



July 3, 2018

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**TAUBE PHILANTHROPIES AWARDS CELEBRATED POLISH MUSICIAN OLA BILIŃSKA WITH IRENA SENDLER MEMORIAL AWARD**

*Artist's Extensive Repertoire Contributes to Survival of Yiddish Culture*



*From left to right: Helise Lieberman, director of Taube Center-Warsaw; Ola Bilińska, awardee; Shana Penn, executive director of Taube Philanthropies*

KRAKÓW, POLAND – On June 28, 2018 at the 30<sup>th</sup> Jewish Culture Festival, San Francisco-based Taube Philanthropies executive director Shana Penn and director of the Taube Center-Warsaw Helise Lieberman presented the 2018 Irena Sandler Memorial Award to its second recipient of the year, Ola Bilińska, an acclaimed musical artist and researcher of Yiddish language and culture. Bilińska is the first musician to receive the award.

“We are thrilled to have the opportunity to honor Ola Bilińska for her exemplary creative work in preserving and celebrating Yiddish music. She brings traditional songs, both popular and obscure, back to life by providing them with modern, compelling forms,” said Shana Penn, executive director of Taube Philanthropies. “In doing so, she has honored these artists of the past and has illuminated the wealth of Yiddish culture on the contemporary stage. She is clearly committed to the continuity of Yiddish culture in Poland and internationally.”

From the 20th century to present time, the Jewish people have expressed a recurring anxiety that the Yiddish language is dying. However, just at the very moment when this fear seems close to being realized, a new generation arises to embrace Yiddishkeit. Ola Bilińska represents the tremendous conviction and endeavor of this new generation whose work ensures the survival of this unique and historic culture.

“In the face of misunderstandings, conflicts, festering wounds and lack of dialogue, one of the routes to overcoming these obstacles is art,” said Ms. Bilińska. “And the purest and most abstract of the arts – music – perhaps works the most profoundly, because it operates at the level of emotions; it refers to the deepest, most unnamed layers of our humanity.”

Bilińska is the leader of the popular folk group Babadag, contributes to Muzyka Końca Lata and collaborates with Raphael Rogiński, Horny Trees, Andrzej Smolik, and Daniel Pigonski, among others.

The other 2018 award recipient was [Norman Conard](#), a renowned educator from Kansas who, together with his high school students, brought the untold story of Irena Sendler to public view.

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#### **Note to Editor**

Ola Bilińska’s June 28, 2018 acceptance speech of the Irena Sendler Memorial Award is available on the final page following this release. Photos from the event are available [here](#).

#### **About Ola Bilińska**

Honoree Ola Bilińska is a Yiddish language and culture researcher and acclaimed musical artist who has done exemplary work in preserving and celebrating Yiddish music, bringing traditional songs, both popular and obscure, back to life by providing them with a modern, compelling form. In doing so, she has honored these artists of the past and has illuminated the wealth of Yiddish culture on the contemporary stage. Her actions affirm her commitment to the preservation and continuity of Yiddish culture in Poland and worldwide. Leader of the popular folk group Babadag, she also contributes to Muzyka Końca Lata and collaborates with Raphael Rogiński, SzaZaZe, Horny Trees, Andrzej Smolik, and Daniel Pigonski, among others.

### **About the Irena Sendler Memorial Award**

The Irena Sendler Memorial Award was created in 2008 by Taube Philanthropies in memory of Irena Sendler whom Yad Vashem named a “Righteous Among The Nations.” Each year, the award is presented to those who have been exemplary in preserving and revitalizing Poland’s Jewish heritage. Nominations for the award are reviewed by a panel of Taube Philanthropies advisory board members and Jewish cultural leaders in Poland.

### **About Taube Philanthropies**

For more than 30 years, Taube Philanthropies has been a leader in supporting diverse educational, research, cultural, community, and youth organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, Poland, and Israel. Founded by businessman and philanthropist Tad Taube in 1981, and now led by Tad and his wife Dianne Taube, the organization works to ensure that citizens have the freedom and opportunity for advancement of their goals and dreams.

### **About the Irena Sendler Memorial Awardees, 2008-2018**

2008: Janusz Makuch, director of the Jewish Culture Festival, Kraków; 2009: Jan Jagielski, archivist, Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute; 2010: former President of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski; 2011: the late Magda Grodzka-Gużkowska, who risked her life to help Irena Sendlerowa rescue Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto; 2012: eminent scholars Prof. dr hab. Maria Janion and Prof. dr hab. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs; 2013: Hon. Bogdan Zdrojewski, former Minister of Culture and National Heritage; Hon. Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, Mayor of Warsaw; 2014: Małgorzata Niezabitowska, author and journalist; Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, director of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Center; 2015: Krzysztof Czyżewski, director of the Borderland Foundation; the late Dr. Jan Kulczyk, Distinguished Benefactor of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews; 2016: Prof. dr hab. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, professor of Jewish and Yiddish literature at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin; Maria Piechotkowa, renowned architect and scholar of Polish synagogue architecture; 2017: Stefan Wilkanowicz, author, editor, educator, and Catholic activist; Bogdan Białek, founder of the Jan Karski Society and Institute for Culture, Meetings and Dialogue; 2018: Norman Conard, U.S. educator who brought Irena Sendler to world notice; Ola Bilińska, artist and researcher of Yiddish music and culture.

**Ola Bilińska Acceptance Speech**  
**Irena Sendler Memorial Award - June 28, 2018**

In the face of misunderstandings, conflicts, festering wounds and lack of dialogue, one of the routes to overcoming these obstacles is art. And the purest and most abstract of the arts – music – perhaps works the most profoundly, because it operates at the level of emotions; it refers to the deepest, most unnamed layers of our humanity. And the more we look deep inside, the closer we are to each other. That’s where we’ll find the TRUTH.

I am very happy that, thanks to the faith of the Jewish Historical Institute, which decided to release the albums “Berjozkele” and “Libelid,” I was able to be such a small preacher of this TRUTH – the truth of the emotions contained within these old songs, which can be understood by listeners from another time and another culture, the truth of landscapes and customs, the truth of a revived language, the truth of the text’s beauty. Truth, knowledge, understanding – how much easier they are when you speak with music.

I’m pleased that I’m a musician.