Morten Thing

Yiddish theatre in Denmark 1906-56

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**Jews in Denmark**

Jews have been allowed to settle in Denmark since the 17th century. From the 1680s they were even allowed to live in Copenhagen and to have a synagogue, though only when religious service could not be seen from the street. The first Jews were called “Jøder af den portugisiske Nation” (Jews of the Portuguese Nation). Later on also German Jews settled in the country and they outnumbered the Sephardic Jews by the 18th century. In the 19th century the Jews achieved (nearly) full citizenship, and the small provincial congregations closed and their members moved to Copenhagen. By the 1880’s about 4.000 Jews lived in Denmark and most of them in Copenhagen.

In 1882 the Russian Jews, or Ashkenazim, began to migrate westward towards England and the US. But a minor group reached also Copenhagen, especially in 1905-1914. 10-12,000 Jews settled for a period in Copenhagen, 3,000 stayed for good. They stressed their identity through the use of their language, Yiddish. They made papers, a library, organizations, politics – and theatre – all in the Yiddish language.¹

¹ I have written about the Russian Jews in Denmark in Morten Thing, 2008.
To Danish historians of the theatre it is an unknown fact that a Yiddish scene existed in Denmark for 50 years, from 1906 to 1956. I have tried to make a register of all performances and plays as far as there are sources like flyers, posters, advertisements or reviews. In this register I have information of 275 performances, i.e. more than 5 performances a year. It is outstanding in Danish theatre history that a minority tries to keep up their cultural identity through such a long period. In fact, this is what groups of Russian Jews did wherever they settled. The Yiddish theatre was a strategic element of Yiddish modernity.

This didn’t spring from tradition. A Jewish theatre did exist in the form of the Ester-plays at Purim. In the German-Jewish enlightenment, among the maskilim, there was a secular theatre. A Danish Jew, Isaak Euchel (1756-1804) wrote, while he lived in Berlin, in 1793 the play Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit, a rationalist play in West-Yiddish (jüdisch-deutsch), which more than the Ester-plays points to the modern Yiddish theatre.

The modern Jewish theatre was born late in the 19th century and witnesses to the dense social signification of the theatre. A first performance was staged in Jassy in Romania in 1876, when Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908) united with Israel Gradner. Goldfaden was well-known as composer and author of popular songs and Gradner was a broder zinger. ‘Broder zingers’ was a local form of entertainment from Brody in Poland. They often performed at weddings, singing and playing comedies. It was Goldfadens achievement to unite this genre of entertainment with the theatrical possibilities of a framing narrative. The Yiddish theatre was an immediate success and Goldfaden’s troupe grew and launched new plays.

This new cultural form was born in the early period of the Jewish exodus from Eastern Europe, and as early as in 1882 the first Yiddish play was staged in New York. At first London became the epicenter of Yiddish Theatre, but very quickly New York took over. When mass immigration had peaked 50 years later there was 11 Yiddish theatre-halls in New York, four in Chicago and three in Philadelphia.

One of the main reasons that it developed that fast and as an immigrant-theatre was the anti-Jewish wave, that rolled over Russia after the murder of Alexandr 2. in 1881, and in 1883 lead to a ban on Yiddish theatre in Russia. It was in London the new kind of theatre got its western form. Jacob Gordin (1853-1909) became number one author of the Yiddish scene. He rewrote a whole series of classical theatre in Jewish garments, and his plays were the most performed in London, as in Copenhagen. Influenced by modern European realist theatre (Strindberg, Ibsen), Gordin paved the way for the Yiddish avant-garde theatre of the twenties.

The Yiddish theatre developed alongside the Yiddish press and the language of Yiddish literature. In the period 1860-1890 embryo-forms of Jewish modernity developed in Eastern Europe. The theatre, the press and the literature were non-traditional forms in Jewish public sphere that broke with the religious dominance and to a certain degree the Orthodox influence. It was a kind of religious or non-religious culture, which was cultivated by the Yiddish theatre.

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2 The register and the sources I have dealt with in Morten Thing 2012.
5 Nahma Sandrow, 1977; Joel Berkowitz, 2003; Zachary M. Baker, 2004; David S. Lifson, 1975; Heidelore Riss, 2000; for an early version of the history of the Jewish theatre, see Fabius Schach, 1901.
degree in non-patriarchal ways, for instance by widening the social space of women. The new public space and especially the use of Yiddish made those embryo-forms of modernity very vulnerable to tsarist suppression. For this reason and because of the Big Exodus in the same period, Jewish modernity unfolded mainly in Western Europe and the US. When Lithuania and Poland became independent countries after WW1, the Jewish modernity also unfolded there, while in the Soviet Union (and in the Ukraine as a part of the Soviet Union) it was subjected to a system of control very much alike the tsarist one.

**Periodisation**

Due to the size of the audience, the Yiddish theatre of Copenhagen was different from that in New York and later in Warszawa. It changed character, too, in its fifty years of existence. It was influenced both by internal factors and by the global Yiddish theatre. The history can be divided into four periods: 1906-21, 1921-27, 1927-39 and 1939-56.

**Performances of the first period 1906-1921**

The first period is the most central to the Yiddish-culture in Copenhagen. In this period (1911-21) there were Yiddish papers and it is in this period that a tiny group of semi-professional actors lived in the town. It is the married couple Morris and Glike Bilavski (staying in the town 1908-21) and Adolf Timianov (staying 1909-15) and, in a shorter period, Mrs. Timianov and Mr. Rothstein (first names unknown).

Not least the period when Adolf Timianov dominated the scene was a fertile period. In 1912 there were 12 performances, in 1913 9, in 1914 12 and in 1915 15. When Timianov emigrated to New York the number of performances dropped to around four a year 1916-19, while the years 1920-21 was a revival with 7 and 13 performances (13 for all the year, but only 6 in this first period). The total picture 1906-21 can be seen from this scheme; first we have the number of plays, then the number of performances:
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<th>Plays</th>
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Halls and plays
The addresses of the theatre halls changed a lot. In the beginning the most used hall was Østerbro Teater. From 1904-16 this building with a theatre hall was owned by ‘The Nordic Good Templar Lodge’. The theatre groups simply hired the room. As remembered by a woman, who performed already as a child:

“The room was a really big one and beautiful, I remember. At each side of the scene there were a colossal lion, gilded and standing on two legs. They looked very good. Around the room there were red plush sofas.”

The format of a theatre-evening was in the first years like this: First there was a play (or more plays), then there was a ball until two o’clock. The average age of the immigrant population was in the beginning rather low and the ball after the play witnesses to the double goal for the evening: You should be entertained in your own language and meet new people (among them representatives of the opposite sex). Later on the ball was separated from the theatre. But theatre performances could (often as one-act plays) fuse with music and singing or as in the thirties with wrestling shows.

