

Breathing new energy into Jewish life

For the second year, Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council has been selected as one of 50 nonprofits representative of a new Jewish spirit and savvy

By DAVID JORDAN HARRIS

Eight years ago a group of young Jewish philanthropists in their 20s gathered to discuss where Judaism fit in their lives. They wanted to identify and support Jewish organizations that brought meaning to contemporary North American Jews. In short, they were looking for organizations that would address the changing needs of their generation.

What emerged from their seminal conversation was the publication of *Slingshot: A Resource Guide to Jewish Innovation*. Each year since 2005, 50 Jewish nonprofits have been held up as exemplars of a new Jewish spirit and savvy. Their missions have spanned Jewish education, community building, social justice, leadership development, and arts and culture. Each has sown seeds of change in its community.

According to Julie Finkelstein, program director of Slingshot, "Slingshot is a celebration of those organizations and projects successfully breathing new energy into Jewish life. The guide highlights both newly formed organizations and innovative projects happening at established Jewish institutions."

Minnesota's Jewish community has reason to take note of the most recent edition of Slingshot. Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation, has been selected for the second year in a row as one of these 50 shape-shifting innovators. Chosen from among several hundred applicants by a team of 48 grant-making professionals, Rimon has stood out nationally for the excellence and impact of its collaborations with artists and institutions, and for its community-building public forums.



Life in Stills

Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council will fund the Sabes JCC's Minneapolis Jewish Film Festival to support the screening of the Israeli documentary *Life in Stills*, as well as a post-film discussion and complementary photography exhibit.

Rimon is easily one of the smallest organizations selected by Slingshot, working with a budget of less than \$100,000. It is also one of the few Slingshot-designated initiatives based

outside the East or West coasts.

What gives Rimon its unique profile and impact? According to the Slingshot adjudicators, "Rimon has a vision to incorporate art into all areas and aspects of Jewish communal work and life rather than treating artists as a separate class... Rimon partners Jewish artists with local organizations and programs, bringing art to new audiences and inspiring new ways for individuals to engage in Jewish life."

One of Rimon's signature efforts is its Project Support granting program, which distributes funds twice a year to a spectrum of applicants — from individual artists early in their work to mature professionals; from start-up arts initiatives like the Twin Cities Jewish Chorale and the Jewish Women Artists' Circle to mainstream institutions like Hillel that recognize that artists are a dynamic and appealing resource for connecting with their audience.

In the fall of 2012 Rimon's Advisory Board voted to support two outstanding applicants from the more than one dozen inquiries it received — the Twin Cities-based chorale Singers in Accord and the Sabes JCC's Minneapolis Jewish Film Festival.

Rimon has awarded Singers in Accord funds to support the music residency of acclaimed conductor and Jewish music specialist Joshua Jacobson in the spring of 2013. Jacobson's weeklong residency will include classes and seminars throughout the larger community and several public concerts.

The Sabes JCC had the unique opportunity to bring an intriguing, multi-disciplinary project to the Minneapolis Jewish Film Festival but needed additional financial help to realize its vision. Rimon has awarded the festival funds to support the screening of the acclaimed Israeli documentary *Life in Stills* about iconic Israeli photographer Rudi Weissenstein; an exhibition of his photographs that are featured in the film; and a post-film discussion with Weissenstein's grandson, who is a key player in the film.

Rimon's acclaimed Artist Salon series continues on Feb. 10 with "A View Down the Road: Four Decades of Feminist Art." Presented in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of the landmark feminist organization WARM (Women's Artist Resources of Minnesota) and with national media sponsorship by the Jewish Daily Forward, the Artist Salon will feature a dialogue among artists Joyce Lyon, Rachel Breen and Jane Bassuk, as well as scholar of American feminism Riv-Ellen Prell and the Forward's Deputy Culture Editor Naomi Zeveloff.

"A View Down the Road: Four Decades of Feminist Art" will take place 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 10 at the Robbin Gallery, 4915 42nd Ave. N., Robbinsdale. The Salon, co-sponsored by the Katherine E. Nash Gallery, WARM and the Jewish Daily Forward, is funded in part by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, the Women's Endowment Fund of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation and the Tychman Shapiro Gallery of the Sabes JCC.

For information, visit: www.rimonmm.org or call 952-381-3449.

