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The Role of Amateur Theatre *King David* in the Preservation of Jewish Culture and Tradition

This work focuses on the role of the amateur theatre *King David*, founded in 1986 with the Jewish community of Belgrade, in the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage and establishing of intercultural dialogue primarily on the microlevel of a neighbourhood, but also within a wider community framework.¹ Over the last thirty years the theatre has been devotedly run by one person, Mirijam Salom, who also writes play scripts, makes song arrangements and directs plays. Members of the theatre group are mostly primary and secondary school children and university students. The fact that most of them are not actually of Jewish but of Serbian descent is a sort of a phenomenon. In this way, the theatre has an educational role in presenting Jewish culture primarily to the young people who actively participate in plays and consequently to their family members and the Belgrade audience. One of the aims of this research is to give some answers to questions concerning the role of the theatre in the lives of the young people who take part in it as well as the reception of the plays with the audience.

Key words: amateur theatre *King David*, Jews, Jewish community of Belgrade, cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue.

Улога аматерског позоришта *Краљ Давид* у очувању јеврејске културе и традиције

У фокусу интересовања овог рада налази се улога аматерског позоришта *Краљ Давид*, основаног 1986. године при Јеврејској општини у Београду, у очувању јеврејске традиције и успостављању међукултуралног дијалога, првенствено на микролокалном нивоу суседства, али и у оквирима шире друштвене заједнице. Ово позориште током протеклих тридесет година пожртвовано води једна особа, Миријам Салом, која пише сценарије, аранжира песме и режира представе. Чланови позоришне групе су претежно деца основношколског узраста, средњошколци и студенти. Својеврсан феномен представља чињеница да већина њих нису јеврејског, већ српског порекла. Тако ово позориште има едукативну улогу о јеврејској култури првенствено међу младим људима који активно учествују у представама, а затим и шире, међу члановима њихових породица и београдском публиком. Један од циљева истраживања

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је да одговори на питања у вези са улогом овог позоришта у животима младих који у њему учествују, као и о рецепцији представа код гледалаца.

Кључне речи: аматерско позориште *Краљ Давид*, Јевреји, Јеврејска општина Београда, традиција, међукултурални дијалог.

Introduction

This work focuses on the amateur theatre *King David* founded in 1986 within the Jewish Community of Belgrade (Serbia), its role in the preservation of Jewish tradition and establishing of intercultural dialogue, primarily on the microlocal level of a neighbourhood, but also within a wider community framework. This work is based on my own field research which was conducted in Belgrade in the period from January 2015 to December 2016.²

In the research I used the method of observation with participation which meant being present both at rehearsals and plays of the amateur theatre *King David*, the method of in-depth interview and free conversations with the theatre members, especially with the parents of the school children playing in this theatre.

While conducting the research, I tried to give some answers to questions related to the role of the *King David* theatre in the lives of young people who participate in its work, but also to the reception of the plays with the viewers. Special attention is paid to the role of the founder and leader of the theatre, Mirijam Salom from Belgrade, in preserving, creating and conveying Jewish culture and tradition as well as maintaining social connections on the neighbourhood level and wider.

The Jewish community in Belgrade

Regarding the determining of the date of when Jews first came and inhabited the territory of today's Belgrade there is a disagreement on the matter among different authors. The earliest written information on Jews in Belgrade dates from the mid-tenth century. Those were the Romaniote Jews who spoke the Greek language (Hrabak 2009, 6–15). The Ashkenazi Jews from Central Europe and Hungary, Yiddish speakers, as well as Italophonic Jews from Italy, found refuge in Belgrade (Sorić 1988, 124; Vlahović 1994, 162; Hrabak 2009, 25). As a result of religious persecutions conducted by the Inquisition in 15th century the Sephardi Jews who spoke Ladino moved from Spain and Portugal (Vlahović 1994, 162; Vučina Simović, Filipović 2009, 41). The Belgrade Jewish community became larger after the Ottoman conquest of the city in 1521 (Hrabak 2009, 24). The settlement of Sephardic Jews, which most likely originates from the first half of the 16th century, was situated in today's Dorćol, on the banks of the Danube and it was called *Jalija*

² I would very much like to thank everyone who took part in this research and without whose kind help it would have been impossible to write the work. I owe special thanks to Mrs Mirijam Salom, the theatre's founder.

