



By Ewa Bronowicz

## Polish In America: A Profile

### Michal Hochman: The Man of Plenty

When **Michal Hochman** sang at the Polish Consulate in New York City recently, at an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, it was an emotional event. Some people cried. While the songs from Mr. Hochman's recent album, *Tych Miasteczek Nie Ma Juz*, not yet officially released, reflect the Jewish experience, he likes to describe them, more broadly, as nostalgic. "I always choose songs that give me the goose bumps," Mr. Hochman, who sings in Polish, explains.



**MICHAL HOCHMAN**  
Photographed by Larissa Baldovin

The very first songs that moved him were by Elvis Presley. "Elvis represented the west," Mr. Hochman, born in 1944, he says, recalling his teenage years. "Everyone was listening to Elvis on the radio, because his records weren't available in Poland back then." When some friends were starting a jazz band, Mr. Hochman agreed to be the lead singer. "I sang American songs, even though my English was terrible," he adds. While, as Mr. Hochman acknowledges, it's never easy to make it as an artist, he happened to be at the right place at the right time: in Lublin, where the music scene has always been strong. Mr. Hochman's first Polish song, "Konik Na Biegunach," became a hit. By 1967 Mr. Hochman was already performing in singing competitions in different cities in Poland, and winning many of them; that is, until politics interfered with his musical career. In 1968, as a result of anti-Semitic policies introduced in Poland, Mr. Hochman's parents, who were of Jewish descent, had to give up their business. Fearing further persecution, the Hochmans fled to America. When the family arrived in New York City, Mr. Hochman was 25 years old. Not many people showed up to his first concert abroad, which coincided with a winter storm. "I realized I couldn't make a living as a singer," he concluded.

Mr. Hochman's first job in the city was working in a shipping department. The problem was that most of his co-workers spoke Spanish, and he wanted to learn English. He confessed his dissatisfaction to a supervisor. The supervisor's wife, Dorothy, agreed to hire Mr. Hochman. The woman was Dorothy Weinberger, and the job was in the membership office of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "At first, I made \$2 per hour," Mr. Hochman remembers. But he did collect Barbara Streisand's and Ms. Nixon's tickets for the 100th anniversary gala of the museum. After two years at the MET, where Mr. Hochman had helped computerize the files and worked as a key

punch operator, he applied to the University of Pennsylvania, for a degree in Environmental Protection. When he asked his professors back from Poland for recommendation letters, they wrote two lines about him. "Those letters wouldn't get me anywhere," he laughs. Ms. Weinberg stepped in and wrote a proper "American-style" recommendation letter. While Mr. Hochman was pursuing his studies, he received a job offer from the Department of Environmental Protection in New Jersey. He took it, stayed for 29 years, and retired in 2002. Then it was time to sing again.

Mr. Hochman has recorded two new albums since his retirement. He has also performed concerts in Poland. He now splits his time between his house in Roosevelt, NJ, and the Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn home of his partner, Larissa Baldovin, whom he calls "Laryska." (Mr. Hochman fittingly met Ms. Baldovin at one of his concerts, 13 years ago. "The timing was perfect. She'd just broken up with her husband, I'd just broken up with my wife," he describes the beginning of their love story.) Asked how he earned the title of "ambassador of Polish culture," as he's been referred to for many years, Mr. Hochman is modest. "It all started during communism. Today people attend events at the Polish consulate, but back then, you didn't know if you'd get out, so no one went." Instead, Mr. Hochman opened his NJ residence to Polish artists, including Ewa Demarczyk and Jerzy Stuhr.

Mr. Hochman has many homelands. He was born in Siberia, where his parents had been sent to forced labor camps via NKVD orders. In 1946, the family moved back to Poland. And, since 1968, Mr. Hochman has been living in the US, although these days he often travels to Poland. "My home is here when I'm here, but when I'm in Poland, I feel at home there," he confesses, and admits that it sounds strange.

## Celebrate Your Heritage, Sunday, June 9th

### Isabella Szutkowski, 2013 Chairman

Preparations usually begin in January for the annual Polish Heritage Festival in June at the PNC Bank Arts Center in Holmdel, New Jersey. This year the 41st annual festival will take place on Sunday June 9. Admission and parking are free. Whether you are traveling north, or south, on the Garden State Parkway, take Exit #116 which is the access road to the PNC Bank Arts Center. The 2013 Polish Heritage Festival will take place rain, or shine. The festival begins at 10:30 a.m. with an English/Polish Mass.

This year Ms. Isabella Szutkowski is Chair of the 2013 Polish Heritage Festival. She is the daughter of World War II era Polish immigrant parents.

