Finding Harmony Through Music

VIRTUOSO PALESTINIAN violinist Nabeel Abboud-Ashkar was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music degree at Washington College’s Fall Convocation for bringing Muslim and Jewish students together to make beautiful music.

Abboud-Ashkar founded the Polyphony Conservatory in his hometown of Nazareth—the largest Arab city in Israel—in 2006, recruiting some of Israel’s finest musicians to teach in the underserved community. Now, aspiring young musicians from all over Israel travel to Nazareth to study at the conservatory, which has already produced award-winning performers and achieved international recognition. In 2011, Abboud-Ashkar helped found the Polyphony Foundation and the Polyphony Youth Orchestra.

President Mitchell B. Reiss presented Abboud-Ashkar with the degree during the September 6 ceremony “in recognition of his enormous talent as a musician and teacher and the courage of his commitment to bring diverse communities together through music.”

The 34-year-old violinist thanked the College for supporting his “courage to dream” and giving him a “kind and gentle push…to continue to do what I’m doing.” He then performed Mozart’s Sonata in E minor with pianist Grace Eun Hae Kim of the Washington College music department.

The following day, they performed the Mozart sonata and another by Beethoven in the first of the season’s popular “12@ Hotchkiss” lunchtime concert series.

“It was an honor and joy to collaborate with Nabeel on the Mozart Sonata in E minor and the Spring sonata by Beethoven, both great masterworks from the piano and violin duo literature,” said Kim. “As insightful and thoughtful as Nabeel is in person, his music-making reflects the same qualities.” ✡
Hillel at Washington College is moving up in the world! This past semester at Washington College, Hillel has increased its student involvement and our campus presence can easily be seen. Now that we have a Hillel House, we are able to host club meetings, dinners, and cooking classes all under one roof. Jewish and non-Jewish students are encouraged to join in on all the different fun-filled events provided throughout the semester.

We kicked off the semester by ringing in the Jewish New Year with a Rosh Hashanah feast! Students participated in the High Holiday services that were generously hosted by the Chestertown Havurah. To close the semester, Hillel invited students to come learn how to braid and bake Challah bread and then we celebrated the second night of Hanukkah.

Hillel has greatly benefitted from student participation and continuous support from the Washington College faculty. I am so pleased with how great this past semester has been. I am overwhelmed with support from students, faculty, the Chestertown community and, most importantly, from those individuals who have donated their time and resources to Hillel’s mission. It’s been a pleasure working with such a great group of students, board members, and faculty this semester. I am confident that Hillel has a bright future at Washington College.

Cheers,

Cortnee Doll, President, Hillel

Greetings From Hillel

Havurah Hosts Joyous Sukkot Celebration

With Professor Gary Schiff presiding, a Chestertown Havurah member hosted Hillel students for Sukkot. Zoë Schneider '15, Allison Davis '15, Rebecca DeSantis '16 and Erin McAuliffe '14, with Mickey Elsberg, eat under the Sukkah. Erin McAuliffe (above) waves the lulav and etrog.
What’s Happening In Hillel

The New Hillel House has been the scene of a busy and festive inaugural year. The cozy house on Washington Avenue hosted an elaborate Rosh Hashanah dinner, a challah baking class, a popular lecture and numerous club meetings and study sessions.

WC’s Hillel chapter even opened the house for students to study while the Miller Library renovations were being completed.

“It’s a wonderful place to just hang out and relax,” says Hillel President Cortnee Doll ’13. “I’m so happy with how this year has unfolded.”

Doll kicked off the semester with an open meeting to introduce students to Hillel and to the newly renovated house with its kosher kitchen and beautiful meeting, eating and study spaces. Rosh Hashanah was coming up quickly, and the group decided to host their first big dinner in the house to celebrate.

Completely student-directed, the event “made us famous on campus,” Doll says. Taylor Goss ’13 was executive chef for the dinner, which featured baked kosher chicken with apples and honey, pumpkin soup, fresh green beans, potatoes with rosemary and other delectables.

Goss even taught his fellow student volunteers how to fold napkins.

“I was blown away by the turnout,” says Doll. “We had 30 people, 20 of them students. President Mitchell Reiss was there, as was our new advisor, Darnell Parker.”

