



A Jewish Arts & Music Organization

2020-21

ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT



SPIRIT

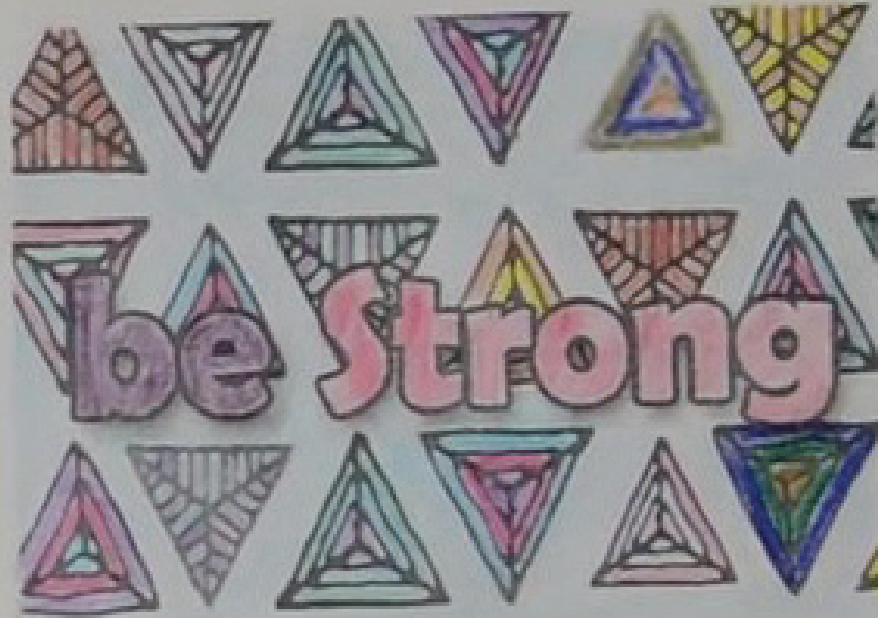


WIND



BREATH

Yaffa



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With the support of our community, we've arrived at new ways of operating so we can broadly share the arts and all their benefits when people need them most.

Dear Friends,

Tzedakah. It's the Hebrew word commonly translated as charity, or philanthropy, that means more literally "justice" or "righteousness." Its observance in Jewish life is governed by detailed laws and practices. The Torah (Five Books of Moses) teaches that giving to others who need our help is the correct and ethical thing to do, perhaps most fundamentally because money is not ours to spend however we wish—it's G-d's deposit with us for which we are entrusted to be responsible stewards.

During the world's many challenges of the past year-and-a-half, many have been in need, and so many have come to their aid with unmatched generosity, doing what is right and just. Individuals from every background and organizations of every kind have managed through challenges and disruptions, supported by their communities.

Arts organizations, like RUACH, have also felt that generosity. With the support of our community, we've arrived at new ways of operating so we can broadly share the arts and all their benefits when people need them most. We have been called upon to reinvent and transform ourselves during this period in our history, and we have, thank G-d, stepped



up and found new ways of bringing light, joy, and meaning during times that can be dark, troubled and anxious.

There are countless causes in need and deserving of charitable dollars, a reality that is especially true today. But I hope you'll keep RUACH in your heart as you make your giving plans this year. We are a small but mighty organization that makes the very most of every gift we receive.

As you'll read in the pages that follow, we have so much important work ahead, which will require significant investment if we are to continue to do justice to our mission and meet our great potential. Giving to RUACH makes our meaningful work possible, and we are grateful for your support.

All My Best,
Joshua Richman
RUACH Founder and Executive Director

RUACH ('spirit,' 'wind,' or 'breath' in Hebrew) has grown to provide creative arts opportunities, set against a Jewish backdrop, to diverse Greater Milwaukee residents.

ABOUT RUACH



RUACH is a Jewish arts and music 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to awaken creativity through arts enrichment rooted in Jewish values and the rich cultural diversity of Sherman Park. Since 2004, RUACH has grown to provide creative arts opportunities, set against a Jewish backdrop, to diverse Greater Milwaukee residents, particularly those who are traditionally underserved.

