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## Helen Beverley, star of the Yiddish films *Green Fields*, *The Light Ahead* and *Overture to Glory* dies at age 94



WALTHAM, MA (26 July 2011)--It was announced this weekend that actress **Helen Beverley** died on July 15 in Los Angeles. She was 94. NCJF extends condolences to Ms. Beverley's family.

Ms. Beverley began her career in her late teens on the Yiddish stage at the Yiddish Art Theatre on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue on New York City's Lower East Side. Under the direction of Maurice Schwartz, she played opposite some of the greats of the Yiddish theater—Samuel Goldenberg, Isadore Cashier, Anna Appel, Stella and Luther Adler. She toured with the Yiddish Art Theater in *The Brothers Askenazi*, *Tevye* and other plays throughout the US and Canada and in Paris and London.

It was during this period that director Edgar Ulmer cast her in his first Yiddish film, ***Green Fields*** (USA, 1937, restored and with new English subtitles by The National Center for Jewish Film). Ulmer's soulful open-air adaptation of Peretz Hirshbein's classic play celebrates an idyllic world of tribal wholeness and innate piety. No other movie has represented the shtetl with such lyricism. ***Green Fields***, its cast and director received glowing reviews and audience acclaim. Upon its release in 1937, the *New York World Telegram* raved "A new high in vernacular art!" *The Film Daily* concurred writing in 1937, "The cast is brilliant...The direction has caught the beauty and poetry of the classic work and transferred it to the screen in a masterful manner."

Ulmer cast Ms. Beverley as the lead in his next Yiddish film ***The Light Ahead***, (USA, 1939, restored and with new English subtitles by NCJF) about which J. Hoberman wrote in his book on Yiddish Cinema *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds* (reissued UPNE Press 2011), "Central to the film is a riveting performance by Helen Beverley as the blind orphan, Hodel...Beverly and Opatoshu are perhaps the most beautiful couple in the history of Yiddish cinema, and their scenes have a touching erotic chemistry." Based on Mendele Mokher Seforim's story of love frustrated by small-town ignorance, star crossed lovers Fishke and Hodel dream of life in the big city of Odessa, free from the poverty and stifling old-world prejudices of the shtetl. Made on the eve of World War II, ***The Light Ahead*** is at once romantic, expressionist, and painfully conscious of the danger about to engulf European Jews.

In 1940 Ms. Beverley appeared in her last Yiddish film, the musical drama ***Overture to Glory*** (USA, 1940, restored and with new English subtitles by NCJF) starring Moishe Oysher. A fan and critic favorite, Ms. Beverley was embraced as one of the leading stars of Yiddish cinema. With The National Center for Jewish Film's restoration and re-release of ***Green Fields***, ***The Light Ahead*** and ***Overture to Glory***, venues around the world have screened these Yiddish film classics, introducing the luminous Ms. Beverley and these unique artistic and cultural productions to new generations.

Long thought lost, ***The Light Ahead*** was rescued and restored by NCJF in 1982. The film screened at the New York Film Festival in September 1982 (the first Yiddish film to screen at NYFF and the first film to sell out!), following which the film had a theatrical re-release run at the Embassy Theater in New York. Ms. Beverley who was unable to attend the New York screenings, corresponded with NCJF Executive Director Sharon Pucker Rivo about her career on the stage and screen. "The whole experience of ***Green Fields***," Beverley wrote, "was the most marvelous thing that ever happened to me – especially because of its ongoing fame." Recalling the original release of the Yiddish films in the late 1930s she wrote, "I used to make personal appearances at the various theaters in NY and it was the greatest surprise to the audiences that I came out and spoke in *English*. It baffled them since they were certain I was a little European girl."

Ms. Beverley continued her acting career on the stage, in London, on Broadway and on tour in numerous productions, including *Key Largo* opposite Paul Muni, and opposite her then husband Lee J. Cobb in *Jason*. She appeared in a number of Hollywood films in the 1940s and 1950s, including *The Master Race* (1944), Charlie Chan's *Black Magic* (1944) and *The Robe* (1953) and on television shows, including *The Rifleman*, in 1960.

Ms. Beverley married actor Lee J. Cobb in 1940; they later divorced. She is survived by her daughter, actress Julie Cobb, and granddaughter, actress Rosemary Morgan. --- End ---