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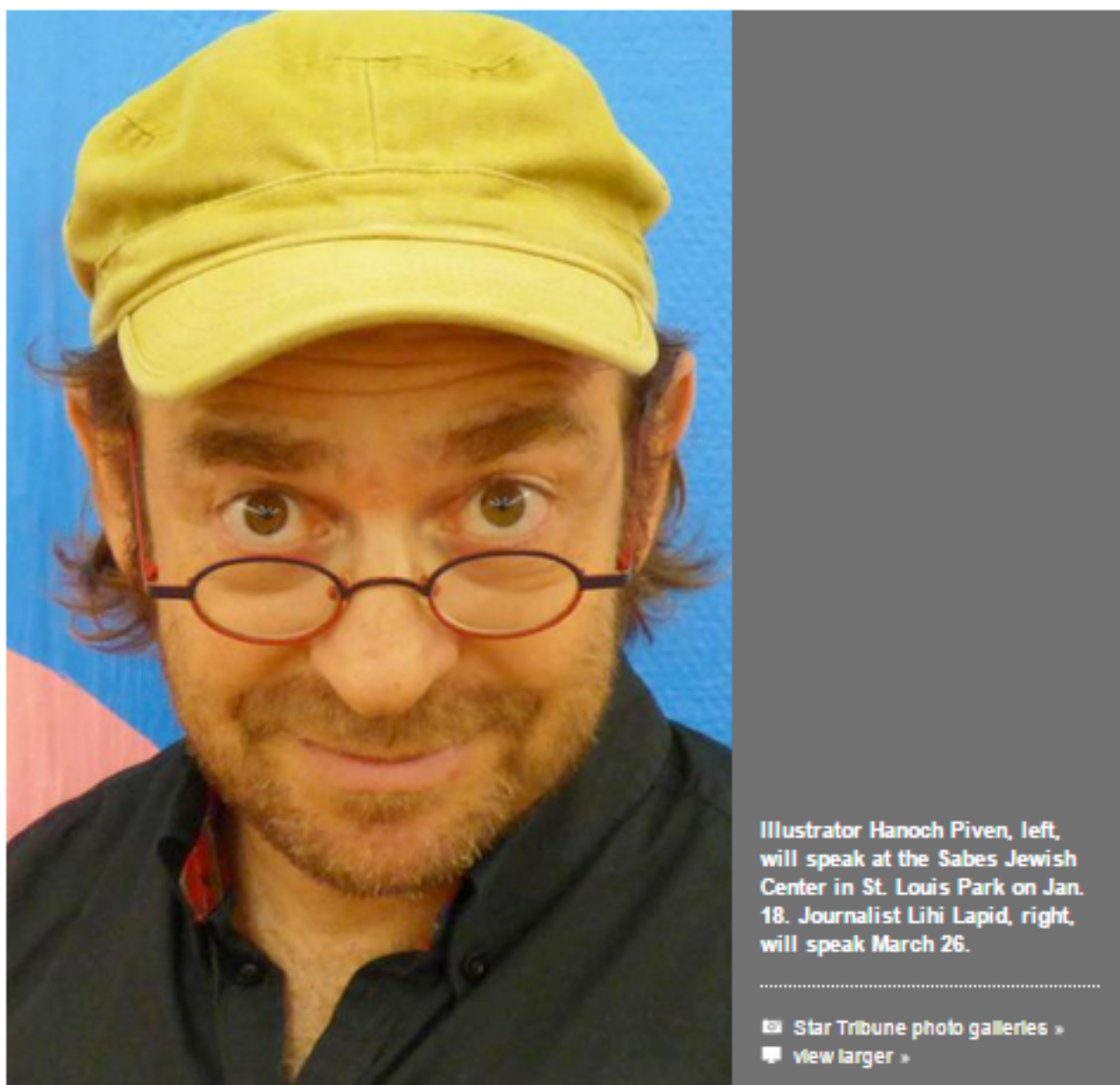
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## Culture BLVD series brings high-profile speakers to St. Louis Park

Article by: ANNA PRATT | Special to the Star Tribune | Updated: December 2, 2014 - 3:35 PM

During the Culture BLVD series, they will shed light on Jewish culture.



Illustrator Hanoch Piven, left, will speak at the Sabes Jewish Center in St. Louis Park on Jan. 18. Journalist Lihi Lapid, right, will speak March 26.

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Eilat Harel, who arrived in Minnesota by way of Toronto in 2000, reads up on the news from her native Israel first thing every morning.

It's important to her to stay connected to her homeland. And it gets her thinking about possible speakers for the annual Culture BLVD series, which brings creative Israelis to the Twin Cities during the cold months. It's offered through the Israel Center of the [Minneapolis Jewish Federation](#).

Harel, director of the Israel Center, started the series four years ago to expose people to her country's arts and culture in a more personal way — to go beyond the headlines that usually revolve around conflict. Also, to that end, "I was seeing more and more interest in Israeli literature. I figured this would be a good way to make some things come to life," Harel said.

The series at the Sabes Jewish Center in [St. Louis Park](#) begins its upcoming season Wednesday, Dec. 3, with Yoni Bloch, a popular musician in Israel. Hanoch Piven, an illustrator, will be featured on Jan. 18, and journalist Lihi Lapid will grace the stage on March 26.

