

Interviewee	Alex Dafner	
About	Alex has been widely involved in Yiddish life in Melbourne. He served as a Kadimah board member (1970 – 2022) and President (1995-2015). He currently leads post-VCE Yiddish reading and conversation group.	
D.O.B.	29/8/1949; Lodz, Poland.	
Time periods discussed	1970s to present day	
Date and place of interview	22 June 2021, conducted online via Zoom (Melbourne)	
Interviewer	Jordy Silverstein	
Subjects	Kadimah committee; President; Melbourne Yiddish Youth Theatre; Dovid Herman Theatre; Bund; lectures; Mitvokh club (Wednesday club); 100 year celebration; In One Voice; Kadimah chess club; Bund; Sholem Aleichem College;	
People mentioned	Sender Burstin; Bono Wiener; Yasha Sher; Herschel Bachrach ; Josef Auerbach ; Moshe Ajzenbud; Pinchas (Pinye) Ringelblum; Nachman Gryfenberg ; Lova Friedman; Yizhak Khan; Avrum Cykiert; Rachel Levita; Cesia Goldberg; Abram Goldberg; Yossl Winkler; Renata Singer; Joe Tigel; Eugene Orenstein; Avraham Novershtern; Dov Noy; Herschel Klafisch; Adam Gruzman; Pinchas Goldhar; Herz Bergner; Leo Fink; Samuel Wynn; Simche Burstin; Varshavski	
Time, H/M/S	Topic	Key People Mentioned (w/time)
00:00:00 -00:00:24	Introductions.	
00:00:24-00:04:00	The a-political nature and structure of the Kadimah Committee in the 1970's. Alex joined the committee as a youth representative of the Melbourne Yiddish Youth Theatre. It consisted of 20 people, all men with one token woman. Members wanted to ensure the Kadimah was a-political to avoid prior internal conflict and they agreed that the Presidency should alternate equally between Zionists and Bundists.	Sender Burstin (Bundist)(2:57) A very influential and dominant figure, began as a voluntary librarian in 1928 when the library was in its highest demand. He was president for numerous years.
00:04:08-00:05:06	The post-war Generation of the 1970's in the Kadimah Committee. They were battle-weary, dominant, and tough men who assumed leadership roles.	Bono Wiener (4:22) Leader of the Bund and a forceful, dominant, and charismatic personality. Yasha Sher (4:37) a beloved actor and later radio presenter at 3EA.

00:05:06-00:11:00	The powerful personalities of the early years. Alex also captures the atmosphere of the Kadimah at this time. Meetings were fiercely argumentative, loud, and rude with everyone refusing to let a viewpoint go unchallenged. Alex finds a correlation between the combative nature of the Kadimah and the collective experience of the Holocaust.	Herschel Bachrach (5:18) had access to printing workshop and Yiddish print and was responsible for the majority of printing for the Kadimah. He was involved with leading newspapers in Warsaw before the war. Josef Auerbach (7:00) Journalist and community personality. Moshe Ajzenbud (7:10) One of the last living Yiddish writers, and an Honorary secretary of the Kadimah. Instrumental to the Melbourne Chronicle of the Yiddish Letter. He was influential in anything printed at the Kadimah and headed up the cultural committee. A Tough, stubborn, community fighter that was very particular about who would get printed. Pinchas (Pinye) Ringelblum (Bundist) (8:28) Incredibly active community activist but was Machiavellian in his dealings. Prominent in setting up the SKIF, Sholem Aleichem and Yiddish broadcasts on 3EA. Nachman Gryfenberg (Bundist) (10:44) Danielle Charak/Gryfenberg's father who was a dominant figure in the Kadimah committee.
00:11:00-00:13:40	Notions of a 'correct' way to present Yiddish and its importance in the Kadimah. It was an open-university style Yiddish experience in which numerous international speakers and proven local lecturers would give lectures to packed houses regarding Jewish issues, politics, literature, and history, as well as a range of other international issues and topics.	Lova Friedman (11:34) Long-time paid secretary who was instrumental in putting together 3rd Almanac. Yizhak Khan (11:54) a published writer. Avrum Cykiert (12:04) Never formally a part of Kadimah, nonetheless a deeply knowledgeable person
00:13:40-00:16:22	The importance of the library and the subsidiary nature of the Dovid Herman Theatre. The theatre had its own budgets and ran their own shows but reported to the Kadimah, as an adjunct type of setup. As a representative of the Melbourne Yiddish Youth Theatre, Alex recalls the lesson in patronage he learnt after failing to pay tribute to the Kadimah in promotional material.	
00:16:22-00:22:23	The new generation of the 1980's. This saw a turn towards a more routine and civil discourse within the committee meetings. Initially, there had to be an activity every Sunday, bar Jewish holidays. Gradually, this progressed to an infrequent Sunday concert or lecture style speaker and the Wednesday (<i>mitvokh</i>) clubs became the dominant place for Yiddish culture. Everything became more consistent with a focus on regularity for cultural	Rachel Levita (19:42) A crucial part of the Dovid Herman theatre. A warm gracious lady who had enormous success with the theatre. Cesia Goldberg (20:28) took over along with her husband Abram Goldberg (20:40), both Rachel and Cesia ran the Wednesday club for a total of 22 years. Yossl Winkler (21:09) Was once a treasurer in the old committee but was