(Hrabak 2009, 6) after the Turkish word *jaly*³. Tihomir Đorđević states that at the beginning of the 19th century, during Prince Miloš's reign, Jews lived in a separate *Jewish Mala* (Đorđević 1923, 203–204).

Belgrade Jews kept their identity through the work of their own institutions such as schools, judiciary, self-management of municipalities, and primarily by practicing religious rituals and cherishing patriarchal way of life (Hrabak 2009, 6–9). Within Belgrade Sephardic community, which had its own serf, religious and secular life was first organised in the middle of the 16th century. The municipality represented Jewish community before the state authorities both during the Ottoman reign and after the liberation (Đorđević 1923, 205). Belgrade Jewish community became an official institution in 1866 (Vučina Simović, Filipović 2009, 73).

Turbulent history of Belgrade and Serbian society as a whole influenced the life and development of Belgrade Jewish community. Regarding this, since the volume of this study does not allow a comprehensive and detailed review of the ups and downs in the life of Belgrade Jewish community, only the most significant moments will be mentioned here. Belgrade went through large-scale destruction during the Austrian occupation in 1688 and the Jewish mahala was burnt down. During the 18th century Belgrade survived two more Austrian occupations when all of its residents suffered, including the Jews (Veselinović 1974, 473). The quality of life of the Jewish community improved at the beginning of the 19th century, during the first government of Prince Miloš (1815–1839) (Veselinović 1974, 523–584).

According to the census conducted shortly before World War II, about 10.000 Jews lived in Belgrade. According to some estimates, 80% were Sephardim and 20% were Ashkenazi Jews (Popović 1997; Čvorović, Nikolić 2015, 299; Blagojević 2016, 342). Jewish community in Serbia was almost completely destroyed in the Holocaust during the German occupation in World War II (Ristović 2010; Čvorović, Nikolić 2015, 300–301). More than a half of the surviving Jews moved out into the newly formed state of Israel in the period from 1948 to 1952 (Čvorović, Nikolić 2015, 302). Nowadays, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia is an institution which connects all Jewish communities on the territory of Serbia. This community has 3300 members. Within the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia there is also the Jewish community of Belgrade (Jewish community Belgrade 2016; Blagojević 2016, 342). According to census 2011, 787 Jews live in Serbia, mostly Sephardic Jews. (Census 2012; Blagojević 2016, 342).

Theatrical traditions with the Jews in Yiddish and Judaeo-Spanish language

The destruction of Jerusalem temple approximately 2000 years ago forced the rabbinic authorities to limit musical performances only to specific occasions

³ Turkish word *jaly* means sea or river bank and/or unoccupied area, wasteland (Vučina Simović, Filipović 2009, 64)

such as worships, weddings and the celebration of the feast of Purim (Jacobson 2003, 5). The Biblical story of Esther was traditionally shown as a Purim theatre play, the so-called *purimshpil* which included singing as a rule.⁴ In the late 19th century this kind of a play was shown several times a year, apart from the feast of Purim (Jacobson 2003, 5).