A month later, Hillel hosted a lecture by Jacqueline Vansant ’76 (see story, p 4), a German studies professor at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, packed the house to the rafters. “People were sitting on stairs, crowding the corridors,” Doll says.

Plans for the spring semester include more cooking classes; a Shabbat dinner and poetry reading with the Chestertown Havurah; a guest lecturer and a trip to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, for Holocaust Remembrance Day; a Passover Dinner; more Shabbat meals; and many more meetings with their attendant philosophical and theological discussions.

“You don’t have to be Jewish to become involved—we welcome everyone,” says Doll. “My dream is for the house to become a campus center for spiritual life.”

Lit House Series Features Jewish Voices

Inspired by the Hillel House opening last spring, the College’s Rose O’Neill Literary House created a series of readings and lecture/performances this fall titled “Jewish Voices.”

“One of our ideas in creating programs for the Lit House has been to focus on voices that tend to be underrepresented on campus,” says Jehanne Dubrow, the accomplished poet who was named Lit House director last spring. “When we heard the Hillel House was opening, we thought it would be nice to schedule a semester of Jewish voices, so that after the opening the conversation wouldn’t stop.”

The readings were an eclectic blend of fiction, poetry, music and performance art, intended to engage students in every discipline from drama to modern languages.

On October 9, Dylan Landis—who gave up a newspaper career to write fiction—read from her acclaimed debut collection of short stories, Normal People Don’t Live Like This. “Landis is a Jewish writer, but she wasn’t sure how overt the Jewishness was in her book,” says Dubrow. “To me, however, it was a very Jewish book because it was about assimilation, Jewishness through suppression, and I thought it would be an interesting question to think about.”

On November 13, novelist Anna Solomon performed with singer-songwriter Clare Burson. Part reading, part musical event, it featured a series of songs written by Burson and inspired by Solomon’s novel, The Little Bride, about a teenaged mail-order bride sent from Russia to the South Dakota prairie in the late 1800s to wed an older Orthodox man and share his sod hut.

The series ended December 4 with an evening of poetry by Idra Novey, author of Exit, Civilian, a 2011 National Poetry Series Selection, and The Next Country, a finalist for the Foreword Book of the Year Award in poetry. Novey has won numerous awards, both for her poetry and for her work in translation, which, as Dubrow points out, “is something students in modern languages have to think about in their classes every day.”
Salloch’s Protégée Offers Lecture At Hillel House

At Washington College, Jacqueline Vansant ’76 discovered the two great passions of her life. One was a music major named Ron Garrett ’74, who became her husband. The other was the German language, inspired by Erika Salloch, a beloved professor of German who, as a young Jewish woman, escaped Nazi Germany in 1937.

As an undergrad, Vansant came to Washington College from Dorchester County and intended to be a science major. But just a few days after she arrived on campus, she happened to be among a group of students who were taken to visit Professor Salloch at her home on Water Street. “It was like walking into another world,” Vansant says. “Her husband Henry was a graphic designer and the house was filled with Native American rugs, watercolors, beautiful weavings. I soon discovered that German was more interesting to me than biology. She opened up the whole world of German literature to me.”

Salloch also opened Vansant’s eyes to the world of Jews displaced by the Nazis. Vansant, who earned her doctorate in German at the University of Texas at Austin and is now a professor of German at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, has been researching and writing on this topic ever since.

This fall she delivered a lecture to a standing-room-only audience at the College’s new Hillel House about her most recent research—the heartstopping story of a group of 15- and 16-year-old Jewish school boys from Austria who made a pact one day in 1938 on a bridge in Vienna to keep in touch forever. They devised a complicated plan that kept them writing to one another for more than half a century, and Vansant has been poring over their letters, hundreds of which are preserved in an Austrian archive.

“I was amazed at how many people came to my talk,” says Vansant. “It was wonderful to have my talk in the new Hillel House, and it was also interesting and gratifying to discover, talking to people in the audience, that there is now a vibrant Jewish community in Chestertown.”

Resources for Jewish Students

Washington College offers a welcoming community for students of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds. Close faculty mentoring helps students sort through an array of special classes, fellowships, internships and study abroad opportunities.

