

Jewish music, prohibited in Soviet era, to be performed here

Moscow Male Jewish Choir
to give concert at Snug
Harbor Cultural Center
tomorrow night

By JODI LEE REIFER
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As a teen in the 1950s, Bill Yellin collected donations to help smuggle prayer books, shawls and matzo into the Soviet Union, where all things Jewish were banned.

Today, Russian Jews practice their religion freely, but Yellin is still nurturing his culture's rebirth.

The Los Angeles resident brings the Moscow Male Jewish Choir to Staten Island tomorrow to perform sacred and secular Jewish music — much of it rescued from Soviet-era hidden archives.

The 7:30 p.m. concert in Veterans' Memorial Hall, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, is sponsored by Eileen and

Randy Lee, the Staten Island Hotel and the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island (JCC).

"It's significant for the fact that 20 years ago, these men would have been sent to a gulag [prison camp in Siberia] just for learning it — forget singing it publicly," said Yel-

lin, a volunteer organizer of the choir's coast-to-coast American tour.

The musical renaissance began in 1989, when the chief rabbi of Moscow went to Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev to request access to KGB archives, where Jewish music had been stored — and sup-

pressed — for decades.

Though many of them neither spoke nor read Hebrew and Yiddish, professional musicians from the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory began to teach themselves the liturgy, with assistance from American cantors.

The Moscow Choir, also

known as Hasidic Capella, was formally established in 1991 with the assistance of JOINT, an American charitable Jewish organization. The tour passes through the borough because Francine Garb, a good friend of choir director Alexander Tsaliuk, has relatives on Staten Island.

Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door and can be purchased at www.sijcc.org or at the JCC's two branches, at 475 Victory Blvd. and 1297 Arthur Kill Rd. Call (718)-727-8257 ext. 230.

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