



Off the Shelf

Hollywood and Jewish refugees

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

Before I read the press release for “The Sun and Her Stars: Salka Viertel and Hitler’s Exiles in the Golden Age of Hollywood” by Donna Rifkind (Other Press), I’d never heard of Salka Viertel. While I knew that many Jewish and non-Jewish refugees who were actors, writers and directors worked in Hollywood or New York, her name was completely unfamiliar. Yet, Viertel not only wrote successful treatments and screenplays, but turned her California home into a European-style salon – creating a safe and comfortable place for those who felt rootless in a country far different from their own.

Rifkind feels that women’s accomplishments during the Golden Age of Hollywood have either been lost or ignored. She notes that, while women worked in every studio department, histories of those times rarely mention them. She also found something similar occurs in the books about European refugees: they so focus on men that one might believe no women suffered the pain of exile. As for Viertel, Rifkind not only wants her accomplishments acknowledged but to restore her reputation. She writes that Viertel has been called a number of unpleasant names, including gossipmonger, fraud, moneygrubber and witch, to name just a few. Part of Rifkind’s task is to show the true Viertel: the one who worked hard to create a home for her family and tried to help other refugees in need of work or solace.

In order to understand Viertel, Rifkind places her life in context. Viertel was born to an affluent Jewish family on the outskirts of the Austro-Hungarian empire. After deciding to become an actress, she lived in a variety of cities in Europe, including Weimar-era Berlin. She married Berthold Viertel, a writer and director for stage and film, and gave birth to three children. The decision to move to the United States in 1928 – when Viertel was 39 and her

husband 43 – was based on financial rather than political reasons. Unsure of whether or not they would be staying in the U.S., they left their three sons in Europe. However, the boys soon joined them and they made a permanent home in California.

Unfortunately, Viertel could not find work as an actress and began writing treatments and screenplays. Among her best-known films were “Anna Karenina” (1935), “The Painted Veil” (1934) and “Queen Christina” (1933). At one point she was so successful, she was one of the highest paid screenwriters in Hollywood. She often worked with Greta Garbo and, for a long time, the two were so close that Garbo spent a great deal of time in Viertel’s home, especially when she wanted to escape the press. It was in that home that Viertel held her Sunday open houses to which came not only European refugees, but many successful Hollywood writers, directors and actors. As more refugees tried to escape from Europe, Viertel worked with different groups to raise money for them, in addition to helping them find work in Hollywood. She did this while being the major source of income in the household. Her husband, who was often away working on projects, usually didn’t make enough money to support himself so Viertel had to send him funds while he lived in another city or country.

The Viertel marriage had its ups and downs. Both spouses had affairs, including some that lasted years. They still remained close to each other for decades even with these affairs, although Berthold finally asked for a divorce in order to marry someone else. Viertel’s longest romance did not end in marriage: her lover wanted children and finally broke it off to marry someone younger.

Viertel never planned to leave the U.S., but after World War II, she had difficulty finding work and moved to Switzerland in the 1960s. That’s because her name became

connected to people of interest to the House Un-American Activities Committee. Viertel, who was not a communist, had not been concerned with the politics of her friends during the war because she had more important worries. Her fears were personal: she didn’t know the status of her family in Europe – those who lived in territories conquered by the Nazis. Were they alive or dead? But any connection to communism in the post-war years could destroy a career.

In addition to writing about Viertel’s life, Rifkind talks about those who frequented her open houses. The most famous were the Mann brothers, Heinrich and Thomas. Although both were well known in Europe, Thomas was more successful in the U.S. Many of the other writers are less familiar. For example, writer Bruno Frank, who left Europe in 1937, worked on such films as “A Royal Scandal” (1945), “Northwest Passage” (1940) and “The Hunchback of Notre Dame” (1939), sometimes as a named writer and other times without credit. Viertel was also friends with Christopher Isherwood, the British writer of the short stories “Goodbye to Berlin” (which were later adapted into the play “I Am a Camera,” and then the Broadway musical and film “Cabaret”). He lived in her garage apartment and often entertained Garbo when Viertel was busy working.