The repertoire of the Yiddish theatre was indeed very Yiddish, as the grand old man of Yiddish Theatre, Jacob Gordin (1853-1909), is the author of 50 of the plays performed in Copenhagen, while 22 are dramatizations of Sholem Aleykhem- narratives. Number three on the list is Schalom Asch (14), J.L. Peretz og Peretz Hirschbein number four (each 11) and Mark Arnstein number five (8 plays). There were translations among the plays, too. Some of Gordin’s plays were part translations, part adaption like דער יידישער קעניג ליר (Der yidisher keinig Lir) from Shakespeare’s King Lear and קרײטער סאָנאַטע (Kreytser sonate) from Tolstoj. And there were Nordic translations like August Strindberg’s דער פֿאָטער (Der foter) and Henrik Ibsen’s פּופּענהױס (Puppenhoys), too. There were a couple of plays written directly for the Copenhagen stage by immigrant authors.

The Yiddish scene was not a scene alike the Danish scenes (the traditional, the modern or the entertainment theatre), it was a scene in its own right. The Yiddish scene formed part of a world theatre: the Yiddish scenes in all the places, where Yiddish-speaking Jews had settled. An important distinction in Yiddish theatre is betweenבײָועסער לייטעראַרישער טײַטער (bavuster literarisher teater) andשונד (shund), i.e. between ‘serious theatre’ and ‘entertainment’. ‘Shund’ translates the English word ‘thrash’ and was used very much in discussions on the American-Yiddish scene. From the American scene the Yiddish operettas reached Copenhagen, and also light comedies.

In the thirties new impulses reached Copenhagen through guest performances like the Hebrew הבימה (Habimah) from Moscow or representatives for the groupדי װילנערס (Di vilners), originally from Vilna. Genres like ‘speech choir’, didactic proletarian theatre and the revue-like ‘living newspaper’ came from the communist theatre of Germany, Poland and Soviet Russia.

Style and actors
When it comes to the performance or style, we know next to nothing. This has to do with the fact that it was a marginal minority theatre. We nearly only have reviews and commentaries from the immigrants themselves. Some of these seem to know the norms of playing of mainstream theatre. But only for the first rather few performances, we have reviews from Danish Jews. Since they didn’t understand the language, the reviews don’t give us much information about performance style. When it comes to reviews from the minority itself there is a whole series of critique of the style for being amateurish or...
undifferentiated and of the culture of the public for being plump and uncivilized.

The professional actors had actually got some training. Adolf Timianov was born in Poland 1886 and attended 18 years old at a German opera school. After some years he began travelling with a theatre troupe, either the קאַמינסקאַ־טרופּע (Kaminska-trupe) or the Sierotski un Vaysman-trupe. He played in Copenhagen under the name Timjanka in 1909 and then went to London to play at ירימש סֿאַלקּ טֿײַטֿאַר (Yidishe folks teater) under Jacob Adler. In 1912 he came back to Copenhagen under the name Tamianow. Later he was known under the name Timianov in America, when he emigrated there in 1915. In the beginning he was attached to groups in Toronto and Montreal, later in the US. Often he played the summer season in Europe. In 1927 he visited Copenhagen on his 25-years jubilee-trip. Also in 1931 he came on a visit.7

As for Morris Bilavski he was born 1881 in Kutne in Poland. He already played theatre while in חדר (kheyder), the Jewish, religious primary school. 16 years old he came to London with some family and became a member of Samuel Goldenberg’s drama club. He started playing Yiddish theatre and performed among other places in Paris. In 1907 he went to Poland to act. Here he met Glike Degensheyn (born 1891 in Zhiklin) and they fell in love. He was a member of the Jewish Social-democracy בונד (Bund) and since bundists were hunted by the police, they decided both to go abroad. They Went to Copenhagen, where they got married. They both took lessons with the Danish actor Holger Rose, and they began to act both in Yiddish and in Danish. Morris Bilavski acted at ‘Dagmar Teatret’ and Glike Bilavski at ‘Casino’. She was also used in some of films made by ‘Nordisk Film Co.’.8 In 1921 they emigrated to the US. They both acted in Yiddish in America, but especially Morris Bilavski. 1925-28 he played and was stage-manager at Irving Place Theatre and 1929-30 at Zats’ folks-teater.9 From their time in Copenhagen we have this depiction from Jødisk Samfund:

"Det store Publikum, der Aften efter Aften fylder teatrene aner ikke, at der her i vor kære Hovedstad eksisterer den store Komedie, det uskolede Talent, det blodrøde, hjertevarmeste Naturel.

Det er Herr og Fru Bielawski. Det desværre uskolede Talent bor ude paa Islands Brygge og ernærer sig til daglig Brug ved Mellemhandel med Cigarer og Cigaretter - - Diletanter altså, vil Læserne altsaa udbryde; nej, netop ikke, derimod Skuespillere uden Engagement, men ikke uden Publikum.” ("The big audience, evening after evening filling the theatres, do not know that here in our lovely capital we have the big comedy, the unschooled talent, the blood-red, heart-hottest naturel.

It is Mr. and Mrs. Bielawski. The unfortunately unschooled talent lives on Islands Brygge [street at island Amager in Copenhagen] and holds up life on a daily scale by selling cigars and

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8 According to The Danish Film Institute Morris Bilavski had his debut at Nordisk Film in 1914, where he had smaller roles in films 1914- 1921, http://www.dfi.dk/faktaomfilm/nationalfilmografien/nfperson.aspx?id=144858.

9 גֻּלְּיק בּּיָלָעְדֶּסִינְה (Glike Bilavski) and מאָריס בּּיָלָעְדֶּסִינְה (Moris Bilavski) in זָאַלמאַן זֶּילְבּךװאַײַג (Zalman Zilbertsvayg, 1931), col. 163f. and ‘Glika Bilavsky’ in Jewish Women. A Comprehensive Encyclopedia.
The first performances

The first Yiddish performance was probably staged in the beginning of 1906. The paper Berlingske Tidende wrote in connection with the first public Yiddish performance in 1907:

"Andre steder [end New York og London], hvor mange russiske Emigranter er samlede, og hvor man ikke har faste Teatre, gives der lejlighedvis dramatiske Forestillinger i Jargon af Dilettant-Selskaber. Dette har ogsaa været Tilfældet hos os, hvor for halvandet Aarstid siden en tilfældig samlet trup her i Kjøbenhavn gav en eller to private Forestillinger." ("In other places [than New York and London], where many Russian emigrants are present, and where there are no fixed theatres, you can now and then see dramatic performances in Jargon [Yiddish] by Dilettante-troupes. This was the case here, when one and a half years ago a randomly composed troupe gave one or two private performances.")

The first public performance was staged November 10th 1907. A couple of days prior to the premiere the physician Louis Frænkel was interviewed to the paper Politiken. He was the one who had got the license for the performance. He told:

"I Londons, Amsterdams og Varshavss Jødekvarterer finder Theaterforestillinger i den ejendommelige Jiddisch-Dialekt hyppigt Sted, hvorimod det vistnok er første Gang, at en saadan Komedie opføres offentlig i Danmark.

