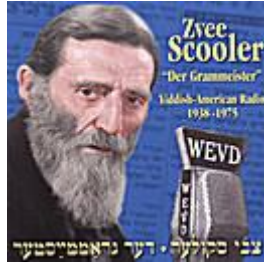


Mp3 Zvee Scooler: Der Grammeister - Spoken Word: Poetry



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From the 1930s until his death in 1985, Zvee Scooler (aka "Der Grammeister") thrilled WEVD Yiddish radio listeners with his pithy, exciting and timely verse. Here, reissued for the first time, are six of Scooler's most memorable performances. 7 MP3 Songs SPOKEN WORD: Poetry, WORLD: Judaica

Details: Zvee Scooler Der Grammeister Zvee Scooler was born in Kamenets-Podolsk (now Kamianets-Podilskyi, Ukraine) in 1899 and arrived in America with his family in 1912. By 1916 he made his first appearance on the stage in an amateur Hebrew-language theatrical and soon thereafter became a regular chorus member in Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre. He appeared with all the major companies of the day, such as the Irving Place Theatre with Ludwig Satz and the Folks-Teater. His first English-language role came in 1926 in *We Americans* starring Edward G. Robinson (Paul Muni was also in the cast). He again appeared on Broadway in 1928 in a 29-performance dud called *The Command Performance*, after which he did not make a Broadway appearance until *Fiddler on the Roof* opened in 1964. He returned to Yiddish with an appearance in the 1932 film classic *Uncle Moses*, playing Charlie, the young love interest. But it was when the Forward Association assumed control of station WEVD in 1932 that Scooler's greatest legacy occurred. With the launching of its flagship weekly program *The Forward Hour*, station manager Henry Greenfield hired Scooler and two other theater veterans to present fast-paced improvisational comedy poetry. When the other two left, Greenfield dubbed Scooler *Der Grammeister* (The Master of Rhyme) and thus was born his long-running rumination in rhyme on the events of the week. Scooler's mellifluous voice, coupled with his biting wit, astute editorials and panoply of nuanced characters, became a cornerstone of New York radio until his death 53 years later. As Scooler reached middle age, he raised an impressive Rabbinic-like beard assuring his niche in both the Yiddish

theatre and in Hollywood movies under Jews with beards. In the Broadway production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, he played the innkeeper. He was one of only three performers who stayed with the production from its opening in 1964 to its closing in 1972. He was also the only Broadway cast member who was hired on for the movie, this time playing the rabbi. Many of his later films *Hester Street*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *The Chosen* are classics of North American Jewish culture. His last movie, *Over the Brooklyn Bridge*, was made in 1984. Through it all, Zvee Scooler continued his regular radio slots: his voice as familiar to Yiddish-speaking audiences as Lowell Thomas was to a more general one, according to the *New York Times* was as unmistakable as his terpsichorean sign-off: *Ayer getrayster, Zvee Hirsh Yosef ben Rab Yankef Mendel Halevy Scooler hamekhine der Forverts Sho Grammeister*. He died in March 1985.

Faith Jones and Henry Hank Sapoznik ----- The Phenomenon of the Grammeister

Zvee Scooler's decades of entertaining weekly rhymed recitations, heard at 11:40 am every Sunday morning, at the climax of *The Forward Hour*, flagship program of Yiddish radio station WEVD, were like nothing else that has ever come over the airwaves, before or since. But what exactly were these ten-minute spoken radio commentaries that became a beloved and long-running regular cultural experience for tens of thousands of Jews in the New York metropolitan area? What was unique about Scooler's radio persona as *Der Grammeister* (The Master of Rhyme), and what made his weekly gram-monologues so popular and so memorable to his fanatically loyal listeners? I think the answer to these questions is that the man Zvee Scooler, and hence his weekly rhymed radio column, embodied a unique combination of several different cultural, literary, and theatrical traditions: an extraordinary blend of liberal political journalist, trusted daily newscaster and radio personality, observer of American Jewish life, literary scriptwriter, handsome Yiddish theatre leading man, Broadway and film actor, learned Hebrew scholar and Talmudist, sophisticated New Yorker, smart poker player, comical and tuneful *badkhen*, accomplished linguist, fervent Giants fan, patriotic Zionist, and fierce Yiddishist. And it didn't hurt that he was the possessor of a rich, resonant voice, which he could play like any instrument of the orchestra, creating an audio gallery of vivid radio characters, from Litvaks to Galitzianer to Lower East Siders, as well as all the colorful Americans, who peopled his weekly rhymed feature stories. He was a writer, of course, who spent many hours each week creating his Sunday morning secular sermons, polishing the delightful, often multi-lingual rhymes and outrageously clever puns. He was a passionate editorialist with strong opinions on the events of the day, a determined campaigner against the vulgarity that threatened

Yiddish culture with borscht-belt schlock, and a moralist who could scold his fellow-immigrants who gave in too easily to the tawdry temptations of life in the goldene medina. But equally important, Zvee Scooler was a performer. It is not unimportant for an understanding of his grammeisterai to note that it was performed in the art-deco Fifth Floor Studio A of the WEVD Building on West 46th Street in front of a live audience. As a child performer occasionally playing roles on The Forward Hours serialized dramas, I remember well watching Uncle Zvee (he was my mothers big brother) standing up in front of that microphone and playing to that adoring crowd as well as to his listeners gathered around their radios at home. Yes, he was certainly one of a kind. And he kept going at it for such a long time, from Roosevelts era to Reagans and now, thanks to this anthology, for years to come. Isaiah Sheffer, Artistic Director of New Yorks Symphony Space

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