“The Sun and Her Stars” contains a great deal of detail in its more than 400 pages. Not all the details were of equal interest, particularly some of the very personal facts about Viertel’s marriage. At times, the book’s focus was uneven: the story of sun (Viertel) was eclipsed by that of her stars (those who visited her salon). However, Rifkind does an excellent job not only bringing Viertel’s accomplishments to light and proving she was a remarkable woman, but portraying the lives of those refugees who felt lost in the New World and those who found success.

Resources

Continued from page 1

- ◆ Lilith Magazine’s blog writers continue to add new material, some about dealing with COVID-19. The blogs can be found at www.lilith.org/blog/.
- ◆ The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute is offering images from its current exhibition at www.brandeis.edu/hbi/artist-program/exhibition.html.
- ◆ Jewish community organizations are bringing the power of “Collective Compassion” to National Mental Health Awareness Month. Created by Jewish Teens

Thrive, a project of the Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative, Collective Compassion is a national response to the growing wellness needs of teens. “Dozens of events and experiences, many in partnership with artists and organizations, draw on the power of Jewish creativity, culture, learning and values to support teens – and the adults that care about them,” according to the Collective Compassion website. For more information, visit www.collectivecompassion2020.com.

- ◆ The Center for Jewish History offers a “Genealogy Coffee Break” on Facebook on Tuesdays at 3:30 pm. The genealogy discussion is led by a librarian from the Genealogy Institute at the Center for Jewish History. Videos of previous meetings are also available for review. Visit www.facebook.com/watch/centerforjewishhistory/501317183869918/ to take part in the live program or view the videos.
- ◆ Pardes scholars and Ramah Darom educators will hold a Pardes *Beit Midrash B’Darom Yom Iyun* (Day of Learning) on Sunday, May 17, from 11 am-3 pm. The theme this year is “Holy Relationships: Exploring Our Spiritual Identity.” Pardes says, “We will examine the current state of our relationships with the Divine, what it means to inhabit holiness and how to own our spiritual identities and

more.” For more information, visit www.facebook.com/events/663576081059631/.

- ◆ The Yiddish Book Center now has a web page dedicated to its almost weekly virtual events. Most events will be available to a little number of people on Zoom, but open to all on the center’s Facebook page. For more information, visit www.yiddishbookcenter.org/visit/calendar-events.
- ◆ Limmud, <https://limmud.org/>, is holding a variety of virtual event. The site says its mission is to “make accessible some of the world’s most dynamic Jewish educators, performers and teachers, working in a variety of educational styles – lectures, workshops, text-study sessions, film, meditation, discussions, exhibits and performance.” Events take place across the world. To learn more, click on events and pick events by region.
- For more resources, see the last six issues of *The Reporter* or visit www.thereporter.org/Article.aspx?aID=5484, www.thereporter.org/Article.aspx?aID=5499, www.thereporter.org/Article.aspx?aID=5502, www.thereporter.org/Article.aspx?aID=5512, www.thereporter.org/Article.aspx?aID=5519 and www.thereporter.org/Article.aspx?aID=5527.

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LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF FORMATION OF LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY: The name of the limited liability company is: Beston Home Inspection Services, LLC (the “Company”). The date of filing of the Articles of Organization of the Company with the Secretary of State was April 8, 2020. The county in which the principal place of business of the Company shall be located is Broome County. The Secretary of State has been designated as agent of the Company upon whom process against it may be served. The Secretary of State shall mail a copy of any process against the Company, to Hinman Howard & Kattell, LLP, Attn: Robert W. Carey, 80 Exchange Street, Suite 700, Binghamton, NY 13901. The purpose of the business of the Company is any lawful business purpose.

607 Construction LLC NOTICE OF FORMATION OF LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY (“LLC”)

Articles of Organization of 607 Construction LLC filed with the NYS Secretary of State (NYSS) on 4/8/2020. Office of LLC is in Broome County. The Secretary of State designated as agent for service of process against it. NYSS shall mail process to 434 Cloverdale Road, Chenango Forks, NY 13746. Business purpose: any lawful activity.

