



## Reverend Katz Library

### New Book Reviews

November 2024

This month we have received some remarkably interesting books, some of which have been recommended by our readers. If you have any recommendation for books with Jewish content, please contact the synagogue office and we will see if we are able to order the books for our library. Please enjoy our recent reviews.

#### **Lee Yaron ed., *10/7 100 Human Stories*      MID-10/7 Yar**

On October 7, 2023—the Sabbath and the final day of the holiday of Sukkot—the Gaza-based terror group Hamas launched an unprecedented assault on the people of Israel. Crashing through the border, attacking from the sea and air, militants indiscriminately massacred civilians in what became one of the worst terror attacks in modern history, and the most lethal day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

A radically passionate work of investigative journalism and political critique by acclaimed *Haaretz* reporter Lee Yaron, *10/7* chronicles the massacre that ignited a war through the stories of more than 100 civilians. These stories are the products of extensive interviews with survivors, the bereaved, and first responders in Israel and beyond. The victims run the gamut from left-wing kibbutzniks and Burning Man-esque partiers to radical right-wingers, from Bedouins and Israeli Arabs to Thai and Nepalese guest workers, peace activists, elderly Holocaust survivors, refugees from Ukraine and Russia, pregnant women, and babies.

At a time when people are seeking a deeper understanding of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how internal political turmoil in Israel has affected it, they predominantly encounter perspectives from the powerful—from politicians and military officers. *10/7* takes a fresh approach, offering answers through the stories of everyday people, those who lived tenuously on the border with Gaza.

Yaron profiles victims from a wide range of communities—depicting the fullness of their lives, not just their final moments—to honour their memories and reveal the way the attack ripped open Israeli society and put the entire Middle East on the precipice of disaster. Each chapter begins with a portrait of a community, interweaving history with broader political analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to provide context for the narratives that follow. Ultimately, *10/7* shows that the tragedy is much greater than the violence of the attacks, and in fact extends back through the entire Netanyahu era, which propagated a false image of Israel as a technologically advanced, militarily formidable powerhouse so essential to the region that it could continue to ignore and undermine Palestinian statehood indefinitely.

#### **Karl Kruszelnicki, *A Periodic tale: My Sciency Memoir*      BIO KRU**

The only child of Holocaust survivors who fled to Australia in 1950, Karl has always forged his own destiny in an idiosyncratic way. Before he became one of the world's favourite scientific storytellers, he ambled through a convoluted cacophony of a career.

In the 1960s, he got his start as a physicist at the Port Kembla Steelworks and promptly joined the Steel Industries Auto Club, racing modified rally cars on Wollongong's deserted back roads. In the 1970s, he entered his self-described 'drug-crazed hippie years', making a living as a long-haired, dope-smoking taxi driver. After he applied to be a NASA astronaut in the 1980s and 'failed', he ended up live broadcasting the first space shuttle launch on Triple J instead. Unexpectedly, that blasted off his media career, and from there it was a stratospheric rise from radio to TV, books, newspapers, speaking, podcasts and the internet.

Karl's story teaches us that you don't have to know all the answers, as long as you ask the right questions. He has wandered down more than a dozen career paths, from being a TV weatherman (really) to a professional four-wheel drive tester in the outback (really) to being a roadie for Bo Diddley (really). All of these seemingly random experiences have helped create the Karl we know today.

In this long-awaited memoir, you will learn that it's okay to not take a linear path through life, and that by following our curiosities and our passions, we can bend the universe to our liking.

### **Rubin Dana, *Jewish voices: inspiring and empowering quotes from global thought leaders* LIT RUB**

Explore the diverse diaspora of Jewish heritage and find wisdom in their experiences with this expansive volume of inspiring quotes from famous Jewish figures. Spotting Jewish writers, artists, scholars, politicians, activists, and visionaries from all eras of the Jewish diaspora, *Jewish Voices* offers a powerful collection of insights to pore over and treasure. Whether you are Jewish or not, you will draw meaning from the universal lessons in their statements and make connections to your own cultural identity and community. The inspirational quotes "Whatever you choose to do, leave tracks. That means don't do it just for yourself. You will want to leave the world a little better for your having lived." —Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States"

Covering a wide variety of topics, including family, activism, spirituality, feminism, and more, some of the other Jewish voices featured Adam Sandler, American actor and comedian Elie Wiesel, writer, professor, and political activist Gertrude Stein, American novelist, poet, and playwright Jonathan Sacks, English Orthodox rabbi, philosopher, theologian, and author Jerry Seinfeld, American stand-up comedian, actor, writer, and producer and many more. Throughout the pages, works of art from Jewish artists bring the words to life. If you are Jewish, *Jewish Voices* will enrich your pride in your Jewish identity. If you are not Jewish, the book will expand your appreciation for the Jewish community. Whatever culture you belong to, this beautiful book will leave you feeling inspired, empowered, and uplifting.

### **Francesco Lotoro *The lost music of the Holocaust: bringing the music of the camps to the ears of the world at last.* MUS LOT**

For more than thirty years Francesco Lotoro, an Italian pianist and composer has been on an odyssey to recover music written by the inmates of Adolf Hitler's concentration camps and the gulags of Stalin's Soviet Union. Between 1933, the year of the opening of the Dachau Lager in Germany, to Stalin's death in 1953 when thousands of Soviet prisoners were released, Lotoro pieces together the human stories of survivors whose only salvation was their love of music.

