

## BCC at 45 Honors Generous "Menschen," Introduces "Musical Culture Awards"

Larry Nathenson

Over 200 BCC members and friends gathered on Sunday, March 26, 2017 at the historic Saban Theatre in Beverly Hills for our annual awards brunch and a celebration of our 45 years as a congregation serving the Los Angeles LGBTQ Jewish community and its allies.

In addition to our usual Herman Humanitarian Award and Presidents Award, given to Agnes Herman and Richard Lesse, this year we introduced Musical Culture Awards to honor those who have enriched our community with music. The six honorees – BCC Cantor Juval Porat, former BCC Cantor Don Alan Croll, BCC Cantorial Emerita Fran Chalin, BCC members Tamara Kline and Jeanelle LaMance, and Jewish lesbian folksinger Phranc – joined in bringing us an amazing concert to celebrate the spirit, soul, and culture that their musical talents have brought to BCC over the last 30 years.

We were especially pleased to bestow the Rabbi Erwin and Agnes Herman Humanitarian Award on one of its namesakes, Agnes G. Herman. BCC's first annual award, dating to 1985, honors the Hermans for their singular efforts to support BCC in its earliest days as the world's first Jewish congregation with outreach to the LGBTQ community and for their steadfast support ever since. Agnes's many other accomplishments include helping to found the first PFLAG groups for clergy, 48 years of activism through speaking and writing on LGBTQ inclusion and AIDS education, sponsoring the first online resource center on LGBTQ issues and Judaism, and much more. Her acceptance remarks can be found on page 7.

Agnes was introduced by her long-time dear friend Joel Kushner, an amazing activist in his own right, who serves as Director of the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health, the Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation, and the Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center for Sexual Orientation Issues in the Jewish Community, all at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles.

The 2017 Presidents Award went to BCC member

Richard Lesse, for his extraordinarily generous volunteer service to BCC over many years. Richard has served as the Secretary of BCC's Board of Directors since 2011, and is a one-person Technology Committee, continually advancing BCC's in-house and live-stream tech and our audio and sound systems. He previously chaired the Membership Committee and the Men's Havurah. This June "no rest Richard" will be pedaling as co-captain of the Wheely Nice Guys team on his fourth 545-mile 7-day AIDS/LifeCycle bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Richard's remarks can be found on page 8.

Richard was introduced by BCC past president and treasurer Brett Trueman, one of BCC's most stalwart supporters and volunteers who spearheaded and oversaw the lengthy process of the capital campaign, real estate search, architectural design, and construction that resulted in the dedication of our new synagogue home at 6090 W. Pico Blvd. six years ago.

Following a brief intermission, Senior Rabbi Lisa Edwards introduced the concert portion of our program with a brief history of our venue, the Saban Theatre. Opened in 1930 as the Fox Wilshire, this elaborate Spanish art deco theatre hosted the

premieres of such classics as the Marx Brothers' "Animal Crackers," Marilyn Monroe's "How to Marry a Millionaire," and Julie Andrews' "The Sound of Music." We thank Rabbi Edwards for originating the idea of including a concert in this year's awards ceremony, and we join her in celebrating her 65th birthday on March 25 (see page 4 for excerpts from Rabbi Lisa's remarks).

The first performer was Cantor Juval Porat, who has served as BCC's cantor since 2009. Classically trained in Germany and Israel, Juval was the first cantor ordained in Germany since World War II. From sacred song to pop culture, as prayer leader, choir director, songwriter and CD soloist, Juval delights and inspires as a spiritual and musical guide along our life journeys.

Accompanied by Cantors Tifani Coyot and Lizzie Weiss, Juval performed "House of New Life," which he co-wrote



PHOTO: AMY HABERLAND

Tamara Kline, Cantor Juval Porat, Jeanelle LaMance, and Cantor Don Croll receive their Musical Culture awards

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with Tamara Kline for the dedication of our new building in 2011. On the screen behind him were many moving scenes from that dedication. He also performed his new composition, "Theology," which will be included on his third CD to be released soon, as well as his own musical interpretation of "Yih'yu L'ratzon" from the liturgy, and the song "Praying for Time" by George Michael, who passed away last year.



PHOTO: AMY HABERLAND

*Jeanelle LaMance, Cantor Croll, Phranc, and Cantorial Emerita Fran Chalin receive their Musical Culture awards*

Next up was Cantorial Emerita Fran Chalin, who served as BCC's cantorial soloist from 1993 to 2008. Today Fran provides spiritual counseling and hospice care in the Jewish community and makes beautiful music with Singing for Peace Yiddish Chorus and the Klezmer Band Gay Gezunt. Fran performed "Shnireleh Pereleh," a classic Yiddish song about the arrival of the Messiah, with photos in the background from the 2005 reunion of Czech Holocaust survivor Torah scrolls organized by BCC.

She also sang "Shopping for Love," a medley of three Yiddish love songs, and Ray Scantlin's "Who Have You Loved Today?" from the musical "Joseph McCarthy is Alive and Living in Dade County," a 1977 response to Anita Bryant's anti-gay campaign in Florida.

