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Grapevine: The Russians have come

By GREER FAY CASHMAN

MANY OF the people who attended the gala 30th anniversary celebrations of the newly renovated Beth Hatefutsoth - the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, gasped in delighted amazement at the magnificent transformation of the entrance lobby. (It was a shame, however, that the revamping did not include the main auditorium, which for some years now has proved too small for its purpose.) Emcee Michael Greenspan, broadcast journalist, film-maker and script writer, who in the 1980s was Israel and Middle East correspondent for CNN, said that when he came to Israel from his native Philadelphia, he thought he knew enough about the Jewish People, but his first visit to Beth Hatefutsoth really opened his eyes. Greenspan, who is usually heard in English, spoke in a mixed patter of Hebrew and English, but since he's been in Israel for more than 25 years, his fluency in Hebrew, albeit with a strong American accent, was no surprise. What was surprising was that philanthropist Leonid Nevzlin, who is chairman of the museum's International Board of Governors, delivered a speech in flawless Hebrew with correct intonation, even though he couldn't quite get rid of his Russian accent. Nevzlin said that it was extremely emotional for him to be able to make a presentation in Hebrew on "the ancient legacy of our people" for the first time.

Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Museum's Board of Directors, quipped that one can come from all over to Israel, but to be part of the museum one had to come from Russia. As it happens, his Russian accent is more pronounced than Nevzlin's, although he has been in Israel for much longer. Sharansky paid tribute to former prime minister Ariel Sharon for all that he had done to keep the museum afloat when it was in danger of closing down for lack of funds. He recalled that Sharon's courage and his ability to take on any challenge had been a source of inspiration to Soviet Jewry, enabling activists to stand up to the KGB. Sharansky related that when he and Yuli Edelstein had their first stint as government ministers, they were talking to each other in Russian and Sharon, who was also a minister, overheard them and warned them to be careful about what they were saying because he understood Russian. Sharansky praised Sharon's phenomenal memory and said he didn't need a reference book. "He had everything in his head - and he remembered it all." Although there were many issues on which he and Sharon disagreed, said Sharansky, he always respected Sharon for the emphasis he placed on Israel's relations with the Jewish diaspora. "He saw Israel as belonging to all Jews." When Sharansky was chairman of the ministerial forum for the diaspora, most of the members rarely showed up, but Sharon, before he was prime minister, came to every meeting. After he became prime minister he sent Sharansky to university campuses around the globe to talk to Jewish students. "Jewish identity was important to him and when he heard about the difficulties confronting Beth Hatefutsoth, he became a full partner in finding a solution." Sharansky and Nevzlin presented the former prime minister's son Gilad Sharon with a huge citation of appreciation to Ariel Sharon. For many in the audience who had worked with the former prime minister in one way or another, it was an extremely moving moment.

□ US AMBASSADOR James B. Cunningham and his wife Leslie hosted a concert at their residence in Herzliya Pituah in tribute to the *Wall Street Journal's* South Asia Bureau Chief American-Jewish journalist of Israeli descent Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped and murdered in Karachi, Pakistan in 2002. Cunningham noted that in addition to being a fine journalist, Daniel Pearl was also a musician and that there **have** been more than 2,000 worldwide concerts in his name that **have** helped to transform a tragedy into a bridge between peoples. "We hope it will lead us all to reflect upon the ideals upon which the concert is built," he told his guests, who included Pearl's aunt Hanna Ranen, Nobuko Takeuchi, the wife of the new Japanese ambassador and Edie Roodman, former director of the Jewish Federation of Oklahoma City, who was in Israel for the Lions of Judah and GA conventions. There was also a message from Pearl's parents Ruth and Judea Pearl, who live in Los Angeles and who established the Daniel Pearl Foundation to further the ideals which inspired his life and work.

Among the Foundation's activities are the Daniel Pearl Music Days. The 18-member Shani Girls Choir, founded and conducted by Pnina Inbar, is made up of girls aged 13-18 who attend the Jezreel Valley Center for the Arts. They include Christian and Muslim Arabs from villages in the Central Galilee as well as Jewish girls. Their repertoire includes classical and folk music as well as popular Hebrew and Arabic songs, their voices are angelic, and in the words of Ruth and Judea Pearl, "their combined voices resonate in

sharp defiance of the forces of division and hostility that took Danny's life, and will reinforce our unshaken conviction that at the end of the day, humanity will triumph and harmony will prevail."

□ LITHUANIAN AMBASSADOR Asta Skaisgiryte Liauskiene was so proud that the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theater was opening the season at the Israel Opera in Tel Aviv with Salome, arguably the most appropriate production for this part of the world, that she invited many of her friends from the diplomatic community, as well as numerous Israelis of Lithuanian background and other Israelis with whom she has established close relations, to **come** to the opening night performance at the Tel Aviv Performing Arts Center. Yitzhak Eldan, the Chief of Protocol at the Foreign Ministry, arrived an hour after landing in Israel from Panama, where he had been attending a diplomatic conference. Although he was exhausted, he knew how important the event was to the ambassador and did not want to disappoint her.

The Israel Opera's director-general Hanna Munitz and her Lithuanian counterpart Gintautus Kevisas traded compliments, though each said that the other was not the easiest person to work with. The ambassador, who was introducing people to each other, broke off to tell the members of the opera that they were "unbelievable." The Israel Opera will travel to Lithuania next June and will stage Rigoletto in Vilnius.

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