De medvirkende Skuespillere er alle Haandværkere, mest Vævere og Skræddersvende, der har faaet Idéen til Opførelsen paa deres aftenlige Sammenkomster her i Toynbee-Hallen; de har selv besørget alt Forestillingen vedrørende; ja, de har endog ingen fremmed Hjælp haft til Indstuderingen, hvorimod jeg har bistaaet dem lidt med Leje af Lokale og Ansøgning om Polititilladelse.” ("In the Jewish quarters of London, Amsterdam and Warsaw theatre performances in the special Yiddish-Dialect are often staged where as it probably is the first time such a comedy is performed public in Denmark.

The actors are all artisans, mostly weavers and tailor journeymen. They have got the idea at their evening-meetings here in Toynbee-Hall [a meeting place for Russian Jews set up by Frænkel himself]; they have done all themselves; even for the rehearsals they had no help from outside, while I have helped a little by renting the hall and applicating for police-permission.")
The program for the performance was hectographed in both Danish and Yiddish. The Danish was typed, whereas the Yiddish was hand-written. There were not yet printers in Copenhagen able to set and print Yiddish type. The play was Herzele mejuchos oder Jekel ba’l agolah and it was written in this orthography when Romanized. It was written by Moses Richter, was rehearsed by Mr. Podiewski and had nine actors. The performance took place in Prins Wilhelms Palæ at St. Annæ Plads and was very popular.

According to Jødisk Tidsskrift all tickets were “revet bort ved Forsalget, og Lørdag Aften var alt udsolgt” (“sold like hot cakes, and Saturday Evening everything was sold out”).

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**Politiken 11.11.07**

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14 Jødisk Tidsskrift 15.11.07.
Even though Danish spectators didn’t understand the language, the performance was commented in more papers. Politiken wrote:

"Kuriosere Forestilling vil man vanskelig komme til at opleve i Kjøbenhavn. Publikum, Skuespillere, de fremmede Tungemaal, der taltes saavel paa Scenen som i Salen, alt virkede saa fremmedet, at man kunde tro sig hensat til en By i Galicien eller Polen eller de halvvasiatiske Grænsedistrikter, hvorfra Franzos har hentet Stof til sine jødiske Fortællinger. Naturligvis maatte man nøjes med væsentlig pantomimiske Indtryk. Det Blandingssprog, Stykket er skrevet i, umuliggjorde selvfølgelig enhver intimere Forstaaelse." ("An odder performance will be difficult to experience in Copenhagen. The audience, the actors, de foreign tongues, both in the audience and on the stage, everything was so odd, that you felt yourself situated in a town of Galicia or Poland or the half-Asiatic frontier-districts, where Franzos has picked his stuff for his Jewish narratives. Naturally we had to settle for the pantomimic impressions. The mixed language of the play made it impossible to achieve anything more intimate.")

The Daily Dannebrog had a longer record of the plot and called the actors next time to write a shorter record of the narrative in the program. Ekstrabladet wrote:

"Det kan uden Overdrivelse siges, at det er den mærkeligste Komedie, der længe er set herhjemme. Men det maa tilføjes, at denne Forestilling, som udførtes af jævne Haandværkere og spillede paa en latterligt lille Scene med umulige Dekorationer, ingenlunde virkede ilde. [...] De russiske Dilettanter bør gentage Forsøget. De bør ikke standse ved dette første skridt. Det kunde være interessant at se endnu en Prøve paa, hvad de kan præstere. Navnlig naar de næste Gang sørger for en bedre Luft i Salen, end der var denne Gang." ("It can without exaggeration be said that this is the most peculiar comedy seen here for long time. But it must be added that this performance, acted by humble artisans and played on a ridiculous little stage with impossible decorations, in no way seemed bad. [...] The Russian dilettantes should try it another time. They should not stop at this first step. It could be interesting to watch one more sample of their art. Especially when they next time will give us better air in the hall than this time.")

The performance was such a success that it had to be repeated on December 8th.

Already in February 1908 a new performance was announced. Jødisk Tidsskrift wrote: ”For at lette Publikum Forstaaelsen af Stykket vil der paa Programmet være trykt en Redegørelse for Handlingen i hver Akt.” (“To make the understanding easier for the audience, the program will have a text on each act of the play.”) The review in Dannebrog had been read, and for this performance the program was printed, a practice followed ever since. Here the narrative was recorded in dense printing in Danish and if you didn’t know better,

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15 The Franzos mentioned was the author Karl Emil Franzos (1848-1904) a Galician-Austrian author of Sephardic extraction. He was a prolific writer and especially Aus Halb-Asien from 1876 was famous and translated into among other languages Danish as Franzos, 1879.

16 Fra ”Hebraisk russisk Dramatisk Forening”s Forestilling (From ”Hebrew Russian Drama Association’s Performance), Politiken 11.11.07, Den russiske Kolonis Theaterforening (The performance of the Russian colony), Dannebrog 11.11.07, En ejendommelig Forestilling. (A peculiar performance. The Jewish Comedy), Ekstrabladet 11.11.07.
you would think it was a Danish performance. The play was דער וילדע מענטש by Jacob Gordin. *Jødisk Tidsskrift* wrote:
"Forestillingen er sat i scene af den jødiske Skuespiller Belawsky fra London, og han udfører selv Titelrollen.” (“The performance is directed by the Jewish actor Belawsky from London, and he is playing the main part, too.”)\(^{17}\) The daily Politiken wrote:

"Den jødiske Forestilling i aften havde fyldt Wittmacks Lokale med et meget interesseret Publikum, der hovedsagelig bestod af russiske Emigranter, og saaledes besad Forudsætningerne for at forstaa det mærkværdige Sprog, i hvilket den spændende Handling oprulledes. Hovedrollen udførtes af en indkaldt dramatisk Kraft, en londonsk Skræddersvend, der spillede den rige Korn-Købmands aandssvage Søn; det var ham, der hævnede hele Familien paa den onde og utro Stedmoder, som den aldrende Fader havde været svag nok til at gifte sig med, og til sidst borteden den straffende Dolk i hendes Hjerte.” (“The Jewish performance had yesterday evening filled Wittmacks hall with a very interested audience, mainly Russian emigrants, who had the ability to understand the peculiar language used to unroll the action. The main part was played by a called dramatic power, a tailor journeyman from London, who was playing the mentally retarded son of the rich grain merchant; it was him who took revenge on behalf of the family on the evil and unfaithful stepmother, with whom the ageing father had been weak enough to marry, and at last he stuck the punitive knife in her heart.”)\(^{18}\)

According to Jødisk Tidsskrift nearly 500 tickets had been sold, and Louis Frænkel thought, that although the play did not offer anything extraordinary in content, ”interesserede det dog ved det flinke Spil, og man havde foruden de fra tidligere Forestillinger kendte Kræfter Lejighed til at bemærke Hr. Belawski og Frk. Degenschein som intelligente Fortolkere af denne specielle Kunst.” (“it was interesting in the nice playing, and besides the known forces from last performances we noted Mr. Belawski and Miss Degenschein as intelligent interpreters of this special art.”)\(^{19}\) Do we hear some echoing from the culture-clash? The Danish highly educated Jew felt some way that the entertainment was a bit raw. But seen with the eyes of the immigrant it was a clear success. They had staged two different plays and for full houses. They had got a proper support from Morris Bilavski and Glike Degenschein when they put up in the second play. And the best of it was that they had established their own culture in the own language in the foreign country, even though the Danes and the Danish Jews thought it somewhat foreign.