“Art is a universal language and through it each nation makes its own unique contribution to the culture of mankind.”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

RUACH develops initiatives in alignment with our program framework:



BEING TRUE TO OUR ROOTS

RUACH's continued work with two of our earliest partners - Yeshiva Elementary School and Ovation Communities - sets the tone for the rest of our programming and provides a foundation for our ongoing commitment to bringing arts opportunities to the underserved.



AN OPEN TENT

In the spirit of the Jewish patriarch and matriarch, Abraham and Sarah, RUACH seeks to provide an open tent as we welcome, work with, and serve those beyond the Jewish community.



CELEBRATING JEWISH CREATIVITY

RUACH widely shares high-quality performances and programs that celebrate Jewish artists, their creativity, and their contributions to an expansive artistic legacy, and that highlight Jewish themes embraced by non-Jewish artists.



THE THREE PILLARS

In alignment with three pillars of Jewish observance (Emunah, Torah, and Dveykus), RUACH utilizes the arts as a universal language to lead those who are Jewish to a deeper connection with Jewish tradition and teachings and to expose those who are not familiar with Judaism to the rich beauty of Jewish heritage.

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RUACH - NOT JUST A WORD

By Josh Richman

Yehoshua Ish Asher RUACH bo

(‘Joshua, a man in whom there is spirit (ruach)’--Numbers 27:18)

‘Ruach,’ a Hebrew word commonly translated as ‘wind,’ ‘breath,’ or ‘spirit,’ appears frequently throughout the Torah (Five Books of Moses), Prophets, and Writings. Common and/or well-known phrases which have the word ‘ruach’ include: “*Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit),’ ‘*Nachas Ruach* (Pride or Pleasantness of Spirit),’ ‘*Ruach Shtuss* (A Spirit of Folly),’ and ‘*Ruach Elokim* (Spirit of G-d),’ among many others.

The name ‘RUACH’ was presented to Rabbi Michel Twerski of Congregation Beth Jehudah in Sherman Park as one of several options of names to select from for our fledgling Jewish arts and music organization, ~17 years ago. According to Jewish

tradition, when parents name a child, they are granted a hint of prophecy, as a name is reflective of one’s essence. We at RUACH like to think that our name is reflective of our essence, even as (or perhaps especially as) our mission and programming have evolved over the years. Our name informs our mission and all of the programming we do both within and, by extension, outside of Sherman Park, both inside and outside the Jewish community.

Rabbi Twerski, who ultimately selected the name ‘RUACH’ for our organization, sat down with RUACH Founder and Executive Director Josh Richman to discuss his thoughts on the meaning of the word ‘ruach’ and

how it is reflective of our organization.

Based on what Rabbi Twerski had to say about the word ‘ruach’ and one of its earliest mentions in the Torah, here’s an insight into our name:

One of the primary and earliest references that informs the meaning of the word ‘ruach’ is in Genesis 2:7, where it says ‘and G-d Blew a living spirit into man.’ The Targum (the Aramaic translation of the Torah, by the commentator Onkelos) calls this ‘living spirit’ a ‘*ruach mimalala*.’

A ‘*ruach mimalala*,’ translated as a ‘speaking spirit,’ is more fundamentally a ‘communicating spirit’ or an ‘interactive spirit.’ So, the Torah teaches that G-d blew into man a life energy



SPIRIT



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BREATH

that reaches out - a spirit that goes out of man to interact with the world.

By investing this life energy, this *ruach*, in the heart and in the emotions, Rabbi Twerski taught that the Divine Intention was that human beings would react out of joy, excitement, passion, love, and all good sides of emotions. By extension, Rabbi Twerski also taught that G-d's Intention was that the *ruach mimalala*, the communicating spirit, motivate a person to interact with the world and enrich it with one's gifts. With the *ruach mimalala*, then, G-d invested man with the capacity to give from the rich gifts which every person is endowed by G-d, to radiate those into the

world so that the world can be uplifted by them.

That's why a person is endowed with the ability to sing, the ability to create music, the ability to act, the ability to write, the ability to draw beautiful things - any artistic or creative gift - or, gifts like the ability to comfort or console, or the ability to listen. The expression of these many things by a person can be a product of a heart through which G-d speaks, saying, 'I'm giving you all of these things - bring them into the world, use them in the world.'