BCC's first ordained cantor, Don Alan Croll, served our community from 1986 to 1992. Previously a singer, dancer, and Broadway actor, Don has served as a cantor in Dallas since 1996 and has now come out of retirement to serve our sibling LGBT congregation there, Beth El Binah. Don performed "How Can I Sing?" an adaptation of a Hebrew poem with lyrics by Malcolm Stern and music by Michael Isaacson, and Meyer Machtenberg's musical adaptation of the "Shehecheyanu" blessing. He closed with David Kleiner's English translation of the Ladino song "Raba HaMehikoh," the chorus of which opens with the line "Don't fall in love with a Mexican rabbi"!

Known as the "All American Jewish lesbian folksinger," Phranc has been performing original music since the 1970s. She has influenced electropunk, new wave and other genres over the course of her career. Now predominantly an artist whose paper and cardboard constructions engagingly reflect butch culture, Phranc's work has been shown across the

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### G'VANIM

G'vanim "Hues (of the rainbow)" is the bimonthly newsletter of

**BETH CHAYIM CHADASHIM**  
6090 West Pico Blvd., L.A. CA 90035

Founded in 1972 as the world's first gay and lesbian synagogue, today BCC is an inclusive community of progressive lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and heterosexual Jews, our families, and friends. Everyone is welcome to attend weekly Friday evening services.

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U.S. She sang the traditional Yiddish song "Tzena Tzena" and her original songs "Lifelover" and "Take Off Your Swastika," written in 1981 as a response to the popularity of Nazi symbols in punk culture of the time.

BCC member Jeanelle LaMance is a retired teacher who has spent much of her life making music in schools, churches and synagogues. For 18 years she has beautifully accompanied BCC's cantors, choir, and visiting performers on piano during High Holiday services and other events and also plays with Zingen far Sholem Yiddish Chorus and Gay Gezunt, a Klezmer band started at BCC 20 years ago (with Fran Chalin). Jeanelle played the now classic song "Lechi Lach," first performed at BCC some 30 years ago and written by Debbie Friedman and Savina Teubal, and Debbie Friedman's adaptation of the "Tefillat Haderech" (traveler's prayer).

This amazing concert closed with Tamara Kline, who enjoyed a 20-year career as a music composer and producer that included commercials for Barbie and Pepsi, music for Oprah Winfrey and the Disney Channel, and the theme for the CBS Winter Olympics. Now also a marriage and family therapist in Beverly Hills, Tamara writes and plays soulful music for BCC. Together with longtime BCC friend Gwen Stewart of "Rent" fame, Tamara performed the song "What If," which she co-wrote with Devra Fishman. She also performed "Let Music Bring Us Together," which she co-wrote with Fran Chalin, inspired by the Pete Seeger line "if you sing a song of another culture, it's harder to kill them."

Our master of ceremonies for both parts of the program was BCC member Adam Kulbersh, a successful character actor in television and film, and now expanding the use of his talents to include writing as well. He is also the proud

new father of his infant son Jack, who made a brief appearance in his father's arms. Adam regaled us with his usual humor as he introduced all the award presenters and concert performers and kept us right on schedule. He also

conducted our live auction and opportunity drawing with raffle prizes. Congratulations to all the winners!

Many thanks to all the others who worked so hard on this brunch and concert, including event co-chairs Tracy Moore and Marc Breindel and committee members Sofia Ames, Robin Berkovitz, Gordon Blitz, Davi Cheng, Jeff Cohen, Ray Eelsing, Mark Farber, Aviyah Farkas, William Garbutt, Ruth Geffner, Ginger Jacobs, Mike King, Bruce Maxwell, Laurie Newman, Cecilia Quigley Groman, Lauren Schlau, Hannah Theile, Ronnie Wexler, Bracha Yael, and special thanks to Danny Fisk. Thanks also to Pam Postrel for her videos and to the concert band: Ricky Katz on electric/acoustic guitar, T.J. Troy on drums and percussion, Mike Meehan on piano, and David Tranchina on bass.

And a big thank you to Amy Haberland Photography for generously donating their time and for taking gorgeous photos of this event. You are invited to download photos at no charge from <http://amyhaberlandphotography.zenfolio.com/p4777492> (password "shalom")



Joan Spittler and Leigh Grode with their "donut wall" at the BCC@45 gala

## Shavuot at BCC

Join the BCC community as we observe the holiday of Shavuot on Tuesday, May 30, 6:00 pm-12am. We'll begin with a brief Yizkor (memorial) service at 6pm, followed by a very dairy potluck (a Shavuot tradition) and "Around the World with Cheeses," curated by Bruce Weil. Our Tikkun Leyl Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah with study led our clergy and perhaps others — more details soon. Contact Rabbi Lisa Edwards for more information at [lisa@bcc-la.org](mailto:lisa@bcc-la.org).



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# From the Saban Theatre: Rabbi Lisa on BCC@45 Thoughts on Our New Musical Culture Awards

Senior Rabbi Lisa Edwards



PHOTO: KEINALOVE

Excerpts from Rabbi Lisa's remarks at the Saban Theatre at our BCC@45 celebration, the day after her own birthday:

All eight of our honorees today are not only extraordinary; they are extraordinarily precious to me. So thanks for this great birthday present, everyone who had anything to do with today! What a super birthday party!