Cathy Ladman returns to Minn. for New Year's Eve shows

Veteran stand-up comic and actor Cathy Ladman will perform Dec. 31 at Big Laughs Comedy Club

By MORDECAI SPECKTOR

When we last talked, in December 2010, Cathy Ladman was living in south Minneapolis. She had some shows booked in the Twin Cities, then was heading back to her southern California home base.

Last week, the veteran stand-up comic was spending Hanuka in Santa Monica — wearing sandals, lighting candles by the sea, to quote the lyrics of Tom Lehrer's Jewish holiday song.

Ladman is preparing her return to the land of ice and grime-encrusted snow to perform a couple of sets on New Year's Eve at Big Laughs Comedy Club at the New Hope Cinema Grill.

The Queens, N.Y., native spent 16 months, over 2009 and 2010, living in Minneapolis, her husband's hometown. She's married to Tom Frykman, who used to be a stand-up comic, too; they met in Minneapolis. They have a nine-year-old daughter, Milan.

As it happened, during our phone chat on Friday, while discussing *The Guilt Trip*, the new Barbra Streisand-Seth Rogen comedy film, Ladman, who must have been scanning the Web, commented: "Apparently, there's some kind of shooting happening... a school shooting. Oy, oy, oy! Oh, my God!"

We both caught up with the incredibly grim online news.

"That's why everyone's talking about gun control on my Facebook page," said Ladman. "Now I get it."

Then I awkwardly segued to her upcoming gig in New Hope.

"I can't remember a time in my life when people haven't needed humor,"

she said, still processing the dreadful news coming out of Connecticut.

Although people need to get their minds off the grimmer aspects of reality, Ladman allowed that she hasn't been so busy with comedy club bookings.

"It's much changed for me... I'm almost like in a different generation," she remarked. "I've been doing a lot more writing, and the kind of performing I've been doing has changed as well — more storytelling, a lot more spoken word stuff."

Ladman been performing in something called *Set List*. "My friend Paul Provenza and Troy Conrad developed this together," Ladman said, regarding the improvisational

shows billed as "stand-up without a net, comedy in the moment." The shows have been featured at comedy festivals in the United Kingdom and on Sky Atlantic TV.

"It's basically improvised stand-up," said Ladman, about the concept that provides a comedian with a brief phrase — "my favorite cheese or I never said that, or whatever."

"It's very fun," she said. "It's so in the moment, and it's thrilling for both the performer and the audience."

She mentioned that unlike stand-up, where there's a mood of "aggression," the audiences for *Set List* shows are more rooting for the comedian to come up with something funny on the spot. "The audience wants you to do well," Ladman noted. "They have real compassion for what the comedians are doing."

A true veteran of the comedy scene, Ladman has been doing stand-up shtick for 31 years. She had her own HBO *One Night Stand* comedy special,

and won an American Comedy Award for Best Female Stand-up Comic. She was on *The Tonight Show* nine times. In recent years, she has had small roles in acclaimed TV shows, including *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Mad Men*. And she was one of the three finalists in Nick at Nite's *Funniest Mom in America*.

California has been the New York native's home base since 1991, but she admitted, "I will always feel like a New Yorker. I miss everything that New York has to offer."

Regarding her time here, she said, "I like Minneapolis, I had fun there, but I missed being here, I missed my life here. And it was horribly freezing in Minneapolis, as you know."

So, I filled her in on the recent snowstorm and the current weather report.

Ladman's shows at Big Laughs should be a lot of fun. You can get a taste of her humor from some YouTube videos out there (look for the one with her routine about dying in bed, after having an orgasm). After all these years, she knows what works, as far as bringing the funny.

However, she observed that her comedic material has become "much darker" in recent years. "It's just where I'm at. I can't pretend to be otherwise."

What topics crop up now?

"Like you say, death, the Holocaust, cancer," she listed a few.

If I write about this stuff, it's really going to pack them in at the Big Laughs Comedy Club, I suggested.

"But it's funny — it takes the sting out of it," Ladman responded.

And she mentioned that the mood should be festive for her shows on Dec. 31, because everyone will have "survived Dec. 21, the Mayan apocalypse. We're home free."

Cathy Ladman performs at 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 31 at Big Laughs Comedy Club in the New Hope Cinema Grill, 2749 Winnetka Ave. N., New Hope. Jon Wilson, recently featured in the Showtime comedy special *Louis Anderson Presents...*, is the opening act. For tickets, call 763-417-0017 or go to: cinemacomedy.com.



Cathy Ladman

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