Traditional Jewish belief teaches that all of us will be asked by G-d, 'I gave you this quality, this ability - let's see how you used it, let's see how the world became better

because of it...'

That's the essence of 'ruach,' according to Rabbi Twerski, whom we thank for his wisdom.

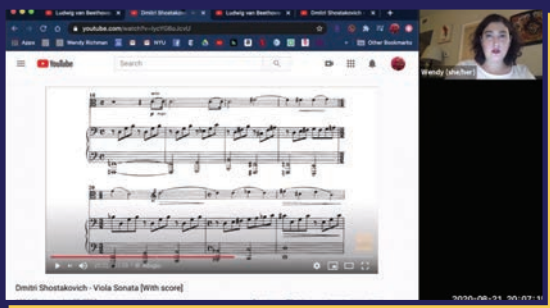
Here at RUACH, we seek to make Sherman Park, and by extension, Greater Milwaukee and beyond, a better place because of our unique programming based on a rich and beautiful Jewish perspective on music and the arts. Please help us to accomplish this mission, in turn, by reaching out and investing generously in us and in our valuable work. In doing so, you will become a partner in a sublime effort to enrich the world through music and the arts, one community at a time.

- Josh Richman

2020-2021 PROGRAM YEAR IN REVIEW

“My students greatly enjoyed the opportunity to hear Jonathan Leshnoff’s original works in *The Composer and Spirituality*. We used his music as an opportunity to explore tempo and melody as we described the music we heard. The students were extremely receptive to a genre of music that is usually different than what they listen to. We very much appreciated being able to work with RUACH and their ability to provide a COVID-friendly way to engage with their programming.”

-Erica Johnson, MPS-General Music Specialist, Elm Creative Arts School



The Composer & Spirituality
Community Outreach



Yeshiva Elementary
School Programs



Arnaud Sussman’s *Jewish Voices*



Sherman Park Arts Festival

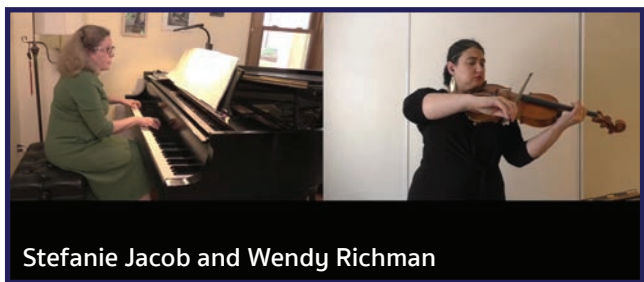


Sherman Park Arts Labs



Recorders Play Jewish Music

The Composer and Spirituality Community Outreach



Stefanie Jacob and Wendy Richman

After the successful premiere of our high-quality, on-demand virtual program, *The Composer and Spirituality: A Musical Investigation*, featuring the GRAMMY-Nominated, Orthodox Jewish composer, Dr. Jonathan Leshnoff, in August 2020, RUACH launched the Community Outreach phase of the initiative in March 2021. We showed the Main Concert Event - highlighting a pre-concert talk and performances of Dr. Leshnoff's compositions and works of composers who inspire him - to public and private schools as well as senior living facilities in the Milwaukee area, including:

- ALBA School
- Elm Creative Arts School
- Jewish Family Services
- Milwaukee Area Technical College
- Milwaukee Jewish Day School
- Mount Mary University
- Ovation Chai Point
- Sherman Multicultural Arts School
- St. John's On The Lake
- The Sam and Helen Stahl Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

In addition to the Main Concert Event, which features the tremendous talents of Jeanyi Kim (Acting Associate Concertmaster (2nd Chair), Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra); Stefanie Jacob (Founding pianist of the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music's Prometheus Trio); and Wendy Richman (Renowned violist and member of the International Contemporary Ensemble), the series also included a virtual "Instrument Petting Zoo" highlighting student musicians from Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra as well as interviews with the performers.

"We viewed the Jonathan Leshnoff, *Composer and Spirituality* virtual concert in my Experiencing Music class on March 1 and thoroughly enjoyed it! Jonathan's music is very interesting and so beautiful. I am still hearing that melody from the second movement of the Yiddish Suite in my head. Gorgeous. Also, it was a wonderful opportunity for the students to hear the composer talk about his works and to become aware of Jewish music. Thank you for providing this terrific learning experience to my class!"