The 19th century brings the development of the theatre in Yiddish with the Ashkenazi and in the Judaeo-Spanish language, i.e. Ladino, with the Sephardic Jews. According to current knowledge, the oldest plays in Yiddish were written in Germany. At the beginning of the 18th century a play „Sale of Joseph“ by Baerman Limburg was published in Frankfurt on the Main (Gottheil, Wiernik 2016). However, Avrohom Goldfaden (1840-1908) is considered to be the father of contemporary Jewish Yiddish theatre, a Russian-born Jewish artist, poet, folk singer, songwriter, playwright, stage director and actor in the languages Yiddish and Hebrew, author of some 40 plays. Goldfaden wrote, directed and promoted his own plays. In 1876 he started the first professional Yiddish-language theatre troupe in Yashi, Romania who performed plays throughout the year (Berkowitz 2004, 10–19). Apart from dramatic arts, Goldfaden also taught the ideas of Enlightenment to the Jews (Sandrow 2003, 10). Soon a lot of similar troupes were founded, mostly by former Goldfaden's actors who had abandoned him (Sandrow 2003, 11). By the 1883 imperial decree the work of Yiddish theatre was forbidden, which was only one of the ways in which the Yiddish culture was being repressed. This contributed to a „mobile“ way of theatre life (Sandrow 2003, 12). „Family troupes were very common, as they existed for centuries in different languages, throughout Europe and America [...] it was also natural for actors and actresses, constantly together and constantly wandering, isolated from normal society, to marry among themselves. So a second generation of Yiddish actors grew up in theater trunks“ (Sandrow 2003, 11 - 12). As a result of emigration of Yiddish-speaking Jews throughout Europe, America and Africa, Goldfaden's plays became classical (Sandrow 2003, 13). It was to Goldfaden's credit that the first play in the Hebrew language was performed in the United States of America (Sandrow 2003, 9).

Regarding the Sephardic theatre, i.e. the theatre in Judaeo-Spanish Ladino language, a study in three volumes by Elena Romero „El teatro de los sefardies orientales“ stands out in particular. It was published in 1979 in Madrid and it mentions 684 plays, some of which were written in Judaeo-Spanish language, while others were translated into it or written by the Sephardic Jews in other languages (Turkish, French, and Hebrew). Most of these plays were published in the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. These plays were performed in Sephardic communities throughout Turkey, on the Balkans and in the Middle East (Angel 1981, 183). Judaeo-Spanish plays started showing in the late 1860s in Istanbul, Izmir and Edirne. The Jewish theatre in Salonika was founded in the 1880s (Kerem 1996, 31–45). These plays presented themes from Jewish religious life (Purim plays, Joseph and his brothers theme, etc.), but also the ones dealing with eve-

⁴ More about the feast of Purim and Purim plays see in (Rubenstein 1992, 247-277; Blagojević 2016, 336-339).

ryday problems. The repertoire contained both comedies and tragedies, as well as monologues. Some plays depict conflicts between traditional religious values and modernism (Angel 1981, 183–184). At the beginning of the 20th century some plays with political backing were performed in Salonika by members of Zionist and Socialist movements. Thus the theatre led the way towards the opening and secularization of the Jewish community (Angel 1981, 183–184).

Judeo-Spanish theatre also existed in the USA in New York, Atlanta, Rochester, Portland, Seattle, etc. Some of the plays were written on the American soil (Angel 1981, 185). According to Joshua Jacobson, in the 20th century Jews were dominant in the musical theatre in America (Jacobson 2003, 5).

In the Balkans, the Sephardic theatre scene in Sarajevo and Belgrade stood out in particular with its work. Abraham Kapon (1853-1930), a playwright from Sarajevo, was a Jew born in Bulgaria. His plays *Šilat Cion (Povratak u domovinu)* i *Hechizadores (Delatnici)* were performed in Ladino at the Sarajevo National Theatre and in inland Bosnian towns (Palavestra 1998, 82). Another author, Šabetaj Josef Ćaen (1883-1946), who also came from Bulgaria, founded a Jewish showboat while staying in Bosnia. Ćaen lived in different places all over the Balkans and he died as a rabi in Argentina (Palavestra 1998, 83). In 1922 he published three plays in Vienna which were written in Ladino (*Debora, Daughter of the Sun and Jeftaj*). He wrote a series of plays, some of which were played in Serbian or in Ladino by the group *Maks Nordau* for the Jewish audience in Belgrade and Sarajevo (Palavestra 1998, 83).