I wanted to take a moment now to say— from my new perspective at age 65, as well as from almost 23 years as rabbi at BCC — and that's a lot of perspective — that our congregation has been blessed by the times we grew up in and the people who happened by, and these music makers we honor today are chief among them...

Whether we call it "pholkmusic" or women's music or new Jewish music, the musical traditions represented by our honorees, and the music they create and propagate, really have both preserved and changed Jewish prayer, Jewish community, and LGBTQ community... What was once considered underground music created common ground, firming up the earth beneath us so that those of us considered "other" could come together to stand on solid ground.

In celebration of BCC's 45th anniversary, we are proud today to be initiating this new award — the Musical Culture Award — in tribute to the music makers — these culture makers — who continue to help shape LGBTQ culture and our congregation...

As the world's first synagogue created by gay and lesbian Jews, BCC is still today a haven and place of queer and Jewish culture making. The Musical Culture Award recognizes the music makers who bring spirit, soul, sanctity and culture to BCC and the LGBTQ Jewish community.

I want to take a moment first though to honor two other people special to BCC — Agnes Herman and Richard Lesse — who have helped anchor BCC and have helped it fly, enabling us in a variety of ways to reach out beyond our doors and bring people in. These two people, who came to BCC decades apart from each other, saw what unique gifts BCC has to offer as well as visions of what BCC could still become.

It was my idea to honor the musicians who have touched us so deeply because over my 23+ years at BCC I've become increasingly aware that much of our

identity as a queer and Jewish community comes by way of the musicians we've known and loved. So much of BCC is of their making and by their design.

A 19th century Rabbi wrote:

"The inner history of a people is contained in its song."  
— Austrian Rabbi Adolf Jellinek, *Der Orient* (1844).

And while I don't know exactly what that rabbi meant by "inner history," I know what it means to me about a community and a people that lived closeted for so long, whose inner life was seldom shared until musical movements — women's music, folk music — helped to bring us out, leading the way to all kinds of music of the soul — guitars in the synagogue, prayers sung in English, folk music about being queer or Jewish or both, Purim spiels and popular songs bringing humor and love to our lives in bold new ways...

*Toward the end of the concert, just before the awards were presented:*

See why we wanted to honor these folks? We do have something for each of you to take with you today: these plaques, each with a mezuzah case decorated with musical notes, with a copy of BCC's own special mezuzah scroll inside, and these words on each plaque:

**Music is the doorway to the soul,  
And the singer its mezuzah.**

A mezuzah is that artful object that hangs in the doorway of a Jewish home. It contains a prayer, as the Torah tells us, "Inscribe these words on the doorposts of your house, that you might remember."

So what might it mean for a singer to be a mezuzah? Perhaps that a maker of music serves — like a mezuzah — not only as a work of art, but as a guardian, a reminder, an invitation, a touchstone.

Blessed are you, sweet singers, all of you who, with your gifts of music and soul, preserve our past, celebrate our present, open doors to our future.

May your music always bring us together!

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## Where Will You Finally Rest? Special Opportunities for BCC Members

When: Sunday, May 7, 2017, 3:30 pm - 5:30 pm  
 Where: Beth Chayim Chadashim  
 6090 W. Pico Blvd, Los Angeles 90035  
[www.bcc-la.org](http://www.bcc-la.org)

BCC is blessed to have not one, but two local Jewish cemeteries offer our members, family, and friends a special discounted price for complete cemetery and mortuary services. Details of this special offer will be presented by:

Wayne Arak from Home of Peace Memorial Park and Mortuary and Moe Goldsman from Sholom Chapels Memorial Park and Mortuary

We invite you to attend to learn about each place of rest, how you can benefit from the special offers, and how to sign up for a pre-need package.

This is a free event. Please RSVP to Aviyah: [mefarkas@gmail.com](mailto:mefarkas@gmail.com). If you cannot attend, but want information, please contact Aviyah.

## L'Chayim Legacy Circle Invites you to a Celebratory Luncheon on May 21

Everyone in the BCC community is invited to a special luncheon on Sunday, May 21st from 12:00 to 2:00 pm. This year we're extending the invitation to all those who would like to find out what the L'Chayim Legacy Circle (LLC) is about and why they may wish to join.



At the luncheon we'll acknowledge and thank members of our L'Chayim Legacy Circle — those who have demonstrated their commitment to BCC's future by including the temple in their will or trust. We will recognize and honor past members who left bequests to BCC and describe their impact on our shul.

Along with a catered luncheon, the program will also feature a musical performance by Tamara Kline. Rabbi Edwards will welcome newcomers to the circle and explain the benefits of becoming an active part of this distinctive group.

Whether you already have a will or trust or are interested in learning how they can benefit you, please join us! The event is underwritten so there is no charge.

To RSVP for the luncheon, please contact Gordon Blitz at (626) 664-1410 or [gordon.blitz@yahoo.com](mailto:gordon.blitz@yahoo.com) so we can determine your choice of entrée and accommodate any dietary restrictions. Please RSVP no later than May 17.

