



# What a Life!: The Autobiography of Pesach'Ke Burstein, Yiddish Matinee Idol

*Pesach'Ke Burstein, Lillian Lux Burstein, Gershon Freidlin*

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A riveting memoir of life in the Yiddish theater, in the words of the star of *Der Komediant*, winner of the Israeli Oscar for Best Documentary 1999.

Pesach Burstein, an old trouper from the Yiddish theater, recalls dramas both onstage and off in this memoir, which he dictated to his wife, Lillian Lux Burstein. The story of Burstein's successful stage career is played out against the background of political turmoil in Europe, vignettes of life in small towns and big cities, friendships and rivalries among theater folk, family life, emigration to the United States, and tours through Europe, South America, Israel, and South Africa. Every personal anecdote tells the larger history: theater history and also the history of the Yiddish communities who were his audiences. While Burstein is a legend in Yiddish theater, he was little known outside that world until he was celebrated in Arnon Goldfinger's acclaimed documentary *Der Komediant*. This memoir provides the first window for English readers into the other side of Yiddish culture - the Yiddish burlesque, the traveling Yiddish theater, and the music hall. It will not only delight readers but also reveal a social and cultural history never before described in such detail. Burstein's life is the story of popular Yiddish theater in the first half of the century.

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