Laura Papo Boroheta (1891-1942) was born in Sarajevo. She went by the name of Luna Levi and became the most popular and prolific writer who wrote in Judeo-Spanish in XX century (Palavestra 1998, 83–84). Apart from writing plays, short stories, songs, she also collected folklore goods of the Sephardic Jews in Bosnia by recording their customs, proverbs, sayings, romances, etc. (Palavestra 1998, 84). In her literary work she wrote about life in Sarajevo Sephardic community. Boroheta's plays were popular with the Sephardic audience not only in Sarajevo, but also in towns all over Bosnia and Serbia where there were Jewish communities. They were played mostly by amateur troupes like the drama section of the Jewish workers' association *Matatja*, founded in 1923 in Sarajevo (Palavestra 1998, 53). This workers' association cherished left wing ideas, which according to Palavestra inspired many Sarajevo Jews to join the Partisan resistance movement during World War II (Palavestra 1998, 53). Between 1930 and 1940 about ten Boroheta's plays were performed in Ladino mostly at the Jewish centre in Sarajevo. Boroheta's plays were translated into Serbian and shown on stage of the National Theatre in Sarajevo, Kolarac National University and the National Theatre in Belgrade (Palavestra 1998, 85).

In Belgrade, in the 1920s and 1930s the Jewish educational society *Maks Nordau* had a notable role in the theatre industry (Demajo 1938–1939, 49–55; Palavestra 1998, 53). One of its founders was David Alabala (1886–1942), a doctor and politician who took part in the founding of the Local Zionist Organisation. Alabala

is the author of two theatre plays, *Erev Jom Kipur* (1924) and *Crisis* (Gaon 2011, 6–7).

The amateur theatre *King David*

For the last thirty years the amateur theatre *King David* at the Belgrade Jewish community has been led by Mirijam Salom, a professor of English, whose volunteer work is truly self-sacrificing (Fig. 1). The activities of the theatre group are primarily directed towards working with young people, children in primary and secondary schools and university students (Blagojević 2016, 351). For decades now a Children's Club has been working on Saturdays and Sundays within the Belgrade Jewish community, where they have Jewish culture, tradition and history classes, etc. In mid 1980s Mirijam Salom started preparing various skits and plays in these classes with the children (Fig. 2). Belgrade rabbi Isak Asiel, a student at the time, played the piano as an accompanist in the rehearsals. It was his suggestion to start an amateur theatre within Belgrade Jewish community. Twenty children were enrolled in the first year. Taking part in the activities is free. Apart from that, the children who play in the theatre have free English classes within the Belgrade Jewish community sections taught by Mirijam Salom.

Mirijam Salom was born in Belgrade in 1950. She wanted to become an actress but her father disapproved. She finished Music High School. At the University of Belgrade she studied applied art, textile major (graduated in 1974) and at the same time the English language and literature (graduated in 1976). For many years she dealt with standard and latino dances, as well as Jewish folk dances. She was an amateur actress at the cultural artistic associations Krsmanac and Abrašević and also at the „Teatar levo“. She was a secretary director on television for musical programmes from 1976 till 1977. All these experiences have been of great help in her work with children and preparing of plays.

Ethnically, theatrical groups at the Belgrade Jewish community are mixed, with a lot of children who do not have Jewish background and come from Serbian families. In this way, the theatre becomes a missionary of Jewish culture at a certain dimension. Even the children who come only to English classes often learn to sing songs their friend prepare for plays and in this way learn about Jewish culture. Mirijam Salom also brought her students from a nearby primary school „Kralj Petar“ to the theatre at the Jewish community.

There are three age groups within the theatre: the youngest, age 5 to 14, medium 15 to 35 and a senior group. Today there are 25 children and about ten senior members at the theatre. The oldest member is 70 years old. Gender structure is balanced, half of the members are male and the other half are female.

