

Musical Seder Invigorates New Polish Jewish Community



For Passover 2004, musician Craig Taubman (L) took his popular, uplifting style of Jewish music to Poland, where he raised the spirits of a revived Jewish community with the aid of Gosia Szymanska (R), a young Polish woman who recently discovered her Jewish heritage.

Musician **Craig Taubman** has become renowned for lifting spirits through regular appearances at special Shabbat services held at Sinai Temple in the city and Adat Ari El in the San Fernando Valley. But he was unprepared for how he would be affected by co-leading a Passover seder in Poland this year.

While performing at a One Shabbat Morning service at Adat Ari El last December, Taubman was very moved by the talk given by **Gosia Szymanska**, a young Polish woman who was discovering her Jewish heritage and represented the revival of the Jewish life that was nearly eliminated by the Holocaust. Afterward, Taubman

was approached by Los Angeles businessman **Severyn Ashkenazy**, a Holocaust survivor and a major force behind **Friends of Jewish Renewal** in Poland. He wanted Taubman to help build the fledgling Jewish community in Poland through a combination of song and spirituality.

In a joint venture funded by the Friends of Jewish Renewal in Poland and a grant from The Foundation, Taubman, who plays guitar, piano and percussion, last April took the accordion and clarinet players in his band to Warsaw for Passover. He co-led seders with Szymanska, who translated his English into Polish, and also performed in concert and conducted community musical workshops for hundreds of Polish Jews, some of whom were raised Catholic. Today in Poland, hundreds of young adults are seeking spiritual reconnection to Judaism.

“To go to Poland – the center of the Jewish world in the 1930s which was destroyed – and see a handful of people who are bringing Judaism back is very, very powerful,” said Taubman. “Yes we saw the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps, but the memory we kept with us is that from death, life can spring, and from darkness, light can shine.”

Taubman brought the progressive Polish congregation, called Beit Warszawa, not only the gift of song, but also CDs of Jewish music, yarmulkes, prayer books, mezuzahs, seder plates, and Judaic books in English.

“There is a renaissance of Jewish life taking place right now in Poland,” said Marvin Schotland, CEO of The Foundation. “Younger generations of Jews are stepping forward and claiming their identity and becoming more involved in spirituality. We wanted to bring them the best resources the American Jewish community – and Los Angeles – have to offer. Craig Taubman is a fabulous role model for this community.” ✧



A family participates in the joyous Passover seder, conducted in both English and Polish, by Taubman and Szymanska.