Harel tries to bring in a diverse mix of artists who work in all kinds of platforms, "reflecting the myriad thoughts and emotions that are a part of Israeli society," Harel said. Hearing from them in person, Israel becomes more than "a faraway dot" on a map on the news. "We can talk about Israel while unclenching our fists," she said.

During their stay in Minnesota, the Israeli speakers often visit with local student groups. It gives young people "something to aspire to," Harel said.

Zehorit Heilicher, who serves on the committee that helps plan the series with Harel, and is herself Israeli, has observed that it cuts both ways. Minnesota isn't on the map for many Israelis. The speakers "come here and they're shocked by our cold and amazed there's a Jewish community here. They're amazed that we live in such cooperation, with the pluralism we live in," Heilicher said.

### A diverse lineup

Harel, who frequently logs onto Israeli radio stations via the Internet, was familiar with Yoni Bloch, who's had several albums go platinum in Israel.

While many songs in Israel are tinged by sadness, especially from older artists, Bloch's tunes are more upbeat. He tells love stories or is silly or sarcastic in his music. "It's a release just to listen to a story that doesn't have a dark background," she said.

Bloch has been a judge for the country's version of "American Idol." The 33-year-old's résumé also includes producing and recording credits for "who's who" in the business, and he's composed music for TV, film and theater.

Music isn't Bloch's only forte. Harel describes him as a "a young genius ... one of those people who knows how to do everything well."

He's a co-founder and the CEO of Interlude, a digital agency that created waves last year with its interactive music video of the classic [Bob Dylan](#) song "Like a Rolling Stone." The video, which went viral last year, is similar to a "choose-your-own-adventure" book; viewers can toggle between various "channels," each showing a different take on the song. "You can decide what you want the story to be," Harel said.

Bloch will talk about how he came to develop this software that "will be the wave of the future," she said.

That's why his presentation at the Sabes Jewish Community Center has been dubbed "Shaping the Future of Storytelling — the Israeli Way," she said.

### From ordinary to art

On Jan. 18, Hanoch Piven will give a presentation called "Seeing Faces." Many of his colorful collages are portraits of world leaders, athletes and entertainers. "That's his contribution to the art world," Harel said.

The illustrator claims that he doesn't know how to draw, Harel said. He collects junk, which he then arranges into the whimsical collages. A light bulb could become a nose or a doughnut could become an eye. "I think he just has a nice way of portraying his perspective of the world," Harel said.

His work, which has graced the covers of Time magazine, Newsweek, Rolling Stone, is about "reinventing the meaning of regular objects ... by inviting viewer active participation," according to the Sabes Jewish Community Center.

When Harel heard Piven was touring, she jumped at the chance to bring him to Minnesota. "He is colorful, and his art has humor in it. Israelis are pretty proud of how we can take the bad and turn it into humor," she said.

That's why he also was a good fit for the Twin Cities Jewish Humor Festival at the Sabes center. The humor festival, which features a mix of stand-up comedians, "laughter yoga" films, one-act plays and more, runs from Jan. 17 to Feb. 1. (Find the full lineup here at [www.sabesjcc.org/humor-fest.php](http://www.sabesjcc.org/humor-fest.php).)

As a part of the festival, Piven will lead a community workshop for children and adults about how to make collages "out of stuff you collect," she said. In a way, he "draws" with objects, she said. It's the first time an Israeli has been featured in the six-year-old festival, according to Claire Avitable, its director and curator.

The workshop is very right-brained focused. It teaches adults and kids to be less critical of themselves. "I appreciate that his art is about communicating with playfulness." It's about living your life with lightness, less stress, being more open to play, she said.

To add yet another dimension to his presentation, Piven's whimsical works will be on display in the center's Tychman Shapiro Gallery from Dec. 14 through Jan. 31.

### Speaking to women's issues

Lihi Lapid writes about contemporary feminist issues, such as juggling a career, family and a sense of self. "Her life story, in general, is intriguing," Harel said. "I think many would identify with her process."

Lapid, who started out as a photojournalist for the Israel Defense Force's Bamahane magazine, has churned out a popular column each week for the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronoth over the past decade. Her recent book, "I Can't Always Be Wonderful," is a compilation of some of those pieces.

Gefen Publishing recently translated into English her bestselling novel, "Woman of Valor." The book tells about what she and her husband, Yair Lapid, who is Israel's finance minister, went through when their daughter was diagnosed with autism. The book also weaves in letters from Lapid's newspaper column.

Jodi Upin, who chairs the Israel Center, read "Woman of Valor" and is interested in hearing more from the author in person. It's a slim but meaningful book, she said. Upin feels like she has common ground with her. "She's the kind of person, who, by the time you're done with it, you feel like you can pick up the phone and say, 'Hey, let's go grab coffee today,'" she said.

It goes to show that "we don't live in a vacuum. To get a better understanding of countries and culture, what they bring to the world, it's really crucial" — and the series does just that, Upin said.

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### related content



Lihi Lapid (Blue Flower Arts handout photo)



Yoni Bloch, a popular musician in Israel, will perform Dec. 3 at the Sabes Jewish Center. Photo provided by Blue Flower Arts

### INFORMATION

To learn more about Culture BLVD or to buy tickets, go to [www.sabesjcc.org/whats-happening.php](http://www.sabesjcc.org/whats-happening.php) or call 952-381-3499. Tickets are \$12 (advance) and \$14 (same day).

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