



February 6, 2009

SELF-DISCOVERY, SET TO MUSIC

By *JOSEPH SAPIA*
FREEHOLD BUREAU

After Mark Zuckerman was bar-mitzvahed in his youth, he became a "delicatessen Jew."

"I wasn't terribly observant," said Zuckerman, 60. "(Then) I got intrigued about learning about Yiddish. The more I got into it, I started doing things that were more Jewish-oriented.

"I got into going to synagogue and identifying more in terms of an understanding of where I was coming from, moving from a life that was sort of flavored Jewish into things that were more meaningful Jewish," said the borough resident, who now considers himself a practicing conservative Jew.

"It's not surprising this occurred to me through music, because that's my passion," said Zuckerman, who has a doctorate in music composition from Princeton University.

On Saturday, Zuckerman will share his search for his Jewish background in a Roosevelt Arts Project program, "In Search of Yiddishkeit: A Local Composer's Musical Odyssey of Jewish Exploration and Self-Discovery."

"Yiddishkeit" — in the Yiddish language — "essentially means Jewishness," Zuckerman said.

The program, a reprise of one he gave last year at Monmouth University, will be a combination lecture and playing of recorded Yiddish music, Zuckerman said.

"There's going to be a lot of ground I'm going to cover," said Zuckerman, explaining the talk is for those familiar with the Yiddish culture and those who are not.

The program is scheduled for 8 p.m. at Roosevelt borough hall, 33 North Rochdale Ave., which is County Route 571. A donation of \$5 to the Roosevelt Arts Project, which promotes arts in the area, is suggested.

Zuckerman said he began taking a serious look at his Jewish roots in the early 1990s.

As for Yiddish, Zuckerman "can understand a lot of what is being said," but is not fluent in it, he said.

"The title of the talk is sort of a play on the discovery of my roots through the discovery of the language of my paternal forebears," Zuckerman said. "Yiddish was the language both my paternal grandparents spoke natively."

His grandfather was from Poland, while his grandmother was from Russia.

Although Zuckerman works as a software engineer, he has an extensive background in music.

"I started composing when I was 11," he said. "The first piece I performed in public was a piece I

wrote for my middle school orchestra."

Over the years, he has played keyboards, cello and saxophone.

Late last year, "The Outlaw and the King" opera by Zuckerman and fellow borough resident David Herrstrom was performed in concert form at Rutgers University-Douglass College. The pair's work on the opera was featured recently on the television show, "State of the Arts," on NJN, the state broadcasting network.

Zuckerman estimated Saturday's program will last 90 minutes if it goes as planned.

"It'll go as long as people are interested," he said. "I'm always happy to play my music."

Additional Facts

IF YOU GO

WHAT: "In Search of Yiddishkeit: A Local Composer's Musical Odyssey of Jewish Exploration and Self-Discovery," a lecture and playing of recorded music presented by Mark Zuckerman.

WHEN: 8 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Roosevelt borough hall, 33 N. Rochdale Ave. (County Route 571). A \$5 donation to the Roosevelt Arts Project is requested.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact the Roosevelt Arts Project, P.O. Box 5, Roosevelt, NJ 08555; (609) 448-4616; <http://music.columbia.edu/roosevelt>
