain identity, to transmit lessons across generations and to bridge cultural divides and connect us all on a universal level.

*“When you find a song that says ‘Let us rejoice,’ there’s no better song to leave an evening with. Hava Nagila tells us who we should be and what we, in a fundamental sense, aspire to be – peoples of love and joy and peace.” – Harry Belafonte*

Featuring interviews with Harry Belafonte, Connie Francis, Glen Campbell, Leonard Nimoy, Regina Spektor and more, *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* follows the song from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe to the *kibbutzim* of Palestine to the *cul-de-sacs* of America. It excavates the layers of cultural complexity with humor, depth and heart – traveling the distance between the Holocaust to Dick Dale and his surf guitar, sometimes in the same sentence. It stops at key places—Ukraine, Israel, the Catskills and Greenwich Village, where Belafonte performed a hopeful version in the late 1950s, only to be countered by Bob Dylan, who butchers the song in his version *Talkin’ Hava Negiliah Blues*. The film covers Allan Sherman’s parody *Harvey and Sheila*, and Lena Horne’s civil rights anthem *Now*—both set to the tune of *Hava Nagila*. The film spotlights Italian-American crooner Connie Francis, who made the song the first track on her famous album of Jewish favorites; and Glen Campbell, who released an instrumental version of *Hava* on the B-side of his theme song from *True Grit*. It also dissects the proliferation of pop culture references to *Hava Nagila* in film and TV and brings the song up to the present, where it’s a rallying tune at sports games, a hot dance number in nightclubs and a global hit online.

The resulting film not only entertains us and makes us laugh; but it reminds us of the power of melody to go deep and to bring a celebration to life – offering delightful moments of discovery, one after another, on the song’s fascinating journey from Ukraine to YouTube.

## HAVA NAGILA (THE MOVIE) Production Notes

It started as a question – a question that elicited befuddled shrugs, vague smiles of recollection and a few blank stares.

*Hava Nagila...what is it?*

“No idea.”

“Dunno.”

“It’s Jewish, right?”

“The bar mitzvah song?”

Over the course of three years, the makers of *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* discovered much more than a bar mitzvah song. They unearthed an amazing story spanning the Old Country and the formative years of Israel, the Jewish American experience in the 20th century and the explosion of American pop culture on a global scale. They received an outpouring of support worldwide when their fundraising trailer went viral. They sat at the feet of legendary performers like Harry Belafonte and Connie Francis and soaked up wisdom from spiritual giants Rabbi Lawrence Kushner and Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. In the end they wove together a film that’s high on fun and entertainment, but also surprisingly profound, tapping into universal themes about the power of music, the importance of joy and the resilient spirit of a people.

The filmmakers began their *Hava* journey in March 2009 at Canter’s Deli in Los Angeles. There amid the hubbub, pastrami and matzo ball soup, director/producer Roberta Grossman interviewed USC musicologist Josh Kun, who described *Hava Nagila* as something uniquely Jewish but also as a song that has bridged cultures in the United States and around the world.

“As Josh spoke, we all exchanged glances, amazed at the depth and richness of the subject matter,” says producer Marta Kauffman, creator of the TV series *Friends*. “In that ‘aha’ moment, we knew we were on to something. This was a story that encompassed history, religion, politics and culture, and the global connections that can only be achieved through music.”

After the day of shooting at Canter’s, writer/producer Sophie Sartain chased down Josh Kun’s many references and began to craft an outline and treatment for a film. “We envisioned it as the biography of a song with *Hava* as our hero/protagonist,” says Sartain. “After his humble origins, he comes to America, assimilates and is propelled to stardom. Does he become the victim of his own success? Can he stay true to his roots? This was the story we would follow.”

In April 2009, the filmmakers shot interviews and footage of performers Irving Fields and Johnny Yune at the Idelsohn Society's "Jews on Vinyl Review" at the Contemporary Jewish Museum of San Francisco. They then set their sights on meeting *Hava Nagila's* greatest ambassador, Harry Belafonte, who launched the song into mainstream pop culture when he performed it in the late 1950s.

