

Doctors prescribe laughter

Sabes JCC bring back the Twin Cities Jewish Humor Festival for its eighth year

By MAX SPARBER

*Laughter is healthy;
doctors prescribe laughter.*
— Yiddish proverb

There is a case to be made that American humor is Jewish humor. It's the viewpoint of the 2013 documentary *When Jews Were Funny*, and you'll hear versions of this idea here and there. An example: Al Jaffee, cartoonist for *Mad Magazine*, has argued that his publication helped mainstream Jewish humor, and there's some truth to that.

There were also the Jewish comics, who dominated vaudeville and later the stand-up circuit. There were Jewish novelists and television actors and film stars, each of them bringing a certain Jewish sensibility to their comedy. It continues today, in television shows like *Transparent*, *Broad City* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, in films like those of the Coen Brothers, in comics like Eric André and Andy Samberg.

And the variety! American Jewish humorists have significantly contributed to entire genres of comedy, including insult comedy (think Don

Rickles), improv comedy (Chicago's founding improvisational theater, Compass Players, were largely Jewish) and the mockumentary (Woody Allen's *Take the Money and Run* is arguably the first example of this film genre.)

It's no wonder the Sabes JCC has been able to sustain a Jewish Humor Festival for eight years. There is so much to pick from.

This year's event includes a number of legendary names in Jewish comedy, starting with their opening night performer, **Carol Leifer**. Although she is not the household name that she should be, Leifer's résumé is enormous, including work as a script writer on *Seinfeld* (she wrote *The Hamptons*, which you may recall as including a kosher girlfriend, a spectacular ugly baby and the word "shrinkage.")

Jerry Seinfeld has credited Leifer as an inspiration for the character Elaine on the show, which Leifer downplayed in the past, although she told *The New York Times* that it was easy to write for the character as she "simply flowed from [Leifer's] own experiences."

Leifer is also an author and mo-

nologist, her work detailing her life experiences, including her coming out as a lesbian at age 40. She will perform at the Sabes JCC on Saturday, Jan. 14 at 7:30 p.m. with special guest **Adam Grabowski**, a stand-up comic who was the 2015 Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities Comic of the Year, as well as having appeared on *America's Got Talent*.

The festival will provide an opportunity to learn more about the



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Jerry Lewis, the subject of a documentary making its Minnesota premiere at the Twin Cities Jewish Humor Festival.

notoriously thorny **Jerry Lewis** thanks to the regional premiere of a documentary titled *Jerry Lewis: The Man Behind the Clown*. Lewis has always been more respected in France than in the United States, so perhaps it is no

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An unraveling friendship

The Undoing Project: A Friendship That Changed Our Minds,
by Michael Lewis, Norton,
362 pages, \$28.95

By NEAL GENDLER

Danny Kahneman and Amos Tversky proved two adages: opposites attract and two minds are better than one.

Starting in fall 1969 at Hebrew University, pessimistic introvert Danny paired with optimistic extrovert Amos to explore how people make judgments and choices and why they're so often wrong.

The Undoing Project recounts two psychologists' unlikely bonding, their groundbreaking discoveries and the collapse of their intense collaboration, all brightly told by Michael Lewis, whose previous 14 books include the successful *Moneyball* and *The Big Short*.

Danny and Amos, as they are referred to throughout the book, "were blessed with shockingly fertile minds," according to Lewis, and "were explicitly interested in how people functioned when they were in a 'normal' unemotional state." Lewis calls Danny "one of the world's most influential psychologists."

Both men had Eastern European rabbi grandfathers. Young Danny

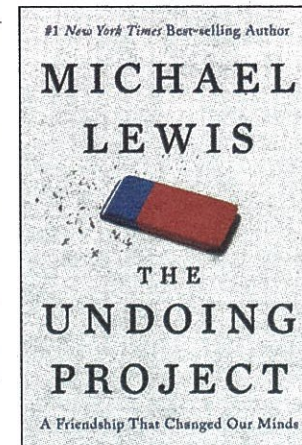
and family hid in France during the Shoah. Sabra paratrooper Amos was, to his friends, "the most extraordinary person they had ever met and the quintessential Israeli," Lewis says. "Danny was always sure he was wrong, Amos was always sure he was right." Danny's office was a mess; Amos' was barren. Amos was the life of every party; Danny didn't go to parties. Amos hated smoke; Danny smoked two packs a day.

"By the end of 1973, Amos and Danny were spending six hours a day with each other, either holed up in a conference room or on long walks across Jerusalem," talking, arguing, laughing, says Lewis, who characterizes them as mated every way but sexually. "They'd become a single mind," sometimes unable to recall which

idea had been whose.

Their first joint paper showed how "people mistook even a very small part of a thing for the whole." The later "Subjective Probability: A Judgement of Representativeness," dealt with how people compare a new situation to a model in their minds, Lewis says.

Other findings included how memory can distort judgment; that people make "unstated assump-



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