**-Barbara Henry, Music, Movement and Dance
Department Chair & Adjunct Instructor,
Mount Mary University – Milwaukee, WI**

Arnaud Sussman's Jewish Voices



“It was an honor for the Nathan & Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center (HERC) to partner with RUACH and several other organizations to present “Jewish Voices,” featuring violinist Arnaud Sussmann. We found it touching how this renowned talented violinist dedicated this program to the memory of his grandfather, Jacques Sussmann, a Holocaust survivor.

HERC was excited to co-sponsor this program because, through Mr. Sussmann’s descriptions of the lives of each of the Jewish composers and how the Holocaust affected them, he educated our community about these composers and

their music. Programs like this are essential so that we can recognize and honor the memory of these talented and courageous individuals. HERC’s constituents, particularly those with a musical background, were enthusiastic about this program. They expressed that they were very impressed by the quality of the music from these composers and by Mr. Sussmann’s genius as a musician. We look forward to future collaborations together.”

-Kari Altman

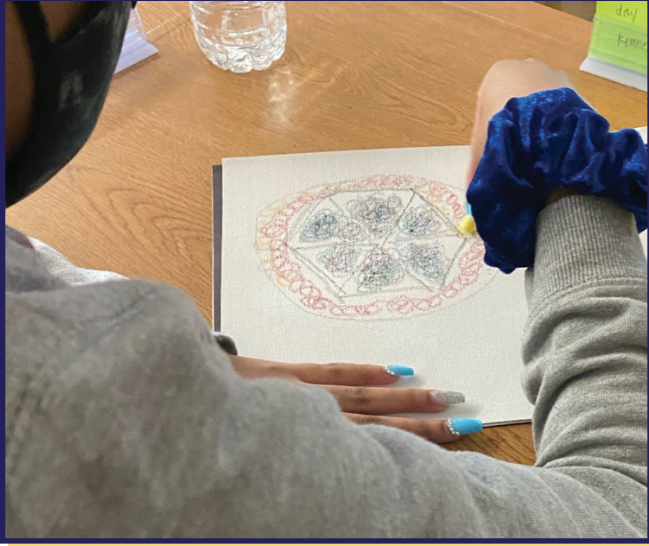
Director of Outreach & Community Programming

Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center

RUACH provided another opportunity for audiences to experience exceptional musical talent virtually this past Spring with our presentation of *Jewish Voices*. The concert, which premiered on May 23rd and was available on-demand the following week, featured French violinist Arnaud Sussmann, who, accompanied by pianist Michael Brown, performed pieces by Holocaust-era Jewish composers whose lives were impacted by the Shoah (Holocaust). Complementing his musical performance, which included remarks by famed composer

and instructor Samuel Adler, Mr. Sussmann spoke about his grandfather’s experience in the Shoah and participated in a live Q&A session with audience members. RUACH was proud to produce this meaningful concert in partnership with the following co-sponsors: The Jewish Home & Care Center Foundation (lead sponsor), Lake Park Synagogue, The Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center (HERC), Congregation Shalom, Mt. Sinai Congregation of Wausau, and Beth Israel Center of Madison.

Sherman Park Arts Labs



The Composer and Spirituality Classroom Experience

RUACH Program Coordinator, Jeremy Borouchoff, taught a two-session virtual class for 3rd through 5th grade students at Sherman Multicultural Arts School in April and May of 2021. This special residency, based on RUACH's *The Composer and Spirituality* series, featured music history/appreciation and visual arts instruction. The class drew their reflections and impressions of two pieces of music featured in the concert, one composed by Jonathan Leshnoff and the other by Dmitri Shostakovich. The student artwork is to be combined with an audio track featuring Leshnoff's "Yiddish Suite" and Shostakovich's "Sonata for Viola and Piano," to create a multi-media video presentation for the Sherman Park community to enjoy.

Sherman Park Arts Labs is RUACH's new intensive arts initiative that utilizes arts in a Jewish context to build cross-cultural understanding and generate joy and hope among school partners in Sherman Park. As schools continued to navigate limitations due to COVID-19, RUACH was able to bring convenient, safe, impactful arts programming to the Sherman Park neighborhood.

