

Laura Wetzler Concert Raises The KJCC Roof

by Gloria Avner



The lucky members and friends of KJCC who showed up on Sunday, January 10th for that evening's Laura Wetzler concert were taken on a glorious, unforgettable Jewish journey – from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe to the plains of Tunisia, Sephardic refuges in Greece and the Balkans and Turkey and, to the surprise of many, villages in Uganda. The sounds of *Lecha Dodi* and the *Sh'ma* sung in Ugandan, with melody, rhythm and whole-body verve so new and exciting to our ears, rocked us. It brought us something in that last full-out, extended wail of *Sh'ma* that was both astonishing and familiar, a cry from a place and lifetime and Jewish soul just beyond reach of memory. Many did not know Laura's name or renown when we first received word of her

availability to perform for us, but after spending an evening grinning, clapping, toe-tapping, singing along and, yes, dancing with this brilliantly talented and captivating performer, we will never forget her.

She didn't just take us through a wide swath of geographical places; she took us to places of the heart. We time-travelled with her, remembering the Yiddish songs we'd heard as children. Yardena *kvelled* hearing Ladino songs she'd heard growing up in Haifa and has sung all her life. Bernie and others of us – including matriarch Pauline (with whom Laura spent a lot of tête-à-tête time at the after-concert party and then of course fully fell under Pauline's spell) and even some who came to KJCC for the first time – knew all the words to the Yiddish Ashkenazi songs. Dozens sang along with gusto and joy. We also revisited the 60s and accompanied Laura's "Carole King" self on "You've got a Friend," during the portion celebrating Jewish songwriters in America. There were meaningful medleys of familiar and unfamiliar songs, but the



irresistible magic lay in the weaving together of song and story, climaxing in the sad but inspiring song Laura had written about Ursula and Helga, the brave idealistic sisters who

smuggled underground resistance literature in their ski-poles as they "flew" down the mountains of 1930s Germany, not knowing that only one of them would survive. The



Island who listened to her mother's seminal Jewish music radio show, who has traveled



the world searching out and studying that music's roots and branches in a journey that must have been "*bashert*." She now

survivor, Ursula, had been her grandmother.

Despair, courage, joy, ritual, commen-

tary on the centuries-old difficulty of getting young peoples' *tushes* in seats (she left us laughing with a story about twelfth-century rabbis complaining about exactly the same thing), Laura covered it all in 60 minutes of beautiful, full-voiced musicianship – the girl from Long



lives in the Massachusetts Berkshires and spends about half the year cataloging and unearthing and performing Jewish music all over the



world. On this unforgettable night she made her way to us, and we are happily the richer for the evening's experience (as you can tell from the smiles in these



photos). Did I mention that it wasn't just the music, but that her voice was clear and ringing and soaring and rich and





beautiful and sent shivers of joy down everyone's spine? Did I mention that people were dancing in their seats during the stirring,

praise and even indulging the few who just couldn't resist a hug. When she finally joined everyone in the social hall for chats and a



nosh, the entire room did something I'm not sure I've seen before: they burst as one into spontaneous applause. Laura returned the love, staying and

up-tempo songs, and then spontaneously leapt to their feet to express their joy during the final number, a rousing and full-throated version of *Hava Nagila*?



chatting (and basking in the glow a little) for another hour. As to the dancing to *Hava Nagila*? "That took bravery," she said. But

After she left us, we realized we wanted to interview Laura for this article and asked Joyce Peckman to talk with her, since Joyce was to be her host for the night. Ultimately though, she interviewed us, and that says a lot about this woman. Joyce said, "I blush to say that she spent more time interviewing me than vice versa. She was fascinated by the KJCC, with its eclectic mix of people, and loved the welcoming, laid-back, non-judgmental attitude."



she is the one who brought us to our feet. And consensus among all present was clearly "let's do this again next year." ◇

There was a long line after the concert for those who wanted to buy her CDs. She warmly and patiently signed them all, thanking everyone for their