	events and the old guard of the committee took on conciliatory roles.	still a dominant figure at this time, however, he along with others, had become more conciliatory.
00:17:33-00:19:39	Zoom technical issues.	
00:22:23-00:24:24	The impact of Yiddish speakers diminishing in number. The Kadimah had to consider the future and look towards embracing the younger generation with fun and entertaining events rather than open-university style lectures. Alex also discusses the 100th year celebration.	
00:24:24-00:25:55	The final years of Alex's Presidency and the financial hardships, fatigue, and a reliance on volunteers. Alex felt as though he had become the bridge between the old generation and the new and eventually turned to Renata Singer and the modern era of the Kadimah.	
00:25:55-00:26:44	Zoom technical issues.	
00:25:50-00:29:02	The modern era of the Kadimah with Renata Singer and Joe Tigel. Sholem Aleichem and Kadimah became closer, In One Voice was revived, there was more of a focus on English and the balancing act between the use of English and Yiddish in cultural programs continued.	Renata Singer (25:50) Alex turned to Renata and Joe Tigel (25:50) who had already been on the committee for years and the younger generation to take over the Kadimah.
00:29:12-00:32:28	A further discussion of the open-university style lectures from Alex's early years. Most were not university educated but were proud, articulate autodidacts, and well-read in Yiddish literature and Yiddish translations of texts. The majority come from lower- and middle-class European families. Many international speakers were university educated and garnered ample respect and admiration as a result, however, all lectures were always accessible to a broader audience.	Eugene Orenstein (30:44) a prominent international speaker from Montreal and New York. Avraham Novershtern (30:51) a prominent international speaker from Argentina and Tel-Aviv University. Professor Dov Noy (31:00) A world famous folklorist with a vast knowledge of Yiddish Folk lore. Herschel Klafisch (31:08) Who was originally from Warsaw and became chief Rabbi of Peru. He was a great Historian with fantastic knowledge of Polish Jewry and spoke for 2hrs without a note of paper.
00:32:28-00:35:50	How and why international speakers were brought to Australia. The international speakers had a world-wide reputation, people such as Bono Vino would scout them on their travels and others would request for people, they heard on Yiddish Radio or prominent authors they had read.	Bono Wiener (35:22) One of the earliest to travel to Jewish communities overseas and often scouted for international speakers to bring to Australia. Adam Gruzman (35:28) A historian who gave a weekly report from Israel in Yiddish and would come to the Kadimah to give lectures on the Jewish Diaspora experience.

00:35:50-00:38:15	Yiddish as a point of commonality for the predominantly secular Kadimah. Yiddish culture and language were highly respected. Yiddish overcame the vanity, pettiness, jealousy, and the perceived hierarchy of prior cultural experience. In addition, the common experience of the holocaust reinforced the notion that everyone had a duty to preserve and promote their language and culture.	
00:38:15-00:40:35	The importance of toughness and the hardworking qualities required to maintain a cultural centre within a period without multicultural policy or funding. There was a begrudging respect between all at the Kadimah. Praise was hard earned and uncommon, yet you quickly heard about any mistake which was made.	Pinye Ringelblum (38:45) An energetic and great organiser that had a terrible reputation. Many questioned his honesty and integrity. However, there was profound respect for what he was able to consistently achieve after meetings ended. He would always get the job done and follow up any issues.
00:40:35-00:43:58	The impact of the Holocaust. It elicited an us against the world mentality but was rarely directly discussed. The focus became cultural autonomy rather than cross-culturalism. It also exacerbated tensions between Zionists, who felt Israel was the safest location, and Bundists, who felt Israel had rejected Yiddish. Importantly, the suffering experienced by the post-war generation never defeated them, it catalysed the push for self-governance and autonomy.	
00:43:58-00:48:40	How much Yiddish culture and language should be implemented within formal settings of the community. Kadimah and Bund members fought hard for Yiddish within Jewish institutions. These debates were political in nature and were the remnants of pro-Hebrew and pro-Yiddish debates in Israel. Alex also discusses the stormy Board of Deputy meetings regarding the March of the living at 46:00	
00:49:02-00:51:28	The unique position of Australian Zionists. The common experience of the Holocaust and comparably favourable economic conditions in Australia allowed Zionists to be more casual, self-sufficient and did not rely upon old alliances and connections for their wellbeing.	
00:51:28-00:56:04	The Kadimah Library in the 1970's; the Schule of the secular. The library was a lending library in the early years, all patrons had the utmost respect for books as access to learning and reading materials was highly valued. Most popular were Holocaust literature, books and memoirs, famous Yiddish literary works and both local and international Yiddish newspapers.	

