



Baltimore native Jay Wolf Schlossberg-Cohen has had a varied career.

Soul On Fire

Jay Wolf Schlossberg-Cohen makes art on film, canvas and shul windows.

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Special to the Jewish Times

Interviewing Jay Wolf Schlossberg-Cohen is like sipping a cup of tea in a hurricane. The man's creative energy just blows over everything in its path. One ends up drenched, exhausted and feeling like something exciting and possibly profound has just left the room.

Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen recently spoke to the BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES by phone from Denver, where he has designed and created a series of stained-glass windows for the sanctuary at Congregation Hebrew Educational Alliance.

Last Sunday, the windows — which depict the synagogue's history of nearly seven decades — were displayed to the public for the first time. (He also designed and created stained-glass windows for Sha'har Zahav Congregation in San Francisco.)

Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen is 45, Baltimore-born and bred. Grew up in Beth Tfiloh Day School, then on to a filmmaking degree from New York University. He spent four years as a Broadway stage manager. Made experimental art/music/animation/dance films, too. Produced some off-Broadway hits. Then out West, to the

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shining illusion of Hollywood and a string of low-budget flicks.

"You spend two years of your life on these things, working with very talented people, and mostly what you are working on is garbage," Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen laments. "So they weren't really good films, but the process was fabulous."

Still, L.A. wasn't a complete waste. He hung out with film legends dating back to the silent era, and listened with rapt attention as they spun their tales of the Golden Age of cinema.

Skip ahead to 1987. Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen has just returned to Baltimore, where for the next six years he will head up the Maryland Film Commission, having been appointed to the post by then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer. He sees the job as a chance to live out what he believes is a profoundly Jewish task: to make the world a better place.

"My mother [Helen Cohen] took us to march with Martin Luther King in 1963," Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen says. "We always believed that we were blessed to be in this country at this time, and that comes with the obligation both to live up to your potential and to try to make a difference in the world."

Thus he used his job with the commis-
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sion to help enhance the role of women in the film industry; to ensure that minority communities got their voices and stories up on the screen; and to boost the fledgling careers of student filmmakers. Plus he helped lure the hit TV series "Homicide" to Charm City.

Then he did the Preakness painting. A massive work celebrating the fabled horse race at Pimlico Race Course, it hangs today at BWI Airport. This was the turning point.

"When I saw the impact of that work, seeing people cry and get excited, I thought I was finally ready to try this full time," he explains.

With the unflagging support of his wife, Allison Wolf, he dropped his other projects and set himself up as a full-time professional painter. As the owner of South Charles Village's Schlossberg-Cohen Studio, his works — most of which depict musicians and performers in the heat of creative expression — are much in demand. He says there is something spiritual about a great theatrical or musical performance.

"I know when I go to a performance, if someone is really good, they have spent their whole lives rehearsing and practicing. Unlike most professionals, they have to be their best every day. When I see an artist working in that way, it thrills me and I want to share it," he said.

Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen's collaborator on the Denver windows, Baltimore glass artist Lucinda Shaw, sputters when asked to describe her colleague's creativity.

"It is his life, it is who he is," she says. "You can't separate the person from his creative side. It is utterly a part of who and what he is."

From a technical standpoint, she says, he uses a technique that piles "layers on top of layers, so that you get a real sense of depth" — which, in fact, may nicely sum up the man himself.

Like, for example, his five-week wander through Israel five years ago to celebrate his 40th birthday. Mr. Schlossberg-Cohen traversed the land, sketching everything from the aftermath of the Dizengoff Square bombing in Tel Aviv to Ethiopian Jewish holiday celebrations.

And he came away a changed man. "[Israel is] deeper than just religion," he says. "It's really about God. There is a real spirituality there. You can't help but feel it. I don't know how you can go there and not just come away on fire." □