At first, Mirijam Salom organised an amateur theatre within the drama sections of Belgrade primary schools where she used to work, „Marija Bursač“ in the period 1976-78, and from 1979-2015 at „Kralj Petar“ school. In the early 1980s, the drama club at „Kralj Petar“ primary school gathered the largest number of children, about 150. According to Salom, those children were very talented and interested in

the plays so she did some of the plays, along with a few musicals which had several mass scenes, in the English language. One of those plays was, for example, *Once upon a time in the West*. Apart from playing cowboys, the children sang and danced cowboy dances choreographed like the ones in American films. Then there were *Rapunzel and the wickedest witch*, *Black foot hospital*, *Cinderella*, and a musical *Boyfriend*.

Actors from Belgrade theatres helped Salom in preparing some of the shows. For example, not only did she get the scenario and the libretto for the musical *Boyfriend* from the Belgrade Theatre on Terazije, but two actresses who worked there at the time, Danica Maksimović and Tanja Bošković, also helped her to prepare the play teaching Mirijam and the children how to do step-dancing among other things.

The greatest success was a play *Shakespeare for all the ages*, performed in the late 1980s. Salom was the author of the play which represents a certain kind of collage, a review of Shakespeare's plays, who was her favourite writer. The concept of the play is such that it shows different stages of life of this writer through different characteristic parts of his plays. About fifty children up to age 14 participated in the play. According to Salom,

„the scenography for the play was a great challenge. There was a slide show in the background with pictures from plays, courts etc. There was singing and dancing in the play. Dragan Mladenović from the band "Renesans" taught the children to dance minuets etc“.

At the republic competition "Zvezdarijada" in 1986 in Belgrade this play won 8 first awards – for the best director, scenography, best actors, etc. Salom says that with the later generations she could not repeat the show because "children do not have patience to learn the old English language“.

For the theatre at the Jewish community Mirijam Salom writes her own screenplays, directs plays and makes song arrangements. In a way, this is a tradition in Jewish theatre. As we have seen, the creator of Yiddish theatre Goldfaden also did all these activities (Sandrow 2003, 9).

According to her words:

„children learn about tradition, history, the Bible at the theatre. They are mainly motivated by socializing and travels“ (Fig. 3).

The theatre has performed over twenty different plays and children's plays. They especially promote different Biblical themes and works of Jewish authors in their repertoire. Every year for Jewish holidays Hanukkah and Purim plays are prepared with special care. Sometimes also for Yom Kippur and Tu BiShvat (Frutas).

Mirijam has written ten different versions of the play for Hanukkah, based on the Isaac Singer's story *A Hanukkah Eve in Warsaw*. Apart from that, so far she has done about eight different versions of the Purim children's play, adapting it according to the *contemporary requirements*:

„there are some old children's plays but they are not scenic enough for the children growing up in modern times“ (Fig. 4).

The play is presented as a musical, it lasts an hour and a half and it is very difficult for school children who act by singing Sephardic melodies, dance and do different acrobatic stunts. Mirijam Salom is the author of plays: *A Great Miracle in Schmuël Workshop*, based on Isaac Singer's work, it takes place in Poland, winter ambient. At the beginning of the 1990s she did a Biblical story *Joseph and his brothers* as a musical with music composed by the American composer Andrew Webber Lloyd (it lasts an hour and a half). The oldest group performs her plays *Solomon and Saba* and *Adam and Eve* (Fig. 5). Mirijam is especially fond of a musical *The Secret of granny Rosa's casket* (Fig. 6), which was performed several times at Purim. *Exodus* is a choredrama by Mirjam Salom. It conjures one of the most important events from the Bible - the Exodus of the Jews who were slaves in Egypt for many years, led by Moses. The performers recite the lines from Solomon's and David's psalms and dance.