Project: VITAL (Values In The Arts & Life)

One of RUACH's longest-standing signature programs, Project: VITAL continued with a special residency teaching students about bullying and the importance of being an upstander, with classroom peer role-playing and the use of puppet-making and puppet shows. The curriculum focused on historical examples of bullying and upstanding from the Holocaust and from Slavery in the United States. The six-session virtual program was held for 53rd Street School and Sherman Multicultural Arts School in Spring 2021.

Yeshiva Elementary School Programs



Since our inception, RUACH has nurtured a special relationship with our core partner, Yeshiva Elementary School (YES), recognizing the importance of providing students who may not otherwise have access to arts programming with high-quality opportunities to explore their creativity. Though COVID-19 limited some of our regular programming, RUACH was able to offer some in-person programming at YES with the gradual reopening of school facilities during our 2020-21 season:

String Institute & Drum Circles

Mrs. Marty Fox, author of RUACH's *Recorders Play Jewish Music* curriculum, conceived of the String Institute, which RUACH administered, and through which 6th-8th grade YES boys participated in an 18-session Mandolin lesson program with artist-educator Guy Fiorentini, who was assisted by YES Secular Studies Teacher, Rabbi Eliezer Cooper. RUACH also facilitated a 9-session Drum Circle program for 3rd grade YES boys taught by long-time RUACH collaborator and well-known Milwaukee artist, Jahmes Finlayson.

Nachas YES, Nachas RUACH

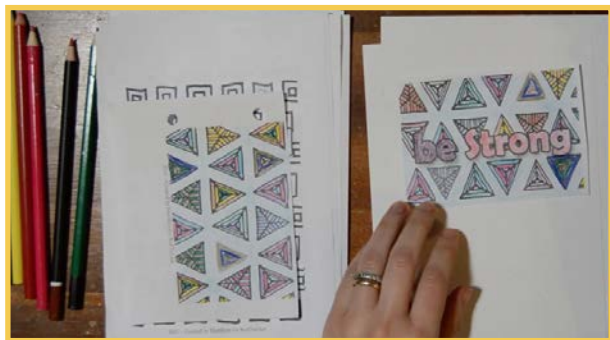
This special 90-minute live performance held at YES on June 10, 2021, was the culmination of String Institute and Drum Circle programming. In addition to performances by proud Mandolin and Drum Circle students, the program also included a student guitar duet by Naftali and Bentzion Fox, and a video performance created in Israel by multi-instrumentalist/vocalist, Dr. Adam Margolis.

“This program is important to us because we are learning how to play an instrument. We really enjoy learning how to play mandolin. Our favorite part is learning new songs. We have learned how to play Beshem Hashem, Asher Bara, David Melech and more. We hope to get better at learning new songs. We also enjoyed performing some songs in front of an audience last year. Another thing we like is when our teacher brings in his guitar and plays along with us, because it makes the music sound better. Finally, this class shows us that you need to work hard but, in the end, the hard work pays off.”

*-Tuvia and Shimon Baumann,
YES Students,
Mandolin Lesson Participants*

Sherman Park Arts Festival

RUACH's Sherman Park Arts Festival made a welcome return this season after its cancellation in 2020 due to COVID-19 disruptions. While the Festival typically includes both a Community Arts Day and a Sherman Park Community Concert, we made the difficult decision to postpone the Community Concert until next season out of an abundance of caution. The 2021 Sherman Park Arts Festival Community Arts Day, which was held virtually, continued the event's tradition of encouraging unity through the arts among all those within the diverse Sherman Park neighborhood. Participants registered in advance to receive a free bag of art supplies that allowed them to complete four different art projects while watching pre-recorded video tutorials available on-demand from March 14th through April 9th. Featured Milwaukee-area artists included Gavi Slutzkin, Yaffa Karan, VIBEZ Creative Arts Space, and Thomas McKinney, Jr.



The Big Blue Bag

The “Big Blue Bag” refers to the blue fabric Sherman Park Arts Festival bags that held the Community Arts Day supplies for each family and that have since been used by many in the community.

The Big Blue Bag is something I see,
Walking through Sherman Park or swimming at the JCC.