Late in 1909 Adolf Timianov popped up in Copenhagen under the name Timjanka. On December 19\(^{18}\) he was the director of Jacob Gordin’s Di shkhite (The slaughter) with actors from Jødisk Dramatisk Forening ”Progres” (Jewish Drama Association “Progres”). According to the program he would after Di shkhite (The slaughter) play ”den Forrykte paa Hospitalet” af Gogol (“The Insane in Hospital” by Gogol). Afterwards there would be a ball. For a period it looks as if there were competition between Bilavski and Timianov, but in 1912 they began to act together and the programs bore photographs of both of them. Ida Weisdorff, a kid when Timianov came, told in the 80ties about him: ”Han var utrolig dygtig til at iscenesætte, og selvom han skældte dem bælgen fuld og sagde, at de ikke duede til noget og ville ødelægge det hele for ham, så elskede de ham endnu mere og gjorde sig mægtig umage. For at gøre det så godt som muligt.” (“He was incredible good in directing, and even when he scolded them and

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\(^{17}\) Russisk-jødisk Theater, Jødisk Tidsskrift 7.2.8.

\(^{18}\) Den jødiske Forestilling hos Wittmack i aften (The Jewish performance at Wittmack’s last night), Politiken 17.2.08.

\(^{19}\) Jødisk Tidsskrift 21.2.8.
said that they were no good and that they would destroy everything for him, they loved him and took pains in following his directions.”20

Sometimes there were criticisms of the milieu around the professionals, but also the opposite. For instance the Yiddish weeklyгазета (Vokhen blat) wrote:

"בר איירך דער ניט קאפענהאגערן זאל ריכטטיג אינפארמירט, וו פאדל אופרטאנטך מיטערן, זא זא יודייש טענטשאַך קאפענהאגערן שפיטלט אַיינ מיאַל אָכנoir אָפרוכט פּארן זאַהן, זא זא חוייד אופרטאנטך-קורפטען, זונען די אָפרוכט איינגען דזיזטעפּילט-קורפטען. [...] די זי פּארופּרטאנטך אָיר (קען) ניט פון יאָער געלטן אַאן קליינן יאָתאָפּעס פּעלטן.[...]

ואָכא יאָך קאַרַג שטילפֿארטגען זאָ אָפי ליטן צו פּארטּעטשאַך, זא פֿון יאָעפרעלטן פּאָן דען קאפענהאגערן יודישט מיטערן פון צאָנטלעגט יאָטרן אָ פֿאוּפֿארטער מילדער מַאָסֶסֶתאָפּ גאָך אָ יאָשִיפּארעלט מױטן מיטערלעגט ברעמעטשט ווערטן, וו אָטערנײַן אָפֿיל וו פון אַ אוּפֿטּרער ווойטשט פֿאָלטּעטן.”

(“To make it clear also to non-Copenhageners, it is necessary to underscore that the Yiddish theatre in Copenhagen plays once in three or four weeks, and except for the three professional actors the others are dilettantes [...] even the professionals [can] not live from their rare and small wages. [...] Towards the actors we have to behave motherly and not that harsh as on other Yiddish stages.”)21

**Yiddish theatre culture**

A special feature was the behavior among the audience during the play. There were some complaints; one of them came from A.K., probablyAbram Krotoschinsky (1889-1961), a confectioner and one of the activists of Yiddish culture in Copenhagen:

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21 In yidishen teater,газета (Vokhen blat) 25.2.16. The Danish-Yiddish papers printed Yiddish without using nikuddim, although they were used in the logo of the paper.
He proposes: 1) the play begins at time and not as now two hours later. 2) It should be prohibited to bring children less than five years of age along. 3) In the hall four responsible persons should maintain order, and if anybody disturb, they should leave.

It might seem that it hadn’t changed that much more than 20 years later. In a review of the 50-year celebration for the poet Halpern Leivick (1888-1962) in 1939, the same Krotoschinsky wrote:

"Kan vi ikke i Fremtiden blive fri for det evige Rend op og ned ad Salens Midtergang, medens de er Optræden paa Scenen? Eller stille sig op foran Scenen hele Aftenen som en "Cæsar"? – vise sit Skyggebillede bag Fortæppet eller Søgen og Raaben efter en Optrædende gennem hele Salen?"

A reference to a review of the Jewish choir 'Hasomir' in Social-Demokraten 20.4.14, in which the audience was characterized as ‘half-Asian’.

23 A.K.: "When you watch our genuine…home-made Yiddish social performances through civilized windows, you must realize how very little aesthetic feeling we Russian-Jewish have, and that the Danish press is right: we behave in an Asian way. […] Does a Yiddish theatre-performance have to be something like an inn? No! It doesn’t! […] Is it seen by other people, that small children one years of age are taken to the theatre? Not only do they disturb the performance, but as they fall asleep it looks like a waiting room during the night. At the balcony a mother is breast-feeding her child. Once she lost herself in the scene and it rained milk and ended in chaos. At her side a family is eating a shabes-meal. With an enormous appetite as it can be heard. … Down in the hall a young man takes his boots off, […] because they're too narrow and puts them on the floor. […] Two persons are warring over a seat. Children are playing and chasing each other. A young man is tired of sitting and puts his feet on another chair […].

Then there is a pause. Papers are sold and all kind of money-collecting, proclamations will be shared out and the hall looks like a “Polish inn.”"

(Vegen der ordenung, oyf a yidishe-teater-farsthelung in Kopenhagen), Yidishe gezelshaft (17.7.14.)

A reference to a review of the Jewish choir ‘Hasomir’ in Social-Demokraten 20.4.14, in which the audience was characterized as ‘half-Asian’.
Alt dette bidrager kun til, at man bringer hele Aftenens Milieu ned på et Niveau, der totalt ødelægger Helhedsbilledet.” (“Can we not in the future be free for the eternal running up and down the centre-aisle when the show is on? Or the ‘playing Caesar’ in front of the stage? Or showing shadow-pictures on the curtain, or the seeking and shouting for a performer through the hall? It all contributes in bringing the milieu of the evening down to a degree destroying the overall pattern.”)24

The tone in the reviews was often rather critical. S.B., surely Samuel Beilin (1885-1959), a joiner and another of the activists, reviewed a play announced as “the sensational comic operetta creating great success in America and Warszawa, Zayn vayhs man (זײן װײבס מאן), with song and dance”:

De fremmedartede Skuespil virkede meget ejendommelig paa en Dansker, især gjorde Fru Bilawski ved sin voldsomme — men i dette Tilfælde naturlige — Ageren et stærkt Indtryk. Af de øvrige Rollehavende fortjener især Souffløren Ros for sin distinkte Oplæsning. Han kunne høres til den fjærne Plads i Salen.” (The strange plays seemed peculiar for a Dane, especially Mrs. Bilawski made by her violent — but in this case natural — acting a strong impression. Among the others playing a role especially the prompter deserves praise for his distinct reading. He made himself heard to farthest seat in the hall.”)25

The prompter was important, not only because the actors forgot words or sentences, but apparently also because of the noise in the hall.

