

# Limmud

## “Black-Jew Dialogues” entertains & educates

By MARTIN ZEILIG

“We have to face the fact that either all of us are going to die together or we are going to learn to live together, and if we are to live together we have to talk.”

Eleanor Roosevelt At its core *The Black-Jew Dialogues*, which opened the Limmud Festival of Jewish Learning at the Berney Theatre before a crowd of over 100 people on March 2, is about human dignity and anything which compromises that dignity.

This fast paced social justice comedy featured Emmy Award winner Ron Jones and veteran performer Larry Jay Tish, the show's co-creators, who received a standing ovation at the end. The play, which combines sketches, improvisations, multi-media, puppets and a game show, explores, as the two playwrights/performers have written, “the history and absurdity of racism” within the context of the U.S. Black and Jewish experience.

“We’re trying to promote a dialogue,” said actor/writer/producer/director Jones, 50, who grew up in Washington, D.C. but now lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, during an interview on stage immediately after the performance.

“It’s a diversity program. We usually have discussions with the audience afterwards (although not in Winnipeg). We also do workshops around cultural diversity.”

Tish and Jones created the concept after spending three days together in a cheap hotel room discussing their own religious and cultural experiences, stereotyping, fear, social justice, and how much they and their people have in common, said Tish, 52, a resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who, along with his wife of 25 years, Robin Tish, has a 17 year old daughter, Ana.

Jones and Tish have performed hundreds of shows since *Black-Jew Dialogues* first opened in 2006.



RON JONES (left) and LARRY JAY TISH performing *The Black-Jew Dialogues*

“The vast majority of our performances are in colleges around the U.S. (but also some in Canada too),” said Tish, adding that he and Jones also have taken their play to the Fringe Festival in London, Ontario, as well as being part of the Canadian Organization for Campus Activities.

He emphasizes that the play finds humour in everything from the Jewish involvement in the Dutch slave trade to octogenarian grandmothers singing and dancing about the joys of soul food and Jewish comfort food.

“Ignorance leads to a lot of the things that lead to division (amongst people),” said the garrulous Jones, a graduate of Boston College, who served in the U.S. Army for 13 years.

He then observed that other Afro-Americans would sometimes say to him “Why are you speaking so white” - in reference to his eloquence.

The play also deals with the inception of the N.A.A.C.P. to Black newspapers being first in decrying the abuse of Jews in Nazi Germany to the U.S. civil rights movement.

“Blacks and Jews have been arm-in-arm in their fight for social justice,” stressed Tish, who also presented a reading of his one-man show, *Happy Birthday First Born Son* - which is a humorous and poignant portrait of a son and his Jewish mother-at Limmud.

“Through laughter, honesty, conversation (and a little nosh), *The Black-Jew Dialogues* is our attempt to revive this all-important union.”

Added Jones: “My orientation has always been that people are people. The show to me is a testament to an ongoing and not always easy dialogue about our differences. Larry and I have had some very difficult moments with each other. Our relationship has been like a rollercoaster. But, the show has acted as a catalyst to not give up on each other.”

That’s a good message for everyone.

## Jewish Life in Brazil

By BERNIE BELLAN

A recent immigrant to Winnipeg, Rubens Bader (who arrived here on the memorable date of September 11, 2009) is a congenial fellow who is instantly likeable.



RUBENS BADER

Although he was apologetic for his lack of total fluency in English, Bader was able to communicate his love for his native land of Brazil. As he told his own story how he and his family happened to emigrate to Winnipeg, I would have liked to have heard more about his own experience in coming here and spent less time watching what must have been a home movie of a Jewish wedding in Brazil. (Bader did offer some interesting tidbits about how much Brazilian Jews like to party. They typically party into the wee hours of the morning - 4 a.m., he said, and often end up having breakfast before going home. Women also change into white blouses so as not to show sweat stains, as well as doffing their high heels in favour of sensible dance shows. Sounds intelligent, I’d say)

As far as his own situation is concerned, Bader noted that he is both a Civil Engineer and holder of a degree in Business Administration, yet he is currently employed as a screening officer at Winnipeg’s Richardson Airport. (It will be interesting to revisit Bader’s situation in a few years to see whether he’s moved into an occupation more appropriate to his qualifications.)

Describing his home life in Brazil, Bader said that “Jewish life in Brazil is good. We never, ever experience any bad things in Brazil. People are nice to us.”

There are 110,000 Jews in Brazil, Bader noted (compared with 180,000 in neighbouring Argentina). Sao Paulo is home to the world’s largest Jewish community centre - a centre so vast that it holds two Olympic-sized swimming pools, eight gymnasiums, tennis courts, and has 22,000 associates.

Someone in the audience asked Bader why, if life in Brazil is so good for Jews there, he left?

The answer, he said, is the constant threat of violence that has resulted from the vast class disparities that exist in that country. The gap between the very poor and the very wealthy is so much wider than in Canada that people live in fear in Brazil - not however, as he insisted, because of one’s ethnicity, but because of one’s socio-economic status.




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For more info contact Izzy Clark, Rady JCC Youth Coordinator at 204-477-7547 or [iclark@radyjcc.com](mailto:iclark@radyjcc.com)