In its trademark color of royal blue,
The Big Blue Bag unites us,
At the grocery store, farmers market, doctor’s office
just to name a few.

As neighbors, community members, and friends
working together,
The Big Blue Bag provided materials,
to create fun projects and crafts,
no matter the weather!

The videos were awesome,
allowing each person or family to go at their own pace,
Ensuring the time was well spent,
without the pressure of a race.

The size of the Big Blue Bag
Is larger than you think,
Making space for items and our hearts
Bonding our community through a common link.

While RUACH used The Big Blue Bags
to help us all during quarantine,
Now when we see someone carrying it,
make sure to say hello to another member of the team

- Mrs. Faygie Hellman, Sherman Multicultural Arts School Psychologist, Parent of
Community Arts Day Participants, Yeshiva Elementary School Social-Emotional
Learning Partner



Recorders Play Jewish Music

RUACH continues to make headway in selling *Recorders Play Jewish Music*, our recorder method book written by Mrs. Marty Fox, a long-time, pioneering music educator at Yeshiva Aharon Yaakov/ Ohr Eliyahu in Los Angeles. Destined to be a trailblazer in the fields of Jewish and music education, the book features entirely Jewish music, so that Jewish students are exposed to their own heritage and can pick up the instrument more easily, and so that non-Jewish students can be exposed to the richness

of Jewish tradition and culture. We have piloted this recorder method book with schools in the Milwaukee area, both Jewish and not, to great success, and are now reaching out to other schools across the country.

If you are interested in bringing *Recorders Play Jewish Music* to your school or organization, contact Jeremy Borouchoff, RUACH Program Coordinator, at recorder@ruachmilwaukee.org or (414) 367-4143.

**View our
award-winning
video about
*Recorders Play
Jewish Music!***



The Season Ahead

A Journey Through Jewish Music with the Amernet String Quartet

RUACH will present a new virtual concert event and related programming featuring the Amernet String Quartet, an exceptional ensemble that has been praised for their “intelligence” and “immensely satisfying” playing by *The New York Times*. Premiering in January 2022, and available on-demand into February 2022, the programming will highlight a repertoire that connects the European Jewish experience with that of the Americas.



Photo Credit: Irene Bello

Jewish Voices Outreach

In Spring 2022, we will be revisiting our popular *Jewish Voices* virtual concert featuring acclaimed French violinist Arnaud Sussmann, bringing the program to diverse partner organizations and educational institutions. The concert includes Sussmann’s performance of pieces by Holocaust-era Jewish composers and remarks about his own grandfather’s experience in the Holocaust.

Rubin Sharpe Tribute Series

RUACH is thrilled to resume the Rubin Sharpe Tribute Series virtually this season after a hiatus due to COVID. The series, which is funded by a bequest to the Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation, presents approximately-one-hour Jewish-themed concerts by talented area performers, including musicians from the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, for Ovation Communities residents.

Yiddish Music Series

In partnership with the Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation and Ovation Jewish Home, RUACH brings virtual Yiddish Music concerts to residents at the Helen Bader Center of Ovation Jewish Home with early to mid-stage dementia. The concert series has proven to be therapeutic for many of the residents, helping them to engage and recall warm memories.

Sherman Park Arts Labs

RUACH will continue to grow the Sherman Park Arts Labs intensive arts program with Sherman Park schools this season, offering a menu of program options from which schools can select, including Project: VITAL (Values In The Arts & Life) residencies, concert outreach programs, recorder lessons, mandolin lessons, drum circle classes, and more!

WhoseTorah: Retracing the Journey of G-d and Humanity Throughout History

RUACH plans to launch the WhoseTorah program with adults from Congregation Emanu-El B'Ne Jeshurun in 2022. WhoseTorah uses theater, creative writing, and storytelling to inspire participants to look at their shared history, connect with their heritage, find higher purpose, and learn important life lessons. By developing scripts and engaging in theater and creative writing exercises based on Midrash, Torah, Jewish history, and their contemporary applications, RUACH and the WhoseTorah team—including the Rabbis Twerski and writer Eytan Grinnell of Congregation Beth Jehudah (CBJ), and Rabbi Mendel Metzger of the Sukkat Shalom Institute and CBJ—plan to engage participants of all ages to enact scenes and learn modern day lessons having first examined relevant episodes and experiences of Torah figures in the episode of Joseph and the Brothers.