Many performances were benefice-performances, where the surplus was given to the suffering in Poland, to the Bund’s arbeber lezesal far ale in Kopenhagen or other good causes. In March 1915 the most popular operetta in Warszawa and New York, Di lustige amerikanerin (On the outside everything was as it used to be. A festive public in their best shabes-clothes and their best spirits, and the room was filled with tobacco-smoke… and yet it was different. Both the audience and the actors were satisfied. The audience sang along with enthusiasm. A true American success. It’s a shame that such good effort was wasted on such a sensation-piece.’”)

Another case was the prompter. As it was put in a Danish review of the Bilavskis version of Sholems Aleykhems Mazl tov (Mazel tov) and Dimovs Shma Jisroel (Shma Jisroel) on October 29th 1916 in Casino Theatre:

“De fremmedartede Skuespil virkede meget ejendommelig paa en Dansker, især gjorde Fru Bilawski ved sin voldsomme – men i dette Tilfælde naturlige – Ageren et stærkt Indtryk. Af de øvrige Rollehavende fortjener især Souffløren Ros for sin distinkte Oplæsning. Han kunne høres til den fjærne Plads i Salen.” (The strange plays seemed peculiar for a Dane, especially Mrs. Bilawski made by her violent – but in this case natural – acting a strong impression. Among the others playing a role especially the prompter deserves praise for his distinct reading. He made himself heard to farthest seat in the hall.”)

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And he thought probably both of Timianov and the theatre. In a review of Gordin’s [Di neshume khapers] (The soul catchers) he wrote that it was nice with good decorations. “Further on a little more respect.” And he thought probably both of Timianov and the theatre.

Money was collected for many causes. The so-called Frivillig-Gruppe (Voluntary-group), collecting money for the Jews in Eastern Europe that suffered from the war, made public that the performance on November 27th, 1915 had resulted in 744,31 Dkr. in surplus, while the performance on December 18th had resulted in 380,01 Dkr. and the performance on January 15th, 1916 had produced 243,66 Dkr. On October 20th, 1917 600 Dkr. was played in surplus. It was quite big amounts, considering a ticket costing from 20 øre to 1 krone.

Nearly all performances were in Yiddish, but not everybody was yiddishists, that is supporting the language policy that Yiddish was the national language of the Jews. The Zionists were Hebraists and viewed Yiddish culture as a transitional phenomenon to be replaced by the ‘revitalized’ Hebrew, which was establishing itself as a spoken language precisely in these years in Palestine. In the Zionist Yidishe folksshitme you could read, that the Zionist youth organization Hoivr hazoir deserved praise for showing the naturalness and vitality of the Hebrew language. It was a solitary ideological demonstration and was not repeated until the troupe Habimah visited Copenhagen 1930.

27. וויזישフィルメディアנער (Yidishe folks-tsaytung) 15.3.15.
28. ? (?: Fun yidishen teater, Yidishe folks-tsaytung) 30.8.15.
29. וויזישフィルメディアנער (Yidishe folks-tsaytung) 21.3.16.
30. וויזישフィルメディアנער (Vokhen blat) 26.10.17.
31. די היבריסער פארשטעלונג, יודישע פאָלקסשטימע (Di hebreishe farshftelung, Yidishe folksshitme) 7.12.15.
Performances were in most cases organized through one of the Jewish theatre-associations or the Jewish social associations. In the first period there were three dominant ones: יידישער דראַמסהָישער דילעטאַנטען פֿערײַן (Yidisher dramatisher diletanten ferayn), יידישער דראַמאַטישער פֿערײַן "פֿראָגרעס" (Yidisher dramatisher ferayn “Progres”) and דראַמאַטישער פֿערײַן "קולטו" (Dramatisher ferayn “Kultur”). In the second period it was יידישער הערש יידישער אָרגאַניזאָציע (Yidisher handverker-ferayns dramatischer grupe). In the last years of the 20ties it was ‘Jødisk Dramatisk Forening “Progres”’, ‘Jødisk dramatisk Klub’ and ‘Jødisk Teaterforening’, now with Danish names. In the 30ties it was ‘Jødisk Teaterforening af 1935’, ‘IKOR’s Teatergruppe’ [IKOR: יידישער קולוניזאָציע אין רוסלאַנד (Idishe kolonizatsie organizatsie in Rusland), יידישע קולטור-סזענע (Yidishe kultur-szene), צוקונפֿט (Tsukunft) and ‘JAKFs Teatergruppe’ [JAKF, Jødisk Arbejder Kultur Forening (Jewish Workers’ Culture Association)]. It was from these associations the actors were recruited.

Performances in the second period 1921-26
The years 1921-26 was a period of only amateur-theatre. The amateurs (or דילעטאַנטען (diletanten) as it was in Yiddish) had been there all the time, but with the professionals as the stars. The new system began in 1921 and was not least marked by the industrious work of Samuel Beilin.

Morris and Glike Bilavski had their penultimate performance in Copenhagen on February 20th 1921 playing Jacob Gordin’s שלױם קײשאָרלטְאַן (Shloym’ke sharlatan). The following week the Tailors’ club played Gordin’s דער יידישער קײנוג ליר (Der yidishe kenig Lir) in Beilin’s direction. In March Hoivri hazoirs drama group played Gordin’s קרײטשער סזענע (Kreitser sonate) directed by Beilin.
April 30th 1921 was the last time Bilavskis were seen at the stage, this time with *Der vilder mentsh* (דער װילדער מענטש). In those three months in the winter 1921 there were four Yiddish performances, twice Bilavski and twice Beilin.

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If we look at all performances 1921-27, we have:

Except for 1921, the 20ties is a decade with a declining number of theatre-performances. This tendency continues until 1934. 1934-38 the number raises radically and reach the peak in 1936 with 26 performances. In the 20ties it is most often the Haandværkerforeningen (Artisans’ Association) and Hoivri hazoir providing the actors. Louis Beilin directs 17 plays in the 20ties. But also Louis Halberstadt, Walter Weisdorff and Louis Reznik directs.
Performances in the third period 1927-39

In the third period the ‘Vagabond Stars’ popped up in Copenhagen. Sholem Aleykhem wrote a comic novel, בלֶנֶדזשענָנִיט שטערן Blondzhende shtern [Vagabond stars 1909-10, New York 1912]. From this Nahma Sandrow has taken the title for her book about the world-history of Yiddish theatre. The travelling actors became in the inter-war period something like the main form of Yiddish theatre. The vagabonds as a phenomenon grew out of more causes. Most important it is naturally that there was a Yiddish culture beyond the frontiers of national states that made guest-performances possible. But also that this culture had reached a certain degree of internationalization, that made these guest-performances desirable. Last not least it developed under the pressure on Yiddish performers from the development in Germany. When Berlin was no longer a Jewish theatre-town, the actors from Poland, the Baltic states and Germany had to invent other stages. And some of them had to seek more humble hunting-fields as Copenhagen.