If you have questions about the L'Chayim Legacy Circle that you'd like answered before the luncheon, please contact Ray Eelsing at (310) 895-5116 or [reelsing@me.com](mailto:reelsing@me.com).



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# LA Pride 2017

## March like we had Somewhere to go... to a Better World

The BCC clergy invite you to join with the BCC community to take part in LA Pride's march this year on Sunday, June 11. Rather than a parade this year, the community is being invited to march in solidarity with (and on the same day as) the National Equality March for Unity and Pride in Washington DC. More details later on where to gather so that BCC folks can march together, but in the meantime, mark your calendars (looks like brunch might have to come after the parade this year). The text below is from LA Pride's website.

<https://www.lapride.org/events-calendar/resist-marchrally>

**Sunday, June 11, 8:00 am**

On Sunday, June 11th we will march from Hollywood, where LA Pride was born in 1970, to West Hollywood, where LA Pride grew up. Instead of a parade celebrating our past progress, we are requesting that our entire LGBTQ+ community and its allies march to ensure our collective futures. Our march will be taking place in solidarity with, and on the same day as, the National Equality March for Unity and Pride in Washington DC.

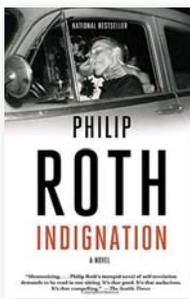
We simply felt that in 2017 we need to return to our roots and protest so that those who would roll back our hard won human rights are put on notice that we will not stand idly by. This is the founding premise of Christopher Street West. This march is for those who believe that America's strength is its diversity. This is not a Democratic or Republican march. It is not a red or blue march. This is a red, white and blue march meant for anyone who cares about human rights. On Sunday, June 11th our unique, diverse, inter-sectional voices will come together in one harmonized voice.



## BCC Books and Bagels Group

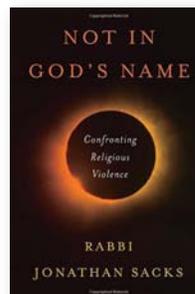
Larry Nathenson

BCC's Book Group (Books and Bagels) has been meeting continuously since January 1995. The group meets monthly in members' homes for a bagel brunch and discussion of a book selected by the group. We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). Our next two meetings are as follows.



**Sunday, May 28, 10:00 am**  
***Indignation*, by Philip Roth**

A novel about a Jewish boy from Newark who attends a largely Gentile college in the Midwest in the 1950s, and the basis of a recent film of the same name.



**Sunday, June 25, 10:00 am**  
***Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

This book by the former chief rabbi of Britain addresses the problem of religiously motivated violence in today's world and offers new interpretations of religious texts to help reduce the phenomenon of "altruistic evil."

The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required for location and to ensure enough food. For more information, contact Larry Nathenson at [Larrynath@aol.com](mailto:Larrynath@aol.com).

# Agnes Herman Says “Thank You” to Her Special Congregation BCC



PHOTO: AMY HABERLAND

*Agnes Herman receives the Humanitarian Award presented by Joel Kushner*

First, Happy Birthday, Rabbi Lisa!

I am excited, thrilled and honored to receive this Humanitarian Award. BCC has always held a special place in my heart because each and every one of you is special. How do I know that? You see, I raised a gay child, like you he was unusual, as an infant he grabbed my heart and never let go; like you he returned my love, like you he understood the

meaning of rejection and like you he did not engage in it. I could speak to you at length about Jeff and his beautiful sister Judi, but instead I wish to explain why else BCC is so important to me, as it was to Rabbi Erv Herman, my beloved ...

New congregations was one of Erv's responsibilities at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; he gloried in your growth and thriving. He watched as you fulfilled Rev Troy Perry's admonition when this Temple was founded, he offered you free space and cautioned: *"No Matter what you do, make sure you make it really Jewish!"*

And so the die was cast ... this congregation had a responsibility to its beginnings and it continues to this day to meet that responsibility. For starters, it was the first Jewish congregation in the world to reach out to the gay community. The first to even acknowledge that gay Jews existed! Reason enough to be special, to fulfill its responsibility!

In 1972, 45 years ago, Erv was in the hospital hosting a kidney stone that refused to move! Rabbi Arnie Kaiman, Erv's associate at the UAHC, was the rabbi who attended the birth of this very special congregation! My husband had directed from his bed: "help them as much as possible!" I was the gopher between Erv and Rabbi Kaiman, because Erv was not allowed visitors.

I believe that we took you to our hearts immediately for many reasons. The reason that stands out for me is, as I said earlier, that you understand thoroughly the meaning of rejection; because you have experienced it you avoid engaging in that anti-social behavior. I believe that is a key to your specialness – your arms are always wide open! You are the friendliest group of people I know! And I will prove it! The first time that Erv

was scheduled to climb your pulpit to conduct a Shabbat service, you came down the steps of the Metropolitan Community Church to greet us in the street, en masse! No congregation had ever done such a thing before. No one has done it since. How could we not take you into our hearts? You got there first with your love!

