



Momedy Comedy Part One
opens with a bang

Description

First instalment of lecture series explores earlier Jewish comediennes

By **Byron Toben**

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Reprise of famous Jewish female comics

For reasons beyond my control, I am unable to attend the **2022 Just For Laughs Comedy Festival** in Montreal.

Nevertheless, the increasing number of female comics each year brings to mind my coverage of the **September 2018 Momedy Comedy three-part series** of famous Jewish female comics over the years, as curated by Irene Lillienheim Angelico for the Cummings Centre.

Below is the first part, *Momedy Comedy Part One opens with a bang*.

Part two: [Momedy Comedy Part Two keeps up the pace](#)

Part three: [Momedy Comedy Part Three brings us up to date](#)

Note that **Chelsea Handler**, one of several comediennes featured in 2018, is a major attraction in 2022.

Irene Lillienheim Angelico's collage of nostalgic film and TV clips celebrating female Jewish comedic performers opened to a near full house audience on September 13. Amiably narrated by Ms. Angelico herself, the show was both educational and amusing. I can't wait for **Parts Two and Three (September 20 and 27)**.

She began by placing all in a historical context. Jewish communities in Europe came late to the enlightenment, let alone theatre, and even that was all performed by men, often at weddings and other group activities.



As immigrants arrived in North America, a combination of greater personal liberty and the need for more income propelled a number of women into the performing arts.

Individuals celebrated in this compendium Part One were:

Molly Picon born 1898 in NYC as Malka Opickun. Died age 92 in Pennsylvania.

Starting out in Yiddish theatre, she was famous for *Yiddle mit ein fiddle* and went on to perform in English. Long-lived and athletic, she performed somersaults at age 80.

Fanny Brice born 1891 in NYC as Fania Borach. Died aged 59 in Hollywood.

Star of *Baby Snooks* radio show and *Ziegfeld Follies* stage shows, inspiring musical *Funny Girl*.

Sophie Tucker born 1887 in Russia as Sofya Kalishin. Died 1966 in NYC aged 79.

The last of the *Red Hot Mamas* and an Ed Sullivan favourite, she even performed for the King in London.

Gertrude Berg born 1899 as Tillie Edelstein. Died 1966 in NYC aged 66.

The writer and star of radio/TV hit *The Goldbergs*, she also slipped some serious themes into the wildly popular series, the first mass appeal ethnic show.

Judy Holliday born 1921 in NYC as Judith Tuvim. Died 1965 in NYC aged 43.

Star of Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*, she transformed her dumb blonde screen image into a 1951 Academy Award.

Bette Midler born 1945 in Honolulu.

Still around after collecting multiple Grammys, Emmys, Tonys and Golden Globes, the divine Miss M is rumoured to play Mae West in a new film to be produced.

(All the videos above are mine and not the excellent ones chosen by Ms. Angelico in her assemblage.)

Ms. Angelico points out how some mannerisms and techniques of these early ladies have influenced later arrivals, such as Sophie Tucker on Bette Midler, and Fanny Brice on Barbra Streisand.

Sponsored in large part by the Cummings Centre, **Mometry Comedy Part Two** will be shown on **September 20, 2018** and **Part Three** on **September 27, 2018** both on Thursdays at 7 pm in the Gelber room of the Jewish Public Library, 5151 Côte Ste-Catherine.

For individual tickets (\$20-25) call Michele Lander at 514 734-1748.

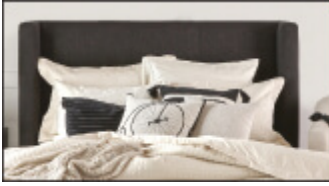
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Byron Toben, a past president of The Montreal Press Club, has been WestmountMag.ca's theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites Rover Arts and Charlebois Post, print weekly The Downtowner and print monthly The Senior Times. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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