The development 1927-39 looks like this:

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The first guest-actor to visit Copenhagen was Adolf Timianov when he returned in 1927. On March 12th he played for the Artisans’ Association [Yom hakhupeh] [Wedding-day]. He was on a European tour and stayed in Copenhagen a couple of months. According to the review in [Kopenhagener tribune] he was exceptionally good, and refined was also his partner on stage, the New-Yorker actor Gitele Lifshits. In December the same year he came back and staged Anski’s [Der dibuk] [The demon]. Pinches Welner (1893-1965)], tailor, activist and later Yiddish author, reviewed in Social-Demokraten:

"Det var en Tilfredsstillelse for den jiddisch talende Del af de københavnske Jøder, at de endelig fik at se det Stykke opført, som har gaaet sin Sejrsgang over næsten hele Verden. Naturligvis skal "Der Dibuk", som er blevet til paa Jiddisch, helst spilles paa Jiddisch, for Jøder, for kun i dette Miljø kan det komme til sin fulde Ret og blive forstået.” (“It was a satisfaction for the Yiddish-speaking part of Copenhagen Jewry that they at last saw the play conquering nearly the

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<td>Total 152</td>
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33 [Kopenhagener tribune] 15.3.27.
whole world. Naturally “Der dibuk”, born Yiddish, at best is played in Yiddish for Jews, only in this setting it can be played in its own right and be understood.”)

Welner had some objections; he thought that Timianov played the character Zadik too ordinary. But when you know the conditions under which they work the actors deserve thank for the performance.34 Among the actors were the 16-year old Sam Besekow, who later became a very famous Danish actor and director.35

1930 Habimah visited Denmark and performed גולם (Golem), דיבוק (Dibuk) and Crown of David. This visit was commented and recommended in Jødisk Familieblad, the new magazine of Mosaisk Troessamfund, the Jewish Congregation of Copenhagen, as no other theatre guest-visit was. It could only be understood as an official consent to the viewpoint, that Hebrew was the national language of the Jews and not Yiddish.

Habimah was founded as a Hebrew theatre in Moscow in 1917 headed by Nakhum Zemach (1887-1939) and got very quickly a grand reputation as theatre. In 1926 it went on a tour among other places to the USA where the troupe split. Zemach and many others stayed in the US while a group in 1928 went to Palestine and founded a new Habimah in Tel Aviv, later to be Israel’s national theatre.36

Habimah was introduced by Editor Povl Grossmann in Jødisk Familiblad:

"De danske Jøder er kendt for deres store Interesse for Teatrets Kunst, en Interesse, der i dette Tilfælde ogsaa omfatter Sproget og Racen. Vi imødeser derfor den sjældne Begivenhed med Forventning, i Forudfølselse af, at vi i ”Casino” i de kommende Aftener vil faa den store Oplevelse, moderne Hebraisk udtalt paa den smukkest mulige Maade, jødisk Aand omsat i Nutidens kunstneriske Form.” (“The Danish Jews are known for their interest in the art of theatre, an interest which in this case also includes the language and the race. We therefore look forward to this rare opportunity with expectation, in presentment of having the great experience in “Casino” the coming nights, in hearing Modern Hebrew pronounced in the most beautiful way, in Jewish spirit transformed into the artistic form of the Present.”)37

The Habimah arrangement was hosted by the Zionist Association. As a word of welcome Joseph Nachemsohn (1865-1936), antique-dealer and for many years in the leadership of the association, said: "Vi skylder Habimah Tak for dens Arbejde og Propaganda i Zionismens Sag.” (“We owe Habimah thanks for its work and propaganda in the service of Zionism.”)

In 1932 the Danish-language paper Mosaisk Samfund printed something very unusual, an ad in Yiddish. It communicated that the Haandværkerforeningen (Artisans’ Association) and Forældreforeningen (The Parents’ Association) had invited famous guests to visit Copenhagen, די וילנס (Di vilners). They would perform two plays by J.L. Peretz, דרי מטונים (Dray matones) [Three gifts] and יריר מידגער בטלן (Der meshugener batlen) [The crazy cabalist] and גריי שופר (Grine felder) [Green pastures] by Peretz Hirschbein. Vilners was in this case Sonja Alomis (1896-?) and Aleksander Asro (1888-1963).38

34 P. Welner, 1927.
36 See Gad Kaynor, 1998.:

37 Povl Grossmann, 1930 a and b.
38 זאַלמאַן זילבערצװײַג, װאָל 2, װאַרשע 1934 (Zalman Zilbertsvayg, vol. 2, Varshe 1934), col. 1571-75; Mosaisk Samfund 30.12.32.
The history of Di vilners started when the German troops in the winter 1915 occupied Vilna and gave the inhabitants greater freedom than they had known under Russian rule. An association of theatre was founded with the members of Nachum Lipowsky’s וידישן טעאַטער (Vilner yidishn teater) and numerous actors among others from פֿאַרבאַנד פֿון יידישע דראַמאַטישע אַרטיסץ (Farband fun yidishe dramatishe artists).

Members were such as Aleksander Asro, Sonja Elmith (Alomis), Frieda Blumenthal, Josef Bulow, Leib Kadison, Josef Kamien, Judith Lares, Nachman Nachbush, Rachel-Dora Rivkina, Chaim Schneur, Ariosho Stein, Schalom Tanin, Frida Vitalina, Polia Walter. Their first performance was staged in Vilna on February 8th 1916. Played was Schalom Asch’s דער לאנדסמאנן (Der landsman) and Perets Hirshbein’s אין א פערװארפענע װינקעל (In a corner apart).

The troupe played in Kovno, Łódź, Białystok and other Polish towns before going to Warszawa in September 1917. Here Abraham Morewski and Herz Grossbart joined the group. Di vilners produced a new standard for Yiddish theatre that moved it into the big European scene. The troupe built on the ideas of the Russian dramaturgic Konstantin Stanislavskij (1863-1938). More members had received a professional education, like Asro by the Solowzow Theatre in Kiev, Morewski from the Theatre School of St. Petersburg, and Judith Lares in Moscow.

They wished, in Asro’s words, to build a new and true artistic theatre, and they became the model for more of the Yiddish art theatres of the 20ties. In 1921 the troupe went on a European tour, from which the most outstanding actors never returned to Vilna. 1921-22 the troupe played in Berlin. Already from the first performance Alomis, Asro, Blumenthal and Grossbart began to perform with readings and short scenes in association with the performances, a form they later could travel with on their own. Herz Grossbart travelled all over the world and made ten records with his art.