Once Jerry Small asked me about our dedication to BCC, why Erv and I held BCC so close. He asked me directly if we had a gay child. Our son was not ready to emerge, to confront who he was; when he finally allowed us to speak of his orientation, BCC and Jerry Small were among the first to know our secret. You never faulted Erv and me for denying our son's homosexuality in those early days when he himself was adjusting to the word "gay." Jeff Herman was a handsome, attractive man and many of our friends had daughters they thought he should date. I explained that would not happen. When we finally told our friends, they answered with a flip of the wrist that declared "Oh we knew that." It was confusing, then why did they think he should date their daughters?

Homosexuality's closet door is not as open as we wish it to be even though our gathering today speaks to the contrary. Yes, BCC has special meaning to the Herman family because both of us were raised to believe in equality, in an open door; we learned early on, that stigmatizing people is wrong; that open arms is the proper way to greet everyone. Acceptance is the key to understanding and acknowledging who we are. I can almost see my mother shrug her shoulders and say, "So, what else is new?"

There is another reason why our hearts and minds are open, Rabbi Erv Herman had a real fight on his hands when the question of BCC's admission to the UAHC, excuse me, URJ, hit the floor of the Union. Only when he began to gather support from individual Board members did he win the fight. That is a story many of you know. He believed that winning this congregation's right to exist as an equal member of the Union family was the highlight of his very successful career!

I am excited and awed at what you have accomplished in less than 45 years! You are an exciting, relevant congregation, standing tall amongst the most prestigious synagogues in the country. I am proud to call you my congregation. You make me proud that I was around at your birthing. You have made BCC strong. I am proud to call you family!

Thank you for honoring me, I will always treasure this moment and wish only that Erv was here to share it with me! You and I know that he belongs here.

# BCC – A Safe Place to be an Out, Proud, Gay, Jewish Geek

Richard Lesse

Thanks, Brett, for that very generous introduction! [Describes some of Brett's achievements and role in Richard's life.]

When I was asked to accept this acknowledgement of my volunteer efforts, I actually tried to decline. I'm a behind-the-scenes guy and I generally shun the spotlight. I don't usually think of my volunteer efforts as all that special or unique, especially when I see so many others working just as hard. But then I thought... a big part of why I volunteer is about helping others in my communities, and this event IS helping BCC, so how can I say no?

So, I was asked why I volunteer. My first reaction was "because giving back to my community is the right thing to do." Simple. But as I thought about it, I realized just how much volunteering has helped me deal with life.

I'm probably not alone in this room, having grown up feeling like I didn't quite fit in. I knew I was somehow different and different meant not quite good enough. I didn't have a lot of friends. I was socially awkward. I was pretty much a geek... well, some things never change. School wasn't a safe place, neither was Hebrew School. I was bullied, picked on and beaten up.

As I looked for a safe place to be, I started hanging out with the adults (including teachers) and I started being helpful as a way of earning my place. In junior high I started really volunteering. Being a library aide led to being in the AV Club. I'd gotten into photography at summer camp (and had my first crush on the photography counselor), so I took photos for the yearbook and student newspaper. That all led to working at my high school's student radio station as a DJ, a news reporter and an engineer. When my junior and senior high schools started a "legacy committee", basically a school beautification program, I got involved in that too. What I found through all this was a group of people with similar interests I could hang with. I still didn't feel safe enough to really be me, but it was a start.

When I got to college I immediately joined both the student radio and TV stations and started "helping out" at the University's TV production studio. I ended up running both the TV Station and the production studio. Again I found a group of like-minded geeks I could safely hang with. Though I still kept a big part of me tucked away, for fear they wouldn't accept me if

they knew. But it was progress.

When I moved to LA and went to my first Gay Pride parade, I was surprised to see a gay synagogue. It never occurred to me such a thing existed. Every year I walked past the BCC booth at the festival and picked up whatever literature they had. But I was too scared to go to services. It wasn't a "gay" issue. It was a "Jewish one." Yes I had a bar mitzvah but my family was not observant at all. We were two day a year Jews. I didn't think I had enough Jewish knowledge to be accepted by the temple. I also knew I couldn't afford dues.

After a couple years of stalking BCC, I finally decided to go to High Holiday Services. I really did want to reconnect to my Jewishness. I wasn't looking for a volunteer opportunity. To be honest, all I wanted was a nice Jewish boyfriend. That was almost 30 years ago and I'm still looking for a nice Jewish boyfriend. Or at least a nice boyfriend! Or even just a boyfriend. :)

After years of being in the background of BCC, when Brett asked me to get involved and co-chair the Men's Havurah, I didn't hesitate. At least not for very long. That led to co-chairing the Membership Committee, which led to being on the Board and then to becoming Secretary. I'm afraid of what receiving the "Presidents Award" really means for my near future. :)

Being an AV geek most of my life, I couldn't stand our old sound system. The feedback, the mics cutting out, the issues with our new Livestream system, it all drove me crazy. So I complained about it. And then I did something about it. It makes me so happy to know that my work on BCC's Livestream system has helped people, some from as far away as Argentina, enjoy our services. It's amazing that people find us, and we're often their only Jewish community, even if it's a virtual one. It's a special mitzvah we all should be proud of!