The repertoire also includes works of some other authors like *Mirjam's hair* and *A Blue Jew* by Isak Samokovlija's, *At home is the worst* (Fig. 7) by Ephraim Kishon and musical *Wedding licence* (music for this play was composed by Alfi Kabiljo, Croatian composer). *Fiddler on the Roof*, a musical by Jerry Bock, is very popular with different generations of actors, who love performing it (Fig. 8, 9, 10).

A play by Laura Papo Boroheta, *La Pasensia vale mucho (Patience is Golden)*, was performed in Ladino language (Fig. 11). The play is about a typical poor Jewish family's life in Sarajevo at the beginning of 20th century. This play was officially praised by the Israeli government for the cherishing of the Ladino language, which is almost completely forgotten nowadays. It is especially significant since plays in Ladino are rarely performed globally, and in Belgrade school children played it. Mirijam says that the generation of young actors fifteen years ago was very talented:

„I encouraged them to speak naturally, as it were their mother tongue. We practiced elocution, a distinct pronunciation of quentions, etc. Children love Spanish. Later on, they used the phrases from the play in their own communication“.

At the theatre's thirtieth jubilee in autumn 2016 they performed a play *Nobody's Luggage* by Erik Kobol at the Belgrade theatre „Reks“ (Fig. 12).

Mirijam endeavours to make the plays interesting both for the actors and the audience, which in this case implies a lot of movements and singing. Children learn elocution, stage movements, dancing and singing. In their plays they often use Sephardic songs combined with Serbian old city songs.

Due to a long-term bad economic situation in Serbia, the working conditions at the theatre are very modest. However, the enthusiasm and talent of the participants make it possible for the plays to be performed even with a reduced decor, props and costumes. It is necessary to mention the contribution of the parents, who help on different levels and according to their own liability: they create and sew costumes, help make the decor, help with the lightning, make-up, etc. Many people do volunteer work at the theatre. Ljiljana Lazić-Dragović, a religious education teacher at music high school “Mokranjac” has been a piano accompanist for many

years. The scenographer is Mirjana Lehner–Dragić, an academic painter. The theatre has a number of associates who help with stage movements and choreography (Ana Torbica, Radmila Milovanov, Ružica Stanković, Vesna Bai, Đurđa Makrovska, Lana Pavlović, Marija Šormas, Jasna Mijajilović).

Before Yugoslavia fell apart in the 1990s, the theatre had performed in many Jewish communities throughout all its former territory. Today, apart from performing plays at the great hall of the Jewish communities of Belgrade, they also play when called to visit other Jewish communities in Serbia as well as other appropriate institutions, for example, Belgrade theatres “Vuk Karadžić” and “Duško Radović” and different Belgrade schools.

The lack of financial aids prevents them from travelling more. They visited Sofia (Bulgaria) several times and performed there at the festival of Sephardic culture “Esperanza” in period 1998-2002. Their performance of the play *Ana Frank* on the island of Hvar, Croatia, was remarkable. According to Salom, they always got a positive reaction from the audience, both at home, in the building of the Jewish community of Belgrade and during their visits. They were visiting a lot with the play *Golem* by Haplern Leivick.

They perform regularly in Kladovo at the annual Jewish festival organised on May 1, which lasts four days. It is a great opportunity for all Jews on the territory of former Yugoslavia to gather. Within this festival Salom holds acting workshops for different ages, but mostly for seniors. They were on television several times. However, Mirijam says that she doesn't look forward much to these appearances on television because

„the main point is for children to learn through the theatre and not to chase after momentary popularity“.

