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## Society Notebook: Multicultural showcase reflects mission of Maine Jewish Museum

The Aug. 10 fundraiser featured a diverse array of fashion, food and music.

BY AMY PARADYSZ

The Maine Jewish Museum wanted its next fundraiser to appeal to a wider audience, and it certainly hit that mark with the inaugural Fashion, Food and Fun(d)raiser Aug. 10.

The 16 designers and 31 models all had a Maine connection and identify as Jewish, an immigrant, a person of color, or part of the LGBTQ+ community. Models included attorney Marshall Tinkle in 85-year-old rabbinical garb; Nathan Fritz (aka Miso Honey) in drag; and Nancy Hoffman, founder of the



Peaks Island Umbrella Cover Museum, wearing umbrella covers as accessories.

“I love how eclectic and inclusive the show felt and how no one feels like an ‘other,’” said model Jenna Gross, who wore a “Hey Queers” sweater that she knitted herself.

“All the models got to know each other, which is part of what this was about, promoting diversity,” said model coach Barbara Furey.

Everything about the three-hour event was multicultural – the food, the music and the fashion. The Maine Squeeze Accordion Ensemble welcomed guests with Jewish tunes. The cocktail reception included bissop, a Western African hibiscus beverage, and New Zealand wines donated by Beth Ann Dahan of Twelfth Night Wines. A buffet of hors d’oeuvres was inspired by the foods of Mexico, Spain, Polynesia, India and China. And then there was smoked trout mousse in fluted cucumber cups, representing “Jewish-ish.” Once the more than 200 guests were seated in the synagogue, Rwandan pop star Clarisse Karasira, who now lives in Maine, got the audience singing along and ready to cheer for every model to walk the runway.

“Tonight is about belonging, celebrating togetherness, but it’s also the story of our diversity,” said Executive Director Dawn LaRochelle. “The outfits



communicate messages across time, culture and language. The stories we wear are individual and authentic, and they connect us.”

Rabbi Gary Berenson, whose father was born in Russia, said, “One of our missions is to honor and educate people about American immigration. When this synagogue was founded over 100 years ago, we were all immigrants. Today we have so many ethnicities in this area, and we want people to visit the museum and bring new energy.”

When Maine Jewish Museum hosts a fundraiser, it has typically been a Maine Jewish Hall of Fame – a “who’s who” among Jews with a heavy emphasis on honor and memory.

“We were looking for something different,” Berenson said.

More than a dozen businesses supported Fashion, Food and Fun(d)raiser, led by sponsors Coffee by Design, Couleur Collection and Kitchen Cove Design Studio. Including the live and silent auctions and private donations, the event raised about \$20,000.

Maine Jewish Museum, located on Congress Street in Portland, is a venue for contemporary art exhibitions featuring established Jewish artists with a Maine connection. It is open to the public from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday through Friday, with no admission fee. A new exhibit featuring the works of Henry Isaacs, Magi Leland, Nanci Kahn and Meredith Kennedy opens Thursday, with a reception from 5-7 p.m.



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David Reed of Cape Elizabeth, Lisa Silverman of Portland, Paulo Correia of South Portland and Renee Garland of Portland. **Photos by Amy Paradysz**