

The National Yiddish Book Center, Amherst

Photos and text by Jerrey Roberts

The National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst hosted the Grumbling Gryphons' production of "The Magic Dreidel: A Celebration of Chanukah!" last Sunday, the first day of the Jewish holiday.

The show was dedicated to the late Frances Saed of Amherst, who was a docent at the center and a member of the Young@Heart Chorus. Saed died in May. Her son, Larry Saed, played parts in the show along with his sons, Arieh and Daniel. His wife, Leslie Elias, co-founded the Grumbling Gryphons, a traveling children's theater, 33 years ago.

Local children and adults were invited to join the performance.

Younger children made candleheaddresses to wear for their small parts while older children and adults donned full costumes and joined the professionals for an hour-long rehearsal that ended near curtain time.

Peter Kassis of Northampton was there with his children, Noah, 10, and Haliyah, 5. He said Noah loves theater and has been performing for four years as a member of Starlight Theater, a children's company based in Sunderland.

Dagen Julty of Greenfield, formerly known in the Pioneer Valley as Happy Dan the Music Man, was invited by director Elias and Anna Sobel to take part in the show, which he did, taking on the roles of a pig and an elephant.

Sobel, a puppeteer, actor and Jewish storyteller who lives in Sunderland, had a major role in the performance, while her husband, Brian Bender, provided music with the Yiddishkeit Klezmer Band.

Josh Speiser, a resident of Washington, D.C., who was in Massachusetts visiting his parents, was there with his sons, Felix and Seamus. It was his first time at the center and he said he thought it would be nice to see it during Hanukkah.

Deirdre Bonifaz of Amherst, who said she loves the book center and calls it "my temple," watched as her granddaughter, Marisol Pierce-Bonifaz, 6, performed. Her daughter, Lissa Pierce-Bonifaz, said she thinks the center and its programs are "a great way for people who aren't Jewish to learn about the traditions."

To suggest a subject for Your Time, contact Suzanne Wilson at swilson@gazettenet.com.

"How cool is that? I come to see the show and I get to be a pig and an elephant."

— Dagen Julty



1. From left, Carol Leven, Larry Saed, Arieh Saed, Leslie Elias, Nicholas Jacobs, Anna Sobel 2. Carol Leven, Noah Friedman-Kassis, Seamus Speiser 3. Nicholas Jacobs 4. Leslie Elias, Noah Friedman-Kassis 5. Leslie Elias, Vanessa Roe, Arieh Saed 6. Jason Stump, Vanessa Roe, Carol Leven 7. Felix Speiser, Josh Speiser 8. Haliyah Friedman-Kassis, Marisol Pierce-Bonifaz