Viewed diachronically, certain differences in the work of the theatre can be noticed, first in the Yugoslav period, secondly, during the 1990s when Yugoslavia was falling apart and finally in the period from 2000 until today. In the Yugoslav period religious themes were not brought out, as Mirijam salom says „everything was moderate. We had no problems. Everything was accepted well“. It is interesting that in this Yugoslav period there were more plays than in later periods. Salom explains it is because children are „busier“ today, they have more responsibilities: „they have to take up everything, music, sport, foreign languages“. On the other hand, „children were better singers earlier, they did not feel restrained. Today's children always check their watches waiting for the rehearsals to be over. Earlier, children used to stay three hours at the rehearsals. The cleaning ladies used to throw us out of the room! Children had more respect for acting in the 1980s. They were enchanted by films and went to the cinema more often. Today, computers are used for everything and there is no contact with the big screen and the stage. As if their feelings are blunted. They only read school readers and only when they have to. This change is noticeable since the mid 1990s. Today's children are like robots, the automated generation“. Many children who used to take part in the work of the *King David* theatre later enrolled in the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade and

graduated from it, like for example, Stefan Buzurović, Tašana Đorđević, Milica Mihajlović, Marjana Mičić, etc.

For Mirijam, the greatest reward for her several decades long work at the theatre is constantly being in contact with a large number of children. She says:

„I find great pleasure in working with children and watching them act well. I myself did not have support from my family to pursue acting at the theatre. It bothered them to see me investing so much time and energy in those children instead of dealing with them. However, that is not important. It is essential to love what you do. Then you live a happy life now and here“.

Conclusion

Jews in Serbia are a double minority, both religious and national. This research within Belgrade Jewish community showed that the theatre is one of the ways in which this twofold dissimilarity could be overcome and connected with the majority of the population.

Viewed in a diachronic perspective and in different social contexts, Jewish theatre started as a play at religious feasts, primarily at Purim, and in time, especially since the end of the 19th century, it has become a way of opening and secularisation of the Jewish community. In the same period such tendencies can be observed in the work of the Sephardic theatre in Sarajevo and Belgrade. Since the 1980s until now the work of the amateur theatre *King David* with the Belgrade Jewish community has been pointed towards editing themes which cherish Jewish tradition and culture. The opposite process is happening in which Jewish religious customs are being shown and taught. Nevertheless, this theatre is a way in which they become more open to a wider social community since it has an active role in connecting with *other* and *different*, in this case with members of a majority Serbian community where a certain number of predominantly young people becomes a carrier and transferor of Jewish culture.

An exceptional role belongs to the founder of the theatre Mirijam Salom, a multi-talented person who creates the repertoire, writes and directs plays and gathers young people. One of the significant factors in the work of the theatre are free English language classes for primary school children taught by Salom. Over the last thirty years the theatre survived primarily owing to the enthusiasm and love of volunteers who actively take part in its work.

Members of the amateur theatre *King David* are mostly primary and secondary school children and university students. While working on plays children are given the opportunity to make real friendships, which is becoming more and more rare in today's world of virtual socializing. They are able to make real contacts and long lasting friendships. The fact that most of them are not Jewish, but Serbian is a kind of a phenomenon. In this way, the theatre has an educational role in promoting Jewish culture, primarily among young people, who actively take part in plays, and then also among their families and Belgrade audience.

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Figure 1. Mirijam Salom, founder and manager at the amateur theatre *King David* of the Jewish community Belgrade.



Figure 2. Scene from a play of the amateur theatre King David. The 1980s, Belgrade.



Figure 3. Mirijam Salom with children at a rehearsal. Jewish community Belgrade.



Figure 4. A rehearsal at the theatre. Jewish community Belgrade.



Figure 5. Scene from the play *Adam and Eve*. Mirijam Salom's private archive.



Figure 6. Scene from the play *The Secret of granny Rosa's casket*.



Figure 7. Scene from the play *At home is the worst*.



Figure 8. Scene from the play *Fiddler on the Roof* (1).



Figure 9. Scene from the play *Fiddler on the Roof* (2).



Figure 10. Scene from the play *Fiddler on the Roof* (3). Mirijam Salom with actors at the end of the play.



Figure 11. Scene from the play *La Pasensia vale mucho* (*Patience is Golden*).



Figure 12. Scene from the play *Nobody's Luggage*, celebration of the theatre's thirtieth anniversary, November 2016.

All photos are from Mirijam Salom's private archive.

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