♦ Roy Ans Fellowship in Jewish-American Studies
♦ Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture (washcoll.edu/departments/irpc/)
♦ Study Abroad In Israel
♦ Washington College Hillel (washcoll.edu/clubs/hillel/) and on Facebook
♦ Chestertown Havurah (chestertownhavurah.org)
♦ Temple B’nai Israel in Easton, MD (bnaiisraeleaston.org)

For more information, e-mail wc_admissions@washcoll.edu

Students bless the bread they made during a challah-baking workshop led by Sybil Wolin of Chestertown. Mrs. Wolin donated the stand mixer they used for kneading dough.
One of the highlights of the fall semester was a student trip led by Professors Janet Sorrentino and Joseph Prud’homme to Philadelphia to see the Dead Sea Scrolls, followed by a lecture on campus by Lawrence Schiffman, a foremost authority on the ancient documents and consultant to the blockbuster exhibit.

The Franklin Institute’s “Dead Sea Scrolls: Life and Faith in Ancient Times” featured one of the most comprehensive collections of ancient artifacts from Israel ever organized, with 20 scrolls, displayed 10 at a time, including the oldest known copies of the Hebrew Bible and four scrolls that had never before been exhibited. The 600 items on display also included a three-ton stone from Jerusalem’s Western Wall and limestone column capitals used in the architecture of the administrative centers during the first temple period (1006-586 BCE).

Two weeks after the October 7 trip, students heard Schiffman, vice provost for undergraduate education at Yeshiva University and author of Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls (1995), talk about the history of the documents and their discovery in a lecture titled “Scholars, Scrolls and Scandals: The Dead Sea Scrolls, Judaism and Christianity.” Hillel House students provided an afternoon tea to welcome Schiffman to campus and talk about his research.

The lecture was sponsored by the Department of History, with the support of Joseph Prud’homme, director of the Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture, along with the Department of Philosophy and Religion.

History professor Janet Sorrentino, who initiated and helped organize the events, says artifacts like the Dead Sea Scrolls inspired her to become an historian.

“There is a big difference between modern perceptions about a religious tradition and what ideas were actually inscribed in a text and survived. My students and I talk about this a lot,” she says.

“In the religious traditions that have prophets, first a God verbally reveals something to a prophet, who then communicates those words to other people. Some social mechanism provides for those words to be passed down orally and accurately for a time until someone finally writes them down, but then those original transcriptions may or may not survive. The process by which those words, understood to be revelations, make it to a tangible artifact is what made me want to study history, and in that process the Dead Sea Scrolls are right up front and center.”

Students Examine Jewish Artifacts

Friends Reese and Melissa Nicole join Rachel Loetzbeier ’16 and Yaron Greenberg ’16 to enjoy Rosh Hoshana dinner at the Hillel House.
FOR THE FIRST TIME, Washington College students will have a chance to study abroad during winter break at the prestigious Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Twelve students will spend nearly two weeks—January 9-20—at the Mt. Scopus campus overlooking the Old City, says Joseph Prud’homme, assistant professor of political science and director of Washington College’s Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture, which is sponsoring the program.

“We will be traveling throughout Israel, to Nazareth, Galilee and Bethlehem, and there will be a trip to Tel Aviv,” Prud’homme says.

The first week will feature an intensive course in comparative religion, exploring the primary religious texts of the great monotheistic—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and the lesser-known faith of the Druze. Most of the courses will be taught by Hebrew University faculty members, though Prud’homme will also teach a number of seminars.

The second week will focus on “contemporary Israeli politics and the problems and perils of the peace process,” he says. “This will be an amazing time to be in Israel because the Knesset will be having elections, so we’ll be right in the thick of the campaign season.”

The students will initiate research projects, which they will continue during the spring semester under Prud’homme’s tutelage. Some will receive course credit.

More than 30 students applied for the program, which is expected to be an annual event. It is open to students of all academic disciplines. “We have a science student studying the history of medicine in religious traditions,” Prud’homme says. A number of students received generous scholarships from WC’s Douglass Cater Society of Junior Fellows.

“This is the beginning of a multifaceted relationship with Hebrew University which we hope will lead to faculty exchanges and, eventually, to an exchange program where Washington College students could spend the entire academic year,” Prud’homme says. “It is very exciting—Hebrew University is one of the finest universities in the world.” ☞

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