*Richard Lesse receives the Presidents Award presented by Brett Trueman*

PHOTO: AMY HABERLAND

*Continued on Page 9*

What I found at BCC was finally a safe place to be who I am — an out, proud, gay, Jewish geek!

A few years ago, I decided to get my tuchus off the couch and onto a bike seat. Not only did I learn that I actually could ride a bike 545 miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and that I could also raise a whole bunch of money for a wheely great cause, I also found another incredible community. The AIDS/LifeCycle Love Bubble is truly that. A place where everyone is not just accepted but openly welcomed for every variation of who they are. We support and encourage each other. We laugh and cry together. And we help ensure that there are safe places people can go for quality HIV/AIDS care and prevention.

If you're in a giving mood, there's a link to my LifeCycle donation page in today's tribute book. [www.tofighthiv.org/goto/WNGRichard2017](http://www.tofighthiv.org/goto/WNGRichard2017)

So what have I learned from all this volunteering? I've learned that there's a place and a community for each of us. But those places and those communities don't find us. We have to find them. And the communities don't exist on their own. It takes a lot of work, a lot of time, a lot of committed people and yes, a lot of money, to allow these organizations and communities to thrive.

Yes, I've spent untold hours volunteering and I've gotten more out of all of these volunteer efforts than I can describe. I've been rewarded for hard work. I've found friends. I've found acceptance. I've found purpose. I've found safe places to be. There are endless organizations that need countless volunteers. So whether it's at BCC or elsewhere, I strongly encourage all of you to find a volunteer opportunity that is meaningful to you. The world needs you, now more than ever, and you'll find great places to be.

I'd like to thank my mom and my sister for flying out from Philly to be with me today! I'm glad you get to see one of the communities that you hear me talk about so much. Your love, acceptance and support, through good times and bad, mean more to me than I'm able to express. I'd also like to thank my friends, Barry and Craig. You guys are part of my family and I'm really happy you're here. [Thanks to other honorees and BCC clergy, staff, and volunteers.]

## Need a Morale Boost? Try BCC's Life Transitions Support Group

If you could use some help dealing with the stress of relationships, careers, economics, social life, family life, health or bereavement, you might want to give the BCC Life Transitions Group a try. The goal of the BCC Life Transitions Group is to enhance participants' spiritual and emotional growth.

Participants have the opportunity to share their experiences, give and receive mutual support, and exchange coping skills with one another in a confidential atmosphere. Everyone is welcome - members and non-members. The group meets twice a month on the first and third Wednesdays from 7:00 - 9:00 pm.

This support group is facilitated by Shirley Hirschberg, Social Worker. Shirley is also available for individual sessions. For more information, please call the BCC office at (323) 931-7023, ext. 205.

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## President's Message

# Looking Back and Planning Ahead

Lauren Schlau



Happy Spring! I hope everyone had a zimmes Pesach. As you will read in this issue, BCC commemorated its 45th year with our Annual Awards Brunch held on March 26, this time with a concert as well. If you did not attend, you missed a very special event. If you did attend, you were inspired by honorees Agnes Herman, who most graciously honored us by

accepting the namesake Rabbi Erwin Herman and Agnes Herman Humanitarian Award, and Richard Lesse who received the Presidents Award. We also recognized six amazing talents whose music and ruach have been part of BCC over the years, offering us a moving and most memorable two-hour concert.

Many months ago when we began planning this event, we wanted to do something different. The Brunch Committee, co-chaired with much devotion and effort by Tracy Moore and Marc Briendel, all agreed it would be fun to try both a new format and a new type of venue. We looked for just the right place and decided on the renovated art deco Saban Theater. As those who attended are aware, the event unfortunately did not meet the high quality

BCC Awards Brunch guests have come to expect. It was not for lack of planning, meetings, list making, and detailing what we wanted and how it was to be handled by the facility. Let me say that sometimes things just cannot be foreseen, especially when our expectations are based on promises and agreements made. For attendees, many new to BCC, we regret the way the event was handled and offer our apologies. We ask that you give us the benefit of the doubt; our detailed planning and effort did not result in the quality and services we wanted and expected. We hope you still consider BCC worthy of your time and financial support now, through this year, and when we hold our next gala.

At this point on our BCC calendar the Board is preparing both for upcoming elections and our new 2017-18 budget. We will be presenting both to members at our annual meeting on July 23rd. If you would like to be considered to serve on our Board of Directors, please contact me at [Lauren@bcc-la.org](mailto:Lauren@bcc-la.org) and I will let the Board Development Committee know of your interest. Board service is a very important part of BCC that you may not have considered when you joined BCC, but hopefully as you get more involved you realize the need for good members to work to continue the amazing 45 year legacy that is BCC today.

## Five Days in Buenos Aires

Jonathan Falk



From March 15 to 19, 2017, I traveled to Buenos Aires on a whirlwind trip to a city with a rich Jewish history and an exciting modern LGBT history. I participated in a Shabbaton conference put together by JAG (Judios Argentinos GLBT), the LGBT Jewish group there, for the World Congress of LGBT Jews, and also had the honor of representing BCC at the annual board meeting of the World Congress.