Her paternal grandfather, Leonard Szutkowski, an engineer and member of the Second Polish Republic's elite, built the town of Janowa Dolina, which was destroyed during the war. He was murdered with approximately 25,000 other Poles in Katyn Forest, and other killing fields in its environs, by the NKVD on Stalin's orders. Stalin's lethal social engineering project was designed to destroy the Polish elite to pave the way for a communist seizure of power in Poland.

Her father, Leonard Szutkowski, grew up in eastern Poland (Kresy Wschodnie) and served in the Polish II Corps commanded by

General Władysław Anders. The II Corps defeated the Germans in 1944 at the Battle of Monte Cassino in Italy.

Isabella's mother's family included teachers and school directors who suffered in occupied Poland during World War II.

Only Isabella's nuclear family emigrated to the United States after the war. Isabella benefited from her education at her Polish Supplementary School in Brooklyn, New York. In addition to studying the Polish language, she learned the true history of Poland in the context of European history. At Polish School she also first learned how to perform on stage, recite poetry, and dance for an audience. These skills served her well in later life. Isabella observes that the many services provided by the devoted staff of Polish Supplementary Schools "are seldom fully appreciated."

This year's Chair first became involved with Polish American organizations through her Polish

School, or her dance company. She has been a member of the Polish American Heritage League (PAHL) since 2006. PAHL produces the annual Polish Heritage Festival.

Isabella earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees in engineering and thereby continues the family tradition started by her grandfather who was a distinguished engineer. She also earned the MBA Degree. Moreover, her husband is a Polish born engineer. They have two



teenage boys. Their oldest is pursuing a degree in engineering. The family frequently visits Poland. They are rearing their sons to be proud of their Polishness.

Soon the Chair of this year's Polish Heritage Festival will announce the attractions and performers at this year's event. Isabella's leadership is sure to make this year's festival especially memorable. Mark June 9 on your calendars and be sure to come to the 2013 Polish Heritage Festival.

— John Czop

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### AFFT CALLS ON

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

The FairTax Plan is a comprehensive proposal that replaces all federal income and payroll based taxes with a national retail sales tax, a "prebate" to ensure no American pays federal taxes on spending up to the poverty level, dollar-for-dollar federal revenue neutrality and, through companion legislation, the repeal of the 16th Amendment, which authorized the creation of the income tax.

"Congress has enabled IRS activities with more than 5,000 code changes in just 11 years, and even expanded their scope to include enforcement of major provisions of Obamacare," said Canevaro. "Congress created this problem. They now have an opportunity to correct it by enacting the FairTax Plan and asking the President to join them in signing the measure into law."

About Americans For Fair Taxation@

AFFT was formed in 1995. It is a nonprofit 501(c)(4), nonpartisan, grassroots organization solely dedicated to providing education on the FairTax Plan (HR 25 / S 122) to all members of the public, elected and appointed public officials and candidates for elected office - regardless of party affiliation. AFFT does not advocate the election or defeat of any candidate for public office and does not favor any candidate, political party, or incumbent over another. For more information, visit [www.fairtax.org](http://www.fairtax.org)



## Woman's Way



by **Alexis Vale**  
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### "Don't Even Think About It"

(As taken from "A Woman's Guide To Survival Series", Volume XII, Article 65 - written by Alexis Vale)

Instead of "thinking about it", (whatever that may be that disturbs you), think of a word that is either a reminder of something pleasant smelling like a flower or involves a memorable thought, place or time in your life. This is what you should be doing to cancel out the thoughts that come up and disturb your peace. **CANCEL OUT THESE THOUGHTS...FAST!**

If you do not do this, they will linger on, cause you emotional pain and disturb you, "in the now". Not to mention that they will keep on compounding to bring you down into a state of depression. (Stay away from the sugar, caffeine and alcohol too...they will heighten every state of depression from something little into something blown way out of proportion and bigger than life itself.)

"Don't even think about it"! What is past is past, you cannot change anything about it...you can only move ahead....not backwards!

It is unfortunate how many people **carry their burdens of the past FOR YEARS .... and it is JUST EATING AWAY AT THEIR PRESENT.** Focusing on the past doesn't advance your future.

If you throw away "your present", then you only have your future, but if you live it the same miserable way...what is the point? What are you accomplishing? Like I always say, "no one else cares".

Take a look around you. How many people do you know who are just plain miserable? Before you know it, you will wake up one day and say to yourself, "how did I get to be this age so fast"?

Wrong thinking.....cancel this out and start anywhere, at any time, to do whatever you want to do in your life, making every day the best that you can! Re-program yourself.

Remember, whatever anyone else is doing is their drama, their choice, their lesson in this lifetime.

**GO FOR A NEW EXPERIENCE NOT AN OLD WORN OUT ONE!**

**Don't let ethnicity die out among Poles!**

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