Fourth Annual Sherman Park Arts Festival

The Sherman Park Arts Festival is RUACH's annual effort to bring Sherman Park neighbors together to create and engage in art, a universal language, in order to strengthen and unite our community. RUACH's 2022 Festival is slated to include:

Community Arts Day

(Tentatively Sunday, March 6, 2022 – Sunday, March 20, 2022):

This virtual program invites families, friends, and neighbors, mostly from the Sherman Park area, to participate in a free two-week community event. On-demand art project videos created by artists, all of whom live or work in the Sherman Park community, engage participants virtually in creating and enjoying arts and crafts.

Sherman Park Community Concert

(Tentatively Sunday, July 10, 2022)

Depending upon COVID-19 developments, the Sherman Park Community Concert will be held in the Sherman Park neighborhood. A top-notch artist is tentatively slated to perform a program of music that celebrates the Black and Jewish experiences.

Storytelling Initiative

RUACH continues to develop its Storytelling Initiative, which delves into various forms of storytelling - including spoken word, theater, music, and visual arts - in an effort to explore common ground in the diverse Sherman Park neighborhood.

Nachas YES, Nachas RUACH Annual Concert

Each year, RUACH hosts a concert featuring music students from Yeshiva Elementary School to showcase students' participation in our arts and music enrichment programs and to bring joy to the wider community.

In Celebration of RUACH's Volunteers

We are forever indebted to all those who have served on RUACH's Board of Directors since the organization's inception. Their generous contributions of time and expertise have been instrumental over the course of our history. Here, we're privileged to recognize a few recent members for their years of service. We also wish to honor the memory of Mrs. Phyllis Lensky, of blessed memory, a dear and loyal Board member, friend and supporter, who passed away in May of 2021.



Jay Frank

After serving more than ten years on RUACH's Board of Directors, eventually taking on the role of President, Jay stepped down from the Board at the end of the 2020-21 season. A registered investment advisor, Jay moved to Milwaukee from Illinois in 1986, and has worked in financial services his entire career. Jay and his wife, Sarah, who preceded Jay on the Board, were among RUACH's first advocates. During RUACH's early days, Jay and

Sarah's children were students at Yeshiva Elementary School, and they realized, just as Josh Richman had at the time, that though the arts are critically important to a child's education, resources for these programs were limited. Without RUACH, he says, so many children would have grown up without exposure to arts skills and appreciation programs. Jay was also particularly interested in the concept of utilizing Jewish arts and music as a way of developing relationships in the uniquely diverse Sherman Park community, noting, "Jewish content isn't just for Jewish people." Jay was particularly fulfilled by his time on the RUACH board because of its diversity. He said, "RUACH was by far the most diverse board I sat on. It allowed for interactions I wouldn't have in any other setting."



Merilou V. Gonzales

Merilou Gonzales, Communications Director at Bader Philanthropies, is a Chicago native, who came to Milwaukee more than 20 years ago, by way of Washington, D.C. Before her time with Bader Philanthropies, Merilou worked for the Greater Milwaukee Committee, and prior to that, with Public Allies in various capacities for more than 15 years. Merilou, who joined the RUACH Board of Directors in 2017-18, views her volunteer role as an opportunity

to help the organization grow and develop, while learning more about the arts and Judaism. For small and humble organizations like RUACH, a "diamond in the rough," she says, Merilou feels that anything is possible. As RUACH expands its programs and deepens its reach, she hopes RUACH will be seen as a leader in the arts community.



Rabbi David Ordan

Rabbi David Ordan, RUACH's current Board President since 2019-20, came to Milwaukee in 2008, and joined the Board in 2015-16, having known Josh Richman and RUACH's work since his arrival in the city. As the Executive Director of the Eisenhower Center, a vocational program for adults with disabilities, Rabbi Ordan brings considerable nonprofit expertise to his volunteer work with RUACH. Drawn to RUACH because of its service to schools, he recognizes the importance of providing

arts enrichment, especially amid school budget cuts, which often result in reductions in arts programming. Rabbi Ordan also appreciates RUACH's efforts to reach across different communities to bring the spirit of music and the arts to people of all kinds. During his time on RUACH's Board, Rabbi Ordan has enjoyed working to streamline governance processes and is excited to help the organization achieve even more targeted Board participation. He encourages others to become a part of the RUACH community: "The more people that can get involved in spreading the word about what RUACH's doing in the community, the better. We welcome people from all over to get involved!"