On my first night in Buenos Aires (Wednesday), I joined the World Congress Steering Committee for drinks and dinner at a local restaurant. Two of us ordered green salads that came slathered with the biggest slices of ham we'd ever seen! But that was soon rectified. In the morning, I attended the World Congress board meeting in the upstairs library of the Comunidad Israelita de la Republica Argentina (CIRA), housed in a 1931 architectural gem of a synagogue on Avenida Libertad (see photo left).

Thursday afternoon was spent with a luncheon and introductions of those who had arrived for the Shabbaton from Chile, Colombia, Brazil,

*Continued on Page 11*

Mexico, the US, and a few European countries. A tango lesson made for a fun icebreaker and some good exercise (see photo right). Everyone eats late in Argentina, and a group of us went out for pizza at a rather late hour.



On Friday morning, we all met at CIRA for a bus ride to another synagogue, Congregation NCI Emanu El, for a panel discussion about the recent achievement of same-sex marriage in Argentina, the first country in Latin America to legalize it. We met the first couple to have a same-sex Jewish wedding ceremony here, Victoria Escobar and Romina Charur, who were married in 2016 by Rabbi Karina Finkielstein.

At a picnic lunch in a local park, we were joined by dozens of hungry swans, and also by a gay Israeli couple who happened to be walking by, and who immediately signed up to join us for the weekend.

From there we attended an outdoor community ceremony commemorating the 25th anniversary of the March 17, 1992, attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires. The ceremony was held at a small park, the site of the former embassy building, and was attended by the Israeli ambassador, the Argentine president, family members of the victims, and various dignitaries. The ceremony had pretty much the



Left to right: Romina Charur, Victoria Escobar and Gustavo Michanie, JAG President, in front of the Synagogue on Calle Libertad. (Photo by Perfil.)

tightest security I've seen in my life, and was front-page news on the local newspapers. The attack killed 29 civilians and injured 242 others, the deadliest attack on an Israeli diplomatic mission.

Friday night services were at the historic CIRA synagogue, where we were joined by a large group of Americans on a Federation tour. Services were in Spanish, and mostly musical. At Shabbat morning services at CIRA, Shabbaton attendees from around the world were honored with an aliyah. Afternoon sessions dealt with interfaith issues and featured a panel of PFLAG presenters, including the mom of a twelve-year-old trans boy. An afternoon picnic and a walk to the historic waterfront area completed the day's official activities, except for a late-night reception at a bar called Sitges.

On Sunday, the board met again, and the Shabbaton ended with a closing ceremony. Many attendees spoke about how significant the event was for them, and how much they appreciated an



opportunity to share Shabbat in an LGBT context.

The board meeting of the World Congress, chaired by President Frank Giaoui, dealt with plans for future conferences in Paris (Sept. 8 – 10, 2017) and in Rome (2018). Alicia Ronay of Guimel, Mexico City, was elected to the Steering Committee, to replace Rinna Riesenfeld, also of Mexico City. Plans for a World Congress video and a book project were discussed, and several short videos about the Buenos Aires Shabbaton can now be viewed on the World Congress website at [glbtjews.org](http://glbtjews.org). To get involved and represent BCC at future World Congress events, please contact me at [jonfalk@aol.com](mailto:jonfalk@aol.com)!

Overall, I found Buenos Aires to be a lovely city, with a great deal of European-influenced architecture, and much rich history to explore. There were theaters, museums, opera houses, nature preserves, and historic marketplaces that I didn't even have time to see. Who's up for a BCC trip to Latin America?

# Leah Zimmerman Bids Farewell to BCC



I was 35 weeks pregnant and just coming off stage from performing in an evening of one-act plays in New York, when my husband told me that UC Riverside had offered him a tenure track position. 10 days later he formally accepted the position, and my water broke. My daughter was only 6 weeks old when we flew to

California for interviews and to secure a place to live. My mother held the baby while I appreciated an hour of independence, sitting on the green couch in the 6000 Pico space talking with Felicia Park-Rogers, Rabbi Edwards and Robin Berkovitz about Ohr Chayim.

As summer approaches, so does the 10-year anniversary of my family's cross-country move and the huge welcome and embrace we found at BCC. During that first year of Ohr Chayim my family all got in the car on Saturday mornings and had a family Shabbat drive to LA. Jeff and the baby, Bella, went to the parent group and my then 5 year-old Leila joined the other students. At that time we were able to attend more Ohr Chayim events. You all welcomed us and gave us our first sense of belonging anywhere in California. I am deeply grateful to have had this community supporting us during the first few years of building a new life here.

10 years later, I am moving on to other adventures. It has been my honor and privilege to guide the Ohr Chayim program through its first decade as a weekly event. It has challenged me and required me to grow in my capacity for working with students with various needs, building community, communication and leadership skills. I leave BCC a stronger LGBT ally and advocate, a better educator, and a fuller person for having spent these years with you. I am incredibly grateful to everyone for all the meaningful conversations and relationships that have fed my soul.