Across three decades of relentless investigation, his findings as captured in *Lost Music of the Holocaust* are extraordinary and historically important. Lotoro unearthed over eight thousand unpublished works of music, ten thousand documents (microfilms, diaries, notebooks, and recordings on phonographic recordings), as well as locating and interviewing many survivors who in

a previous life had been trained musicians and composers. Be it a symphony, an opera, a simple folk song or even a gypsy melody, Lotoro has travelled the globe to track them down. Many pieces were hastily scribbled down on whatever the composer could find: food wrappings, a vegetable sack and even a train ticket stub. To avoid discovery by camp guards, Lotoro even discovered forgotten pieces of code inmates had invented to hide their real meaning - music. In many cases, the composers would be murdered in the gas chambers or worked to death, not knowing whether their music would be heard by the world. Until now.

**David Baddiel, My family, the memoir      BIO BAD**

A searingly honest, funny and moving family memoir in which David Baddiel exposes his mother's idiosyncratic sex life, and his father's dementia, to the same affectionate scrutiny.

On the surface, David Baddiel's childhood was fairly standard: a lower-middle-class Jewish family living in an ordinary house in Dollis Hill, north-west London. But David came to realise that his mother was in fact not ordinary at all. Having escaped extermination by fleeing Nazi Germany as a child, she was desperate to make her life count, which took the form of a passionate, decades-long affair with a golfing memorabilia salesman. David's detailing of the affair – including a hilarious focus on how his mother turned their household over to golf memorabilia, and an eye-popping cache of her erotic writings – leads to the inescapable conclusion that Sarah Baddiel was a cross between Jack Niklaus and Erica Jong.

Meanwhile, as Baddiel investigates his family's past, his father's memories are fading; dementia is making him moodier and more disinhibited, with an even greater penchant for obscenity. As with his mother's affair, there is both comedy and poignancy to be found: laughter is a constant presence, capable of transforming the darkest of experiences into something redemptive.

My Family: The Memoir is David Baddiel's candid examination of his childhood, family and memory offering a twisted love letter to his parents.

**Mark Hodkinson, Opening the gates of hell: the untold story of Herbert Kenny , the man who discovered Belsen      HOL HOD**

Herbert Kenny, an army dispatch rider, was the first ally to push open the gates at Belsen Concentration Camp, in April 1945. He kept his story from the world until a chance correspondence with a trainee journalist brought it to light. Now, forty years on, that reporter is ready to share Herbert's incredible tale with the world.

With unprecedented access to Herbert's diaries, letters and interviews, Mark Hodkinson brings to life the harrowing conditions of Bergen-Belsen and its eventual liberation. From the events leading up to its gruesome discovery, to the trauma Herbert faced and his abandonment in the aftermath, this is a testament to the power of one person in the face of unimaginable darkness.

This is the tale of an ordinary man thrown into an extraordinary, life-changing situation. How can a person cope when they come face-to-face with history's darkest moment? Herbert Kenny was that man. This is his story.

**Eleanor Reissa, The letters project: A daughters journey      BIO REY**

In 1986, when her mother died at the age of sixty-four, Eleanor Reissa went through all her belongings. In the back of her mother's lingerie drawer, she found an old leather purse. Inside that purse was a large wad of folded papers. They were letters. Fifty-six of them. In German. Written in 1949. Letters from her father to her mother, when they were courting. Just four years earlier, he had fought to stay alive in Auschwitz and on the Death March while she had spent the war years suffering in Uzbekistan. Thirty years later, Eleanor—a theatre artist who has been on the forefront of

keeping Yiddish alive—finally had the letters translated. The particulars of those letters send her off on an unimaginable adventure into the past, forever changing her and anyone who reads this book.

“‘The Holocaust,’ Eleanor Reissa writes in this unforgettable and courageous book, ‘is attached to me like my skin and I would be formless without it.’ A very personal story that begins with her discovery of some sixty letters written in 1949 is also a fundamental one of a woman trying to make sense of her life and family and of the shadows that go back before she was born. There is plenty of feeling and sentiment, but it never feels sentimental. Her inimitable wit leavens the sadder scenes. This journey of discovery is riveting, told with tender insight, at times heartbreaking and at times heartwarming just like the Yiddish songs that have delighted Ms. Reissa’s audiences.” —Joseph Berger is a New York Times reporter and author of *Displaced Persons: Growing Up American After the Holocaust*

**Yael van der Wouden, *The Safekeep: a novel* F VAN**

An exhilarating tale of twisted desire, histories and homes, and the unexpected shape of revenge.

It is fifteen years after the Second World War, and Isabel has built herself a solitary life of discipline and strict routine in her late mother's country home, with not a fork or a word out of place. But all is upended when her brother Louis delivers his graceless new girlfriend, Eva, at Isabel's doorstep - as a guest, there to stay for the season...

In the sweltering heat of summer, Isabel's desperate need for control reaches boiling point. What happens between the two women leads to a revelation which threatens to unravel all she has ever known.

‘Surprising, chilling, and electric. *The Safekeep* is a simply fantastic work of literature.’

Alice Winn, bestselling author of *IN MEMORIAM*

Nominated for The Booker Prize 2024

**Lavie Tidhar, *Adama* F TID**

*THERE IS NO LAND WITHOUT BLOOD, AND I WATER THIS LAND WITH THE BLOOD OF MY MEN.*

Ruth's family were in Budapest when the Nazis came.

Now Ruth is in Palestine, amid the bare hills inland from Haifa, breaking the rocky soil of an unyielding land before it breaks her. With her comrades, her fellow kibbutzniks, she will build a better world. There will be green grass, orange trees and pomegranates, a land that is their own and no one else's.

So they till their fields, dig their wells, build their homes and forge a new way of living, fiercely proud of their shared pursuit of a dream.

But as one generation begets another, the dream unravels, twisted into a dark tapestry of secrets and lies; sacrificed for revenge, forbidden love and murder.

*A sweeping historical epic following four generations of a single family as they struggle to hold on to their land and each other.*