RUACH Tribute to Phyllis Lensky, of blessed memory, by her children



Book of Life signing with the Jewish Community Foundation of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation

Born in 1936, Phyllis Lensky, of blessed memory, grew up on the South side of Milwaukee where her father owned a drug store. Her parents, Sophie and Louis Kaplan, made sure she had Jewish connections and sent her to Hebrew/Sunday School at Congregation Beth El. Junior and senior high school in a new home on the West side provided more opportunities to enhance her Jewish connections. This also marked the beginning of her volunteerism as she became first a member and later president of her BBG group (B'nai B'rith Girls, a Jewish girls' youth organization). College introduced Phyllis to many new Jewish friends where she became president of her dorm. She graduated from UW-Madison in 1958 as an Occupational Therapist, and in 1986 she received a Master's degree. In the summer of 1958

Phyllis was set up on a blind date with Harry Lensky, an attorney, the man who became her husband a year later.

IN CELEBRATION OF RUACH'S VOLUNTEERS

While busy with their careers and raising their two children, volunteerism became a big part of their lives. Harry served as president of the Board of Jewish Education, Congregation Beth Israel, and Jewish Family and Children's Service. Phyllis found her niche in National Council of Jewish Women, Congregation Beth Israel, the Liver Foundation, and short-term assignments with VNA (Visiting Nurse Association), AARP, and other community organizations. She expanded her activities to include Congregation Anshe Sfard Kehillat Torah (ASKT), the archives of the Jewish Museum Milwaukee (JMM), and RUACH. It was the most natural thing in the world for Phyllis and Harry to give and share what they had.

In 2003, seven and a half years after a liver transplant, Harry died. The years since then changed Phyllis's life in many ways. She joined a new synagogue, ASKT, which provided her with a wonderful Shabbat (Jewish Sabbath) community as well as support during times of illness and distress. And of course, she became a valued volunteer at ASKT, spearheading the creation and production of a yearly calendar and co-chairing the Adult Education committee.

After living her whole life in Milwaukee, Phyllis seemed to know everyone in the Jewish community! As one of the most active volunteers for many years in the archives, Phyllis identified people and places in hundreds of unlabeled photos -- often adding a story or two about the people in the photo. Her deep knowledge of the Milwaukee community assisted JMM staff and researchers when more information was needed about an event, person, or business, or to assist a family seeking information about relatives.

After spending many winters in Florida, Phyllis decided that traveling was too difficult even though she was not looking forward to Milwaukee winters. As a social and outgoing people person, she knew that living alone in her condo would be too isolating, so she made the decision to move to Chai Point. Not only did she make new friends at Chai Point and ingratiate herself to people there, but she also edited their bulletins, helped conform menus to Jewish holidays, and started a welcome program for new residents. She very quickly became the "Captain" of Chai Point!

Phyllis had a deep appreciation for the arts. In addition to having subscriptions to the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and the ballet, she was part of a writing group and wrote many personal memoirs. Although she cut back on many of her volunteer commitments because she was too busy, when approached about being on the Board of RUACH she could not say no. Obviously RUACH meant a great deal to her, and she greatly appreciated what they provided to the community -- and especially to the residents at Chai Point.

Phyllis was a loving daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. She was kind, caring and supportive to her family and friends. She related to people and understood them and had a strong moral compass. At times her opinions might be hard to hear but she always said what was on her mind with thoughtfulness and respect. At times she could be a force with which to reckon! She had a great sense of humor, and was spunky, fun, lively and friendly. She overcame many obstacles and challenges in her life but always found the strength to cope, the ability to adapt, and a way to make the best of a situation. She engaged life on its terms. Phyllis touched many lives in many places and was an inspiration to all who knew her. She will be missed by many people.

THANK YOU RUACH DONORS!

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