39 In Ḥydisk Familieblad a reviewer wrote:

"disse Kunstnere spiller og fortolker deres Kunst i det Sprog, mange af os taler og forstaaar, nemlig: Jiddisch, hvorfor Betingelserne er til Stede for at kunne faa det rette Udbytte af deres Spil, hvad man ikke kunde

On occasion of Di vilner’s visit in Copenhagen Hoivri hazoir staged a series of lectures on Yiddish theatre by Samuel Beilin. The performances of Alomis & Asro were a tremendous success among the Jewish immigrants, and already in March 1933 they came back and gave new performances.

In December 1933 the Zionist Association had invited members of Habimah, Chawe Joelit & David Vardi to perform at Casino. In January 1934 Di vilner came back and gave two shows playing “Den røde Itzik” (a medieval tragedy translated in to Yiddish), Rachels trial against God (Zweig in Yiddish), Anski: Scenes from Der diobuk, Tolstoy: In the harbor, Meylch Ravitsch: The ballad of the Mother of the fallen soldier no. 1603 and Peretz Hirschbein: The Green Pastures).

In March 1934 it was David Vardi & Chawe Joelit who gave a show at Casino. David Vardi (1893-1973, orig. Rozenfeld) formed originally part of the Habimah-troupe while still in Moscow and director for a part of the troupe’s plays. In 1932 he went as one of the first Habimah-actors on a tour through Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, ending in Palestine. In 1924 he went to New York. In 1927 he founded together with Chawe Joelit a Yiddish theatre called "Vardi-Joelit Teatretaft."
Theatre-Study), where Jewish workers from Newark were the actors. In Copenhagen Vardi & Joelit played both in Hebrew and Yiddish and was invited by Jødisk Forældreforeningen (Jewish Parents’ Association) and Jødisk Folke Forening (Jewish People’s Association).

In April 1934 the Jewish-American actor Benny Adler played in Copenhagen. Benny Adler (b. 1886 in Romania) had trotted the same paths as many other Vagabond stars. He had been discovered as a 13 year old by travelling actors and was taken in by playing. As 15 year old he performed in New York, Montreal and Chicago. Towards the end of the 20ties he played in Vienna and in Poland. On April 21st he played פרי מנטש סטייל (Froy mentsh teyvl) [Mrs. Human Devil] at Casino “with local forces.” He was a success and had to repeat his performance on May 10th. He then performed אורייל אקוסט (Uriel Acosta). He had got very good reviews for his first performance but Uriel Acosta was rehearsed in only two weeks, and it could be seen. The review in Mosaisk Samfund was very critical.

Di vilners, Habimah and Benny Adler brought new perceptions of Yiddish theatre to Copenhagen. The classic melodramatic way of action was under fire. The communist theatre-group from Jødisk Arbejder Kultur Forening (Jewish Workers’ Culture Association) began for instance to work with the well-known director Per Knutzon (1897-1948), who both directed the communist Revolutionær Teater (Revolutionary Theatre) and some of the most successful modern pieces by Bert Brecht, refugee in Denmark at that time, and Danish modernist playwright Kjeld Abell (1901-61). With the Jewish Workers’ Culture Association he directed speech choirs and a series of Levende Aviser (living newspapers), i.e. a topical revue-like performance built on the genres of the paper.

The topical perspective came in focus, when Jewish Association of 1930, organizing the Russian Jews, was asked by Danish actors and the Social-Democrat educational association, AOF, to perform Ferdinand Bruckner’s play Racerne (The Races), a play critical to German race-policies. The association said yes, and the play was staged at Casino on February 17th 1935, but the theatre-censor banned the play for public performance. It was too provocative in relation to Germany he told Social-Demokraten.

Benny Adler came back in August 1935. Together with the local Yidisher yugnt-theater he played August Strindberg’s דער סײַפרן (Der foter). Actually it had been played three times in Yiddish in Copenhagen already, and it received an interesting review by Samuel Beilin. He wrote that Adler made the refined, polished, Nordic captain a bloated Russian officer. "Det er ikke noget at vise os, som kender Strindberg.” (“This is not a thing to show us, who know Strindberg.”) It can be taken as a measure of the progression of integration.

Chayele Grober (1896-1978) from Habimah was on visit in the Odd Fellow Palæet (Odd Fellow Palais) November 10th 1935.

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44 Mosaisk Samfund 6.9.35.
Beresowski (1890-1971), director of the Jewish choir Hasomir, reviewed her exuberantly.\(^{51}\) December 1\(^{st}\) there was a concert with Grober in the Studenterforeningen (Students’ Association), where 800 people heard her sing and recite.\(^{52}\) In April came another of Di vilners, Jacob Weislitz (?-1966) on tour. He gave a reciting on April 18\(^{th}\) and 25\(^{th}\). But he was such a success, that he performed at IKOR’s bazaar the 27\(^{th}\), at IKOR’s and Jødisk Arbejder Kultur Forening (Jewish Workers’ Cultural Association’s) May-party on May 2\(^{nd}\), in Jødisk Haandværkerforening (Jewish Artisans’ Association) May 3\(^{rd}\), for Zionistsforeningen (Zionists’ Association), Hasomir, Foreningen af 1930 (The Association of 1930) and Jødisk Ungdom (Jewish Youth) on May 4\(^{th}\). May 10\(^{th}\) IKOR, IKOR’s Women and Jewish Workers’ Culture Association arranged a gala night. It was a Weislitz epidemic. After this tour de force he began directing Friedrich Wolff’s פראפעס אַר מאלמלא (Professor Malmlock) “with the best forces”. It was staged on May 17\(^{th}\) with amateurs from יידישער יוגנט-טעאַטער (Yidisher yugnt-teater). He had translated the play himself in to Yiddish with the title די געלע לאטע (Di gele lote) [The Yellow Patch] and played Malmlock himself. It received an overwhelming review.\(^{53}\)

Weislitz was scarcely out of the door before the two famous Jewish actors, the brothers Rudolf Zaslavski and Shloyme Naumov. Zaslavski (b. 1886) and Naumov (b. 1898) were originally from Ukraine. They had a long experience as tramp-actors. Zaslavski had played with Ida Kaminska, one of the biggest Yiddish stars ever. He migrated to South America in the 20ties and performed in Argentine and Brazil. In 1933

\(^{51}\) Mosaisk Samfund 8.11.35, 15.11.35.

\(^{52}\) Mosaisk Samfund 6.12.35.

