

# Fest aims to keep Yiddish 'alive and well'

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Written by  
**Ned P. Rauch**

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VALHALLA — During an evening devoted to celebrating the Yiddish language Sunday, Joanne Borts, actress, singer and advocate, did everything but wave pompoms to gin up support for the centuries-old culture.

With the massive Kensico Dam behind her and several hundred listeners sitting in the shade before her, Borts ran through song after song, most of them a mix of klezmer and Broadway show tunes.

Some of the songs were in English, some in Yiddish, some in both languages. One song included a riff on Jiminy Cricket.

Borts grew up on Long Island and lives in Manhattan. She was one



Joanne Borts performs Sunday at the Yiddish Heritage Festival in Valhalla. Photo gallery with this report at LoHud.com. Melissa Elian/The Journal News / Melissa Elian/The Journal News

of a half-dozen acts to perform for Yiddishfest 2011 at the Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla.

The event was part of a series staged by the Workmen's Circle throughout the New York City area.

Backstage, after receiving congratulations, Borts talked about why she's dedicated so much time and energy to boosting Yiddish culture.

"My overall goal is to tell audiences that Yiddish is not old or old-fashioned. That it's a vibrant, timely, sexy, 21st-century language," she said. "It's not dead. It's alive and well."

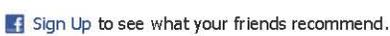
She said Yiddish, with its origins in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, is an important cultural bond between past and present.

"This is a language that unites our families and holds us together," she said.

On stage, she asked the mostly white-haired audience how many of them knew Yiddish. Throughout the crowd, hands shot up .

When she asked her follow-up, how many are planning to learn Yiddish, only a few hands were raised. She wasn't pleased.

"I believe in this language and I believe in this culture," she said later. "I'm proud of it."

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