644 Gage Road, LLC NOTICE OF FORMATION OF LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY (“LLC”)

Articles of Organization of 644 Gage Road, LLC filed with the NYS Secretary of State (NYSS) on 4/17/2020. Office of LLC is in Broome County. The Secretary of State designated as agent for service of process against it. NYSS shall mail process to 1963 Bradley Creek Rd, Endicott, NY 13760. Business purpose: any lawful activity.

Notice of Formation of Mushock Development LLC

Arts. of Org. filed with Secy. of State of NY (SSNY) on 07/17/2006. Office location: Broome Co. SSNY designated as agent of LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail process to: The LLC, 1137 Simon Road, Endicott, New York 13760. Purpose: any lawful activities.

Notice of Formation of BRAVE2BU, LLC. Arts. of Org. filed with Secy. of State of NY (SSNY) on 04/16/20. Office location: Broome County. SSNY designated as agent of LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail process to: 4132 Gregory Rd., Binghamton, NY

13903. Purpose: any lawful activities.

Notice of Formation of EPL Rentals, LLC

Arts. of Org. filed with Secy. of State of NY (SSNY) on 04/27/2020. Office location: Broome Co. SSNY designated as agent of LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail process to: The LLC, P.O. Box 783, Johnson City, NY 13790. Purpose: any lawful activities.

Two Plus Four Construction Co. is the General Contractor for the construction of 17 duplex buildings (34 family units) in the Fairmont Park development in the town of Union, NY. The project known as Fairmont Park Apartments is a scattered site; duplexes will be constructed on Woodland Avenue, Oak Street, Poplar Street, and Birch Street. We plan to start construction in May of 2020.

This project IS TAXABLE
Davis Bacon Wage Rates DO NOT APPLY to this project.

We are especially interested in receiving proposals from NYS Certified MBE / WBE, SDVOB and Section 3 subcontractors and

material suppliers. Our goals for this project are: MBE: 20% WBE: 10% SDBOB: 6% as well as a preference to Section 3 subcontractors and suppliers.

Plans will be available in a designated area for viewing at the following locations (by appointment):

- Two Plus Four Construction Co – 6737 Myers Road, E. Syracuse, NY 13057 – contact Brenda Wilson bwilson@twoplusfour.com (315) 437-1808
- The SEPP, Inc. Office – 53 Front Street, Binghamton, NY 13905 – contact John Bernardo (607) 723-8989

Plans will be available for online viewing at the following locations:

- The Builders Exchange of the Southern Tier – www.bxstier.com – contact Cheryl Plahanski cheryl@bxstier.com (607) 771-7000
- Syracuse Builders Exchange – www.syrbex.com – contact Monica Noble (315) 437-9936

Plans will be available for online viewing on-line and/or purchase at: www.planandprint.com or at Plan & Print Systems at 6160 Eastern Ave., Syracuse, NY 13211, (315) 437-5111. Contact Two Plus Four Construction for access code to view plans.

Any questions regarding the plans

and specifications should be directed to Brenda Wilson at Two Plus Four Construction Co. bwilson@twoplusfour.com (315) 437-1808.

Work areas include: landscaping, framing and trim carpentry, insulation, siding, roofing, doors, windows, drywall, flooring, painting, bath accessories, appliances, cabinets, countertops, blinds, plumbing, HVAC, electric and all associated building materials.

Please notify me immediately if you are interested in submitting a proposal by completing the box at the bottom of this letter and then faxing or emailing it to our office. All proposals should be mailed or faxed to Two Plus Four Construction Co. at the address or fax number above. All proposals are due by Friday May 22nd by 2:00 p.m. attention Brenda Wilson.

Notice of Formation of KGBC, LLC

Arts. of Org. filed with Secy. of State of NY (SSNY) on 04/22/2020. Office location: Broome Co. SSNY designated as agent of LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail process to: The LLC, 106 Washington Avenue, #1, Endicott, New York 13760. Purpose: any lawful activities.

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