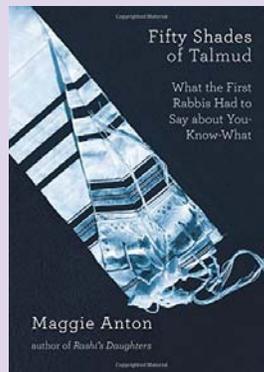
Recently, in conversation with my 15 year-old daughter, she told me that it was only in the past few years that she has come to realize there are people who don't support or understand LGBT+ people. You have all given my family a gift that I could never have given them alone. Thank you for being part of our lives and for helping to teach and model for my children what it means to be an inclusive community.

While I look forward to having more Saturdays free and spending weekends with my family in Claremont, I will miss my Shabbat mornings with the children and families of BCC.

*BCC will recognize Leah, and her work with Ohr Chayim, at PRIDE Shabbat, June 9th. She will be giving the drash.*

## Mazel Tov

We wish the following BCC members a hearty "mazel tov" on their recent achievements and good news.



**Maggie Parkhurst**, aka BCC member **Maggie Parkhurst** has been awarded the 29th annual Benjamin Franklin Award in the Religion and Humor categories by the Independent Book Publishers Association for her most recent book, *Fifty Shades of Talmud: What the First Rabbis Had to Say About You-Know-What*.

BCC Member **Mark Farber** has recently retired.

If you have a recent achievement or other good news to share, please contact the BCC office. We want to celebrate with you!



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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<b>1</b> YOM HAZIKARON (Israel Memorial Day)	<b>2</b> YOM HA'ATZMA'UT (Israel Independence Day) 7:15 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	<b>3</b> 7:00 pm Life Transitions Group Shirley Hirschberg	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> 8:00 pm Shabbat service Yom Ha'Atzma'ut Rabbi Miller Fran Chalin Drash by James Sutherland	<b>6</b> 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 2:00 pm Chizuk Chiyuvi (HIV+ Support Group)
<b>7</b> 3:30 pm Where Will You Finally Rest Presentation (See page 5)	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	<b>10</b> 7:00 pm Executive Committee Meeting	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Miller Elissa Barrett Gershick	<b>13</b> 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 10:00 am (private home) Baby Kibbutz Rabbi Miller
<b>14</b> LAG B'OMER MOTHER'S DAY	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	<b>17</b> 7:00 pm Life Transitions Group Shirley Hirschberg	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> 6:30 pm Early Service Intergenerational Rabbi Edwards Fran Chalin 8:00 pm After Shul Special Social Justice Film	<b>20</b> 10:00 am Shabbat Minyan and Veggie potluck
<b>21</b> 12:00 pm L'Chayim Legacy Circle Luncheon (See page 5)	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	<b>24</b> YOM YERUSHALAYIM 7:00 pm Board of Directors meeting	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> 6:00 pm Shabbat Dinner in the Neighborhood (Fu's Palace) 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Edwards Dave Parkhurst	<b>27</b>
<b>28</b> 10:00 am (private home) BCC Books and Bagels Indignation, by Philip Roth	<b>29</b> MEMORIAL DAY (BCC Office Closed)	<b>30</b> 6:00 pm Yizkor 7:15 pm Tikkun Ley! Shavuot Rabbis Edwards and Miller (see page 3)	<b>31</b> SHAVUOT, First Day (BCC Office Closed)	<i>All events at BCC unless otherwise noted</i>		

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<i>All events at BCC unless otherwise noted</i>				<b>1</b> SHAVUOT, Second Day (BCC Office Closed)	<b>2</b> 8:00 pm Shabbat service Ilene Cohen Cantorial Emerita Fran Chalin	<b>3</b> 10:00 am (private home) Baby Kibbutz Rabbi Miller 2:00 pm Chizuk Chiyuvi (HIV+ Support Group)
<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	<b>7</b> 7:00 pm Life Transitions Group Shirley Hirschberg	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> 8:00 pm Shabbat service PRIDE SHABBAT Rabbis Edwards Rabbi Miller Jeff Bernhardt Drash by Leah Zimmerman	<b>10</b> PRIDE WEEKEND
<b>11</b> PRIDE WEEKEND 8:00 am LA Pride Protest march (See page 6)	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	<b>14</b> 7:00 pm Executive Committee Meeting	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> 6:30 pm Early Contemplative Shabbat Service Rabbi Miller Fran Chalin Drash by Ginger Jacobs	<b>17</b> 10:00 am Shabbat Morning Minyan and Veggie Potluck
<b>18</b> FATHER'S DAY	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study	<b>21</b> 7:00 pm Life Transitions Group Shirley Hirschberg	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> 6:00 pm Shabbat Dinner in the Neighborhood (Fu's Palace) 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Bracha Yael Davi Cheng	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b> 10:00 am (private home) BCC Books and Bagels Not in God's Name, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> 7:15 pm Torah Study	<b>28</b> 7:00 pm Board of Directors Meeting	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b> 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Rachel Bat-Or Cantorial Emerita Fran Chalin	