00:56:04-01:03:09	<p>The collective sense of the Kadimah’s history and the impact of a lack of retrospection. Certain individuals did receive recognition, however, most who came before Alex’s time do not receive the admiration they deserve. There was a clear break between the successful pre-holocaust generation that developed the Kadimah, and the post-holocaust generation that came with so much baggage and cultural knowledge. The post-Holocaust generation were forward looking and combined with the relative youth of the Kadimah in comparison to European libraries and institutions, there was rarely any meaningful retrospection.</p>	<p>Early Yiddish writers Pinchas Goldhar (56:40), Herz Berner (56:45), Moshe Ajzenbud (56:49) Yizhak Khan (56:51) are all mentioned as prominent writers that would release their books at the Kadimah. The Kadimah was the ‘place’ to release, sell and discuss new releases in Yiddish.</p>
01:03:09-01:11:20	<p>Alex recalls the issues he faced in collating information for the 100-year celebration. Alex wanted to collect photos of all the prominent figures of the Kadimah, but he struggled to find photos for many of them. Alex also did not know at the time (2012) that the annual reports were kept in the library. Further, there are slight differences between the Annual Reports and the Almanacs which make it difficult to form the correct timeline of the Kadimah’s history today.</p>	<p>Leo Fink (1:01:50) After Australia opened its borders to European immigrants in 1948, Leo was renowned for getting Yiddish speakers visas and bringing them to Australia. Samuel Wynn (1:02:14) A name that was very respected, however, Alex does not give any more detail.</p>
01:11:20-01:16:40	<p>The unsung heroes and little-known events in the Kadimah’s history. Alex explores the fine line between being remembered as a prominent figure and being lost to history.</p>	<p>Yossl Winkler (1:11:53) He may have lacked the charisma or language of others, but he would take great notes during the meetings and would tirelessly work to ensure everything was complete before the next meeting. He would pay bills, resolve hassles, and cover contingencies. In print, he will only be remembered as the honorary treasurer. In a funny tale, Alex recalls that Josel was also the treasurer of the Bund, and when the Kadimah was in serious financial strife, he secretly borrowed money from the Bund and reimbursed it once the Kadimah recovered. Moshe Ajzenbud (01:14:39) A very tough, stubborn, short tempered and self-centred character. However, he was the man that wrote everything. If you needed something written, everyone would just give it to Moshe. He never received any thanks, however, when he made a mistake, everyone would let him know about it.</p>

01:16:40-01:17:30	The Chess club of the Kadimah. Briefly, Alex praises the underappreciated impact of the Chess club which attracted those who would never normally attend the Kadimah. Often, people would lament them for being irresponsible or view them as a nuisance, but they too, have a place in the Kadimah's history	
01:17:30-01:22:28	Disagreements over speaking the right, or a good Yiddish. There was a Vilnius speaking language elite whilst Warsaw or Łódź Yiddish was ridiculed. Speakers were judged on their eloquence, sometimes to greater extent than the content of their speeches. The ability to quote or recite entire passages was a marker of education, knowledge, and finesse of the Yiddish language.	Simche Burstin (1:21:44), Varashavski (1:21:53) and Avrum Cykiert (1:22:06) Could all quote things from memory and would often spout forth and show off.
01:22:28-01:26:25	Descendants that Alex is aware of today. Danielle Charak (1:22:50) Nachman Gryfenberg's daughter, Yasha Sher's daughters Ruth and Naomi (1:23:10), Leah Justin , (1:24:11) Josef Auerbach's Daughter and his son Leon Auerbach , Rose Blustein (1:24:28) daughter of Moshe Ajzenbud, Simcha Burstin's sons Morris and Ben Burstin (1:25:20) and finally Simche Burstin's family Hinda and Sefra Burstein (1:25:40) and his wife Helen (1:25:46) who still volunteers at the library.	
01:26:25-01:28:30	The tendency of children to not follow in their parents' footsteps and the subsequent lack of generational succession within the Kadimah. Alex himself did not come from a prominent Kadimah family and can hardly recall anyone that was prominent and has children that continued their legacy. Possibly due to teenagers wanting to distance themselves from their parents and forge their own path.	
01:29:30-01:32:38	Schisms within the Kadimah. Alex is not aware of all of them, and those he knows of from the years before he joined, he only read about. Generally, splits within the Kadimah occurred along the lines of language and politics, more specifically, international political issues more often than local ones.	
01:32:38-01:33:34	Alex's final remarks.	