

BIRO-FAJNRAJCH Fela (1902?-), actor. Her family lived at ul. Warszawska 72, next to the Three Crosses. Her father, Mosze Josel, a pious and learned Jew, came from Lelów. He bought dairy products from the surrounding villages and sold them in the city. Her mother, Chaja, came from an aristocratic Hassidic family. Her maternal grandfather, Zyskind Zygelbaum, had a water mill near Kłobuck. One of her uncles, Mosze Zygelbaum, had a mill in Dąbie, next to which illegal party meetings were held.

In the home, there were ten children. During the years of the freedom movement 1905-07, in the Fajnrajch home, there were heated discussions between brothers Majer and Dawid (Zionist Socialists) and Szymon (a Bundist). Majer and Dawid were later arrested. Dawid sat in prison for six years and shared a cell with Dawid Lewenhof (who died in prison) and Josele Berliner. Their mother took food to Majer and sent packages to Dawid. In contrast to her father, her mother was “enlightened” and quietly accepted the freedom movement.

Fela’s parents died before World War II. The rest of the family scattered across the world. Majer Fajnrajch and Simcha found themselves in *Eretz Israel*, Abraham in the Soviet Union, one in Argentina, while Izak, Dawid, Jankiel, Ruchla (married name Kacenebogen, settled in Łódź) and Sura remained in Poland.

Fela learned Yiddish in a *cheder* and other languages in a private school on ul. Garncarska. She began working early in Weinberg’s factory. After that, for a short time, she studied as a corsetier in “Higienia” (at Jakub Rozenberg’s wife). She also learned sewing at Waldfogel’s.

Her brother Majer was a lover of theatre and literature and performed in amateur productions. Rehearsals were held in the home of Fela’s parents. Prepared for Purim was a performance of Goldfaden’s *Tsvey Kuni Lemel*. The show was performed in the great hall of the Bem Hotel on II Aleja. Mania Szaferanko played Beautiful Karolina. This performance was Fela’s first exposure to the theatre. From that time, she never missed a performance of a Jewish show in Częstochowa.

She was introduced to the stage by → Szmul Frank. Her first role was as Tojbele in *Żydowskim królu Lirze* [The Jewish King Lear]. The play was staged in the “Hazomir” theatre in Radomsko. She performed with a troupe of Łódź amateurs – Cymbalista, Mrs Gliksman, Wajsman, Ajzenberg and others, under the direