

## SUNDAY, July 13

The B'nai B'rith Ketubah Married Couples Unit (40+) holds its **annual barbecue** at a member's home in Somerset at 4 p.m. Admission is \$30 per couple (members \$25). RSVP to 732-873-9435 by July 8.

## TUESDAY, July 15

Rabbi Chaim Lobel teaches **The Basics of a Kosher Kitchen** today and July 21 at the Young Israel of Aberdeen. Contact [rabbi@yiaberdeen.com](mailto:rabbi@yiaberdeen.com) or 732-583-6262, ext. 5.

## FRIDAY, July 18

Temple Beth Miriam, Elberon, holds **services on the beach** at 5:30 p.m. followed by a BBQ and performance by Yosi at the temple. The cost is \$5, \$20 maximum per family. RSVP by July 14 to 732-222-3754.

## MONDAY, July 21

Rabbi Chaim Lobel teaches **The Basics of a Kosher Kitchen** at the Young Israel of Aberdeen. Contact [rabbi@yiaberdeen.com](mailto:rabbi@yiaberdeen.com) or 732-583-6262, ext. 5.

## WEDNESDAY, July 23

Rabbi Chaim Lobel begins a five-week **Read Hebrew America** course at the Young Israel of Aberdeen at 8 p.m. Contact [rabbi@yiaberdeen.com](mailto:rabbi@yiaberdeen.com) or 732-583-6262, ext. 5.

## TUESDAY, Aug. 5

Young Israel of Aberdeen holds a **Sushi Night** at 7:30 p.m. Contact 732-583-6262, ext. 5, or [rabbi@yiaberdeen.com](mailto:rabbi@yiaberdeen.com).

## The Agenda

### Broadway composer at JCC



Long Branch's own Jeff Blumenkrantz will perform at the Axelrod Performing Arts Center at the JCC in Deal on Thursday, July 17, at 8 p.m.

Blumenkrantz, who was nominated for a 2003 Tony Award for best original score for *Urban Cowboy*, began his career as an actor, performing in such Broadway shows as *Into the Woods*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *Damn Yankees* and in such TV programs as *Will & Grace*, *Just Shoot Me*, and *Law & Order*.

Also appearing will be vocalist Natalie Weiss, who was raised in Marlboro and was a semifinalist in season four of *American Idol*.

Tickets cost \$25, \$20 for seniors and students. For more information, contact 732-531-9100 or [boxoffice@axelrodartscenter.com](mailto:boxoffice@axelrodartscenter.com).

### 'Oliver' auditions

The JCC of Greater Monmouth County, Deal, will hold auditions for actors ages seven-16 for its November production of *Oliver*.

Auditions will be held at the Axelrod Performing Arts Center on Sunday, July 27, 3-6 p.m.; Monday, July 28, 7:30-10 p.m.; and Thursday, July 31, 7:30-10 p.m.

Those trying out should prepare 16 bars of a standard show tune and bring resumes and headshots if available.

Visit [www.jccmonmouth.org/article.php?id=96](http://www.jccmonmouth.org/article.php?id=96) or contact [AnthonyLGreco@aol.com](mailto:AnthonyLGreco@aol.com).



# A Jewish state – in Germany?

TOBY AXELROD  
JTA

**B**ERLIN — An Israeli artist is challenging boundaries — national, political, and artistic — with his project to create a Jewish state in the former East Germany.

Ronen Eidelman wants to raise questions about national identity, anti-Semitism, and the complex relationship involving Germany, Jews, and Israel.

Eidelman, who has been living in Germany the past year and a half, says his project reflects “the power of art to ask questions and put a mirror to society.”

“I want to blur the line between life and art,” he says, “and I don’t want to stay in the ghettos of galleries and museums” but go out into the streets.

While some Germans never tire of debating such topics, Eidelman’s proposal for the entity, “Medinat Weimar,” apparently has touched raw nerves. One Jewish leader says he would never set foot in the new “state.” Eidelman’s university, for which the project was conceived, has distanced itself from the idea.

Others simply distrust the blending of art and politics.

With banners, flags, and a mini-constitution, Eidelman is “looking for provocation as a tool to talk about truths and taboos that otherwise would not be touched: anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel,” says Daniel Gaede, the director of educational programs at the Buchenwald memorial.

“I am not opposing art,” Gaede says. “But I am opposing artwork that sometimes looks like political action, and then when it becomes politically difficult, you insist, ‘No, no, it is just art.’”

There are some historical and artistic precedents.

In 1934, Joseph Stalin established a Jewish region in the Soviet republic of Birobidjan. In 1940, Gestapo head Adolf Eichmann approved the resettling of Jews in Madagascar, but never acted on it. In 2007, author Michael Chabon created a virtual Jewish homeland in Alaska in his novel *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*.

And Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has suggested cynically that Germany and Austria host a Jewish state.

Now Eidelman has taken up the baton. On June 22, with a rally and a conference, he launched Medinat Weimar, a Jewish state in the German state of Thuringia, with its capital in Weimar.

The event, which coincidentally took place on his 37th birthday, was Eidelman’s final project for a master’s degree in public art and new artistic strategies at the Bauhaus University.

It is not yet clear whether Medinat Weimar will attract disaffected Israelis, rabid anti-Semites, or confused Germans — or perhaps none of the above.

Boundaries and definitions exist to be challenged; that’s a message of the Bauhaus University, which is one of a few institutions worldwide that offers a degree in public art. The university’s Web site says its students engage in “temporary intervention in public space.”

But even the university is uncomfortable with this one. It has refused to let Eidelman display his project at its museum, releasing a statement saying it fears being “perceived as supporters of a political movement for the formation of a Jewish State in Thuringia in Weimar. This is not possible.”

Weimar is the home of writers Goethe and Schiller, the seat of Germany’s short-lived, prewar democracy — and a few miles from Buchenwald, the Nazi death camp.

Eidelman swings between studied pessimism and carefully staged delusions of grandeur.

“I am hoping that decisions will be made at the conference” next week, he says, adding that fans already have

sent in a few possible anthems via the project’s Web site ([www.medinatweimar.org](http://www.medinatweimar.org)).

“I’d like to see it as the Basel of Weimar, like the first Zionist conference” in 1897, adds the artist, whose family immigrated to Israel from the United States in 1978.

He calls himself “a proud Israeli but completely non-Zionist,” and describes his project as a “political movement as a work of art,” replete with banners, songs, and buttons.

It confronts three main issues through its “Thirteen Principles,” inspired by Maimonides’ “13 Principles of Jewish Faith”: German guilt and philo-Semitism (“Germans are very good with dead Jews, but what about the Jews who are alive?”); what Eidelman calls “the failure of Zionism: so many Israelis are looking for their second passport”; and “the failure of the state of Thuringia.”

Some may wonder what could be more ridiculous than suggesting that Jews move en masse to Germany, let alone to a state that is grappling with high unemployment, a brain drain, and xenophobia?

Eidelman insists the project is not about the Jews punishing Germany but rather, as they did in Israel, Jewish pioneers turning Thuringia into “a thriving state.”

His ultimate stimulus — or last straw — came from Ahmadinejad, who in 2005 remarked that if Germany and Austria feel guilty about the Holocaust, they should set up a Jewish state on their territory, thus resolving the Middle East conflict.

Clearly, the Iranian president “is an anti-Semitic provocateur,” Eidelman says. “If you put it in his mouth, it is very upsetting.”

But, he wonders, “Could we ask these questions in a more honest way? Why can’t there be another Jewish state?”

Wolfgang Nossen, the head of Thuringia’s Jewish community — which is estimated at some 800 members — says he would not even consider such questions.

“It corresponds to the statement by the Iranian idiots, and people here could start thinking that the Jews are starting already,” Nossen says.

Eidelman is not the first to test art’s boundaries in Germany. In 2006, for example, the Spanish-born artist Santiago Sierra withdrew his installation that involved pumping auto-exhaust fumes into a former synagogue near Cologne. Sierra said he only wanted to criticize the “banalization of Holocaust remembrance.”

The previous year, Austrian artists Julius Deutschbauer and Gerhard Spring had mounted their “anti-fascist amusement park” in Berlin, including an enlarged photograph of dead bodies with holes cut out so one could put in one’s face and “identify” with Holocaust victims.

More akin to Eidelman is Israeli video artist Yael Bartana, whose short film *Mary Koszmary* suggests inviting three million Jews to move to Poland. She recently told the Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz* that audiences “didn’t know whether to take it seriously or not.”

Eidelman says of his project, “this whole thing is a fantasy, clearly.” But he also speculates that the consequences could be mind-blowingly positive: Jews could move here from Israel, and “when ‘the Empire’ finally collapses, will people come from America? Probably.”

Just imagine if a few million Jews mix with two million Germans, he says.

“Something will come out of it, including a mixed Hebrew-German-English, with other languages added in.”

With this definition, perhaps Medinat Weimar already exists — in Israel.

Eidelman has a different take. Israel, he says, is “Zionism 1.0, Medinat Weimar is 2.0 — or maybe ‘Zionism, *The Return of the Jedi*.’”



Ronen Eidelman: “Not all Germans like what I’m saying.”

Photo by Ronen Eidelman

### An artist raises questions about national identity.