In December 2009, they interviewed Belafonte at the Village Vanguard nightclub in New York City, where he first sang *Hava Nagila*. In what Grossman describes as "the best interview of my career," Belafonte shared his experiences singing *Hava Nagila* everywhere from Miami and Brooklyn to Israel and post-war Germany.

"Belafonte made comparisons to black spiritual music and commented on the song's deeper messages of joy, hope and peace," recalls executive producer Lisa Thomas. "He had us spellbound."

In New York, the filmmakers also shot man-on-the-street interviews at Katz's Delicatessen on the Lower East Side. Finally, they filmed an interview with actor Leonard Nimoy, one of the many well-known commentators in the film.

With this preliminary footage, they crafted a nine-minute fundraising trailer with editor Chris Callister. They posted the video on the crowd-funding site, [www.indiegogo.com](http://www.indiegogo.com), to raise \$3000 to interview a visiting Israeli scholar at UC-Berkeley. That's when things really took off. The video went "Jewish viral," criss-crossing the globe several times and amassing more than 800,000 online views. Donations poured in. In a few weeks, they quadrupled their fundraising goal. Second and third fundraising campaigns gave them the money to jump-start production.

The clip not only helped with fundraising, but it planted the film in the middle of a *Hava* controversy. Angry emails and calls came in from defenders of the prominent New York cantor Moshe Nathanson. Why did the trailer say that musicologist A.Z. Idelsohn created *Hava Nagila* when, according to them, it was Nathanson, who was Idelsohn's student in Jerusalem and wrote the lyrics as part of a school assignment? The filmmakers had to investigate. With the gracious participation of both the Nathanson and Idelsohn families, they attempted to solve the mystery of *Hava Nagila's* origins.

From there, the producers tracked down other performers in the *Hava Nagila* pantheon. They met country music star Glen Campbell at his synagogue, Beth Emunah Messianic Synagogue, outside Los Angeles. He discussed his instrumental version of *Hava Nagila*, which resides on the flip side of his Oscar-nominated single for the movie *True Grit*. They jetted off to New Jersey to catch the legendary Connie Francis in concert and hear how she paired *Hava Nagila* with *Exodus* in an arrangement that she performed in concert for most of her long and storied career.

In 2011, they completed principal photography. They visited Sadagora, Ukraine, a former center of Hasidism, where *Hava Nagila* was first chanted in the mid-1800s as a wordless prayer, or nigun. They traveled to Jerusalem and visited the Israeli National Archive, where scholar Edwin Seroussi placed *Hava Nagila* in the context of the conscious creation of Hebrew folk culture in the early part of the 20th century. In Tel Aviv, they had an unforgettable hora lesson from Israeli dance legend Ayala Goren. Back in the U.S., they returned to the Bay Area to film scholar James Loeffler, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner and the Klezmatics in concert. They rounded out their filming with an interview with Soviet-born musician Regina Spektor and with a visit to KlezKamp in the Catskills, where they interviewed the colorful and brilliant “Hava Hater” Henry Sapoznik.

“It has been a fascinating journey from Ukraine to YouTube with *Hava Nagila*,” says director Grossman. “I believe we managed to thread the needle between heart and humor, emotion and entertainment, resulting in an unexpectedly deep and compelling meditation on the tragedies, triumphs and joys in the modern Jewish journey.”

Premiering opening night at the 2012 San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, to an enthusiastic sold-out crowd at the Castro Theater, *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* was hailed as an instant hit – “a toe-tapping, entertaining celebration of the song” (*San Francisco Chronicle*) that brought together young and old, Jew and non-Jew.

*“Watching Roberta Grossman’s brilliant “Hava Nagila (The Movie)” in the Castro Theatre with more than a thousand other festivalgoers on opening night was, if not a religious experience, certainly a celebration of Jewish community. As we followed, together, the transnational migrations of what has become the quintessential bar-mitzvah song, we recalled our own experiences and shared something profound — a recognition of our common Jewishness.” – Sue Fishkoff, Editor, JWeekly.com*

## **HAVA NAGILA (THE MOVIE)**

### Interview Subjects

#### **Harry Belafonte**

Harry Belafonte is a Grammy-Award-winning singer, actor, social activist and humanitarian. He was dubbed the "King of Calypso" for popularizing the Caribbean musical style in the 1950s. Belafonte is perhaps best known for singing "The Banana Boat Song," with its signature lyric "Day-O." Belafonte received the Kennedy Center Honors in 1989, was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1994 and won a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000.