\(^{53}\) Mosaisk Samfund 17.4.36, 24.4.36, 1.5.36, 6.5.36 and 29.5.36.
he returned to Europe and began to perform with together with his brother. On July 21st they performed in Copenhagen. First they played a part of Sholem Aleykhem’s (Tevye der milkhiger), fragments of Peretz and Nadir, a scene from Israel Joshua Singer’s (Yoshe Kalb), in the second part Yiddish folksongs and khasidic songs and in the third part Jewish musical pictures, among them Jewish jazz. They stayed in the city for some months and directed among others Tevye der milkhiger, and it was performed on August 23rd with both brothers and local amateurs. In September they were joined by Niusia (or Nucia) Gold (1909-?). On September 20th they all three performed Tolstoy’s Kreutzer Sonata in Yiddish, Libe an frayndshaft. Rudolf Zaslavski wanted to put up Sholem Aleykhem’s Dos groyse gevins under the title 200.000. Unfortunately he fell ill, and in November he left. Instead Niusia Gold and Shloyme Naumov directed and played in Ossip Dimovs Yeiskhe der shtot klezmer [The city musician Yoshke] on November 15th. Twenty actors were on the stage, and Samuel Beilin gave it a fine review. In December they travelled on, but first Niusia Gold did a reciting-evening on December 9th. She read from works of Avrom Reyzen, Richarik, Bialik, Olgin, Nadir and Itzik Fefer, and also "vor egen begavede og afholdte Digter, Ritterband, af hvilken der bl.a. reciteres: "Der Schuster")." ("our own gifted and loved poet, Ritterband, from whose works, she recited: "Der shuster")."

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54 רודאָלף זאַסלאַװסקי (Rudolf Zaslavski) and שלױמע נאַומאָװ (Shloyme Naumov) in 1931 נײַ יאָרק 1931 (Zalman Zilbertsvayg, vol. 1, Nyu York 1931), col. 751f., andװאָל 5, מעקסיקאָ סיטי (vol. 5, Meksiko Siti 1967), col. 4843f.

Another great guest-star was Di vilner-actor Herz Grossbart (1895-1994). He had cultivated a kind of artistic lecture with great success. He called them ‘word-concerts’. He stayed in Copenhagen from April till September 1937 and gave eight word-concerts. He also performed at Scandinavian Jewish Youth’s 17th congress on July 28th at a gala banquet together with Børge Rosenbaum (1909-2000); that was before he changed his name to Victor Borge.66

In October the two Di vilner-actors Semmy Weinstok and Lola Silberman came. They stayed till December. What Zaslavski had failed to do, due to his illness, they did: to put up Sholom Aleyster’s 200,000 together with the association צוקונפט /Tsukunft. In his review Abram Krotoschinsky wrote, that Lola Silberman shined like a brilliant.57 In the beginning of 1938 the two Polish-Jewish actors Mila Weisslitz and Moszek Potschinsky visited Copenhagen. They stayed for nearly four months and performed and recited in the Jewish associations, and they put up Gottefeld’s פרנוש (Parnose) [Subsistence]. They performed with Børge Rosenbaum and Abram Krakowski.58 In the autumn of 1938 they came back and gave a series of new reciting. In March 1939 Shloyme Naumov came and in June Herz Grossbart was in Copenhagen on a short visit. But that was the end of the story of the vagabond stars.

The performances 1940-56

When the guest-actors stopped coming to Copenhagen the local Yiddish stage took over again. In 1938 and 1939 there had been some amateur performances, even in 1940-43 there was Yiddish theatre in town. On May 3rd 1941 Samuel Besekow (1911-2001) staged Peretz Hirschbein’s די פוסטע קרטשме [The empty inn]. He was as mentioned before a legitimate child of the Copenhagen Yiddish stage and got in the 30ties an education at the Royal Theatre. He became a well-known director and author and even played a Yiddish-speaking tailor in the movie Skaf en Sensation [Get a sensation] from the mid-30ties.

56 Mosaisk Samfund 9.4.37, 16.4.37, 23.4.37, 30.4.37, 14.5.37, 21.5.37, 2.7.37, 16.7.37, 27.8.37, 17.9.37, 27.8.37.

57 Jødisk Ugeblad 29.10.37, 12.11.37, 19.11.37, 3.12.37, 17.12.37.

58 Jødisk Ugeblad 7.1.38, 28.1.38, 11.2.38, 18.2.38, 25.2.38, 4.3.38, 11.3.38, 25.3.38, 1.4.38, 8.4.38, 22.4.38. Abram Krakowski (1889-1957) was a shoe-worker and a much used and entertaining recite.
In October 1943 the Germans opened a hunt of the Jews, but most of them succeeded in fleeing to Sweden (some 7,000), while a minority of some hundred were caught and sent to kz Theresienstadt. In Sweden the Danish Club in Gothenburg played three one-acts with Georg Levin and Nora Unterschlak on April 29th 1945.

After the war there were nine performances. The last one was hardly a play. On February 11th 1956 The Yiddish Library was donated to the Royal Library. At this occasion Abram Krakowsky made a one-man-act he called *Et tidsbillede fra 1906* [A period-picture of 1906], when The Yiddish Library was founded by Bund in Copenhagen. That was the last play in Yiddish. When 3,000 Polish Jews immigrated to Copenhagen in 1969, they for a short time revived Yiddish theatre. Only a couple of plays were put up.

The development 1940-56 can be shown like this:
Plays  | Performances
---|---
1940 2  | 2
1941 2  | 2
1942 2  | 2
1943 3  | 2
1945 3  | 3
1948 3  | 3
1950 1  | 1
1952 1  | 1
1956 1  | 1
I alt 18 | 17

All four periods put together:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plays</th>
<th>Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1906-1921 118</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1926 32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-1939 152</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1956 18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I alt 320</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides this 275 performances and 320 plays, 12 Danish, 5 Hebrew, 1 Russian and 1 German plays were shown. 25 plays were shown twice, five were shown three times. The following plays were shown four times: דער אמת אַ קראָפט (Der emes’e kraft), דער פאָטער (Der foter), קריָייטסער סואַנט (Kreytser sonate), מֶנטשן (Mentshn) and אָיריעל אָקַוסַטא (Uriel Acosta). The most played was מיריעל אַ פראָט弹性 (Mirele Efros); it was played six times.
A story of integration and assimilation

The fabulous story of the Yiddish stage in Copenhagen is not comparable to anything like it in other immigrant-groups, for instance among Swedes and Germans, the two largest immigrant-groups in Denmark. Anyhow the story is also a story of integration and assimilation. The first period is marked by the settling of Russian Jews in Denmark and their need for an identity marker. This marker is their language, Yiddish. To uphold Yiddish and use it in papers, meetings and theatre is what we see in the first period 1906-1921. In that period nearly all programs (and flyers and posters) are in Yiddish.

In the second period the programs are in Danish. In this period the children of the immigrants are grown-ups with a living spoken Yiddish, but most of them didn’t read Yiddish. The Russian Jewish activists fought for Yiddish education in the two Jewish schools – and they finally succeeded. But it didn’t change the fact, that during the third period the use of Yiddish is declining, although Yiddish Theatre experiences an Indian summer due to the vagabond stars.

In the period 1906-1940 the Russian-Jewish immigrants were in opposition to the Danish Jews. But in the thirties they outnumbered the Danish Jews. And when they experienced in October 1943 that the Danes rescuing them were blind to the difference between the two groups and rescued all of them, this marks the final signal for assimilation of the Russian Jews. And the death of Yiddish theatre in Copenhagen.
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