#### **Lila Corwin Berman**

Lila Corwin Berman is an associate professor of history at Temple University. Her first book, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (UC Press, 2009), examines Jews' efforts to explain themselves to non-Jews from the 1920s through the 1960s. She is currently working on a book tracing Jews' journeys away from urban America in the postwar years.

#### **Glen Campbell**

Glen Campbell is a Grammy-Award winning country music singer and guitarist. During his 50 years in show business, Campbell has released more than 70 albums. He has sold 45 million records and accumulated no less than 12 RIAA Gold albums, four Platinum albums and one Double-Platinum album. Campbell's hits include "Gentle on My Mind," "Wichita Lineman," "Galveston," "Rhinstone Cowboy" and "Southern Nights."

#### **Dani Dassa**

Dance teacher and choreographer Dani Dassa has been called "the father of Israeli folk dancing in the United States." He studied modern dance, first in his native Israel, and later in New York with Martha Graham. Dassa founded and directed the folk dance camp "RIKUD," held at the Brandeis Institute. He has toured the United States both as a performer and as a teacher. In 1966, he founded Cafe Danssa, a folk dance coffee house in West Los Angeles, California.

#### **Irving Fields**

Pianist Irving Fields is most famous for his 1959 album *Bagels & Bongos*, which sold two million copies. He has recorded nearly 100 albums featuring trios, quartets, orchestras and solo. Some of his most noteworthy compositions include "Miami Beach Rhumba," "Managua, Nicaragua" and "Chantez, Chantez," covered by Dinah Shore. Fields, age 97, currently plays six nights a week at Nino's Tuscany, an Italian restaurant in New York City.

### **Dr. Gila Flam**

Dr. Gila Flam is the director of the Music Department and the Sound Archives of The National Library of Israel. She studied musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and received her Ph.D. in music from UCLA. Her dissertation topic was on songs of the Lodz Ghetto, which was based on interviews and recordings of survivors. Dr. Flam is also a lecturer at several academic institutions, where she teaches topics of Jewish and Israeli music.

### **Connie Francis**

Legendary singer, composer, actress and entertainer Connie Francis is best known for her hit songs "Who's Sorry Now?," "Where the Boys Are" and "Everybody's Somebody's Fool." She is considered the most prolific and popular female rock 'n' roll hit-maker of the early rock era. In the 1960s, Francis starred in several films and headlined a show in Las Vegas. Other hit songs include "Stupid Cupid," "Lipstick on Your Collar" and "Don't Break the Heart That Loves You."

### **Ayala Goren-Kadman**

Ayala Goren-Kadman teaches, choreographs and researches the folk culture and dance of Israel's ethnic groups. Since 1988 she has directed the ethnic dance program of the Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. She has guest taught at Julliard, Barnard College, Connecticut College, UCLA and Stanford. She has written numerous articles about ethnic and folk dance in Israel and co-produced a series on the traditional dances of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa.

### **Josh Kun**

Josh Kun is an associate professor at the USC Annenberg School and the author of *And You Shall Know Us By the Trail of Our Vinyl* and *Audiotopia*. He is director of the Popular Music Project at the Norman Lear Center. Kun's research focuses on the arts and politics of cultural connection, with an emphasis on popular music, the cultures of globalization, the US-Mexico border, and Jewish-American musical history. Kun is co-founder of the Idelsohn Society for Musical Preservation.

### **Rabbi Lawrence Kushner**

Lawrence Kushner is a rabbi, writer and teacher who has authored more than a dozen books on Jewish mysticism and spirituality. He is a regular contributor to NPR's *All Things Considered* and *The New York Times*. He is the Emanu-El Scholar at San Francisco's Congregation Emanu-El. Prior to this, he was Rabbi-in-Residence at Hebrew Union College in New York City. He served for 28 years as the rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

## **James Loeffler**

James Loeffler is an associate professor of history and Jewish studies at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire*. In 2005 he co-founded the Jewish Music Forum, a national academic organization supported by the American Society for Jewish Music and the Center for Jewish History in New York. He has served as a music consultant to National Public Radio, Nextbook and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

## **Chazzan Danny Maseng**

An Israeli-born playwright, actor, singer, writer and composer, Danny Maseng first came to the United States to star on Broadway in *Only Fools Are Sad*. He is currently the cantor and musical director of Temple Israel of Hollywood. Maseng has been Director of Hava Nashira for the URJ, the Artistic Director of the Brandeis-Bardin Institute and the Director of The Spielberg Fellowships for the FJC. He is the Patron Artist of the Avraham Geiger School for Cantorial Arts in Berlin.

## **Leonard Nimoy**

Leonard Nimoy's career has spanned many aspects of stage and screen. He is best known for playing the character of Mr. Spock in *Star Trek*, but his contributions have also included directing several films, including two of the *Star Trek* movies as well as the blockbuster hit, *Three Men and a Baby*. Nimoy's other television credits include *Wagon Train*, *Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Rawhide*, *Perry Mason* and *Combat*. Since 2003, Nimoy has focused primarily on his photography career.

## **Henry Sapoznik**

Henry "Hank" Sapoznik is an award-winning author, radio and record producer and performer of traditional Yiddish and American music. He is credited with the late 20th century revival of klezmer music. He co-produced the Peabody-Award-winning series the "Yiddish Radio Project" for NPR's *All Things Considered* in 2002. Sapoznik founded "KlezKamp: The Yiddish Folk Arts Program" in 1985, and is the executive director of "Living Traditions" the folk arts organization which runs it.

## **Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi**

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, better known as "Reb Zalman," is the father of the Jewish Renewal and Spiritual Eldering movements. An author and teacher of Hasidism and Jewish Mysticism, he is a participant in ecumenical dialogues throughout the world, including the widely influential dialogue with the Dalai Lama, documented in the book, *The Jew in the Lotus*. Reb Zalman currently lives in Boulder, Colorado, and continues to mentor his many students the world over.

## **Edwin Seroussi**

Edwin Seroussi is a professor of musicology and director of the Jewish Music Research Centre at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research interests include Jewish musical traditions in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as Israeli popular music. He held lectureships at Tel-Aviv University and at Levinsky Teachers' College in Tel Aviv, before his full time appointment at Bar-Ilan University in 1990, where he was head of the music department from 1994 to 1998.

## **Lorin Sklamberg/The Klezmatics**

Lorin Sklamberg is a vocalist, accordionist, pianist, guitarist and founding member of The Klezmatics. Since their emergence more than 25 years ago, the Klezmatics have raised the bar for Eastern European Jewish music, made aesthetically, politically and musically interesting recordings and helped change the face of contemporary Yiddish culture. They have performed in more than 20 countries and released ten albums to date—most recently the two-CD *Live at Town Hall*.

## **Pete Sokolow**

Pete Sokolow is a jazz and klezmer pianist and reed player whose klezmer roots in the Catskills span older and newer generations of Jewish musicians. Sokolow has played with many major figures in klezmer history, including Dave Tarras, the Epstein Brothers, and Ray Musiker, and been an important figure in the revival of klezmer music. His albums include *Klezmer Plus*, and he wrote the transcriptions and technical introductions to Henry Sapoznik's book, *The Compleat Klezmer*.

## **Regina Spektor**

Since emerging on the NYC café circuit in 2001, Regina Spektor has been hailed as a truly special talent. Born and raised in Moscow until age nine, Spektor listened to her father's bootleg tapes of Western pop and rock as a child and also learned to play piano. She and her family moved to New York, where she developed her classical piano training by attending the SUNY Purchase Music Conservatory. Her albums include *Soviet Kitsch*, *Live in London* and *What We Saw from the Cheap Seats*.

## **Johnny Yune**

Korean-American entertainer Johnny Yune is a singer, actor and comedian. He played the lead in the 1980s films *They Call Me Bruce?* and *They Still Call Me Bruce*. Yune's big break came on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, where he appeared more than thirty times. Yune started his career in the 1960s playing in Jewish cabarets in New York. In 1975, he released his o *Ose Shalom*, an album of Jewish and Yiddish favorites.

## HAVA NAGILA (THE MOVIE)

Filmmaker Bios

### **ROBERTA GROSSMAN (Directed and Produced by)**

An award-winning filmmaker with a passion for history and social justice, Roberta Grossman has written and produced more than forty hours of documentary film and television. Grossman's last film, *Blessed Is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh*, won the audience award at 13 film festivals, was broadcast on PBS/*Independent Lens* and was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award. Grossman was the series producer and co-writer of *500 Nations*, the eight-hour CBS mini-series on Native Americans hosted by Kevin Costner. Her feature documentary, *Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action*, premiered in 2005, screened and won awards at more than 40 festivals worldwide and aired on public television stations. Grossman's other writing and directing credits include *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, a four-hour special for the History Channel; *Hollywood & Power: Women on Top*, a special for AMC; *The Rich in America: 150 Years of Town and Country Magazine* for A&E; *The History of Christianity: the First Thousand Years*, a four-hour special on A&E; and *Heroines of the Hebrew Bible and Judas* for the A&E series *Mysteries of the Bible*.

### **SOPHIE SARTAIN (Written and Produced by)**

An award-winning writer for print, film, television and digital media, Sophie Sartain's experience includes stints as Executive Director of Editorial Services for MGM Home Entertainment, Managing Editor of Sony Online Entertainment and Director of Development for Katahdin Productions, where she also served as writer and co-producer of *Blessed Is the Match: The Life of Hannah Senesh* (PBS, 2010). Sartain created and co-executive-produced the VH1 special, *Fortune Files*, and contributed as a writer on *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* (PBS) and *The Rich in America* (A&E). As a grant writer, Sartain has raised more than \$1 million for documentary projects. As a freelance writer, her clients have included 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, Universal Studios, New Line Home Entertainment and ABC Radio Networks.

### **MARTA KAUFFMAN (Produced by)**

Marta Kauffman co-created and executive produced the Emmy Award-winning series *Friends*. Previously, Kauffman co-created and served as co-executive producer on the critically acclaimed comedy series *Dream On*. While on *Dream On*, she received an Emmy Award nomination and a CableAce Award. Kauffman also co-created the comedy series *The Powers That Be* for Norman Lear. She served as executive producer on the one-hour drama *Related* on the WB. She also co-created and served as executive producer on the comedy series *Family Album* and *Veronica's Closet*, starring Kirstie Alley. In addition, she served as an executive producer on the series *Jesse*, starring Christina Applegate, and was executive producer of the

documentary, *Blessed Is the Match*. In 2011, Kauffman created and executive produced the Lifetime Original Movie *Five*.

### **LISA THOMAS (Executive Produced by)**

An innovative entrepreneur, philanthropist, film producer and Grammy Award-winning music producer, Lisa Thomas is best known as the cofounder and former CEO of Clif Bar, Inc. From the moment it was introduced to the marketplace in 1992, Clif Bar—an all-natural energy bar—was a success. Over the next several years, Clif Bar, Inc., appeared frequently on the annual Inc. 500 list of the fastest growing privately held companies, and in Working Woman Magazine's 500 fastest growing companies owned by women. Thomas produced *Blessed Is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh* and executive produced the feature documentary *Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action* (2005). She also produced *Sacred Ground*, a companion album to *Homeland* that won the Grammy Award for Best Native American Album.

### **CHRIS CALLISTER (Edited by)**

Chris Callister has directed and edited documentaries, short films, and music videos, and his work has been seen around the world by over a million people. He has edited for The History Channel, Universal Sports Network and the Sundance Institute. His credits include the feature documentary *Blessed Is the Match* (assistant editor and post-production supervisor); music and concert videos for The Killers (writer, director and editor); the feature film *Cyrus* (apprentice editor); and the short film *The Liar* (writer, director and editor), which screened at numerous festivals including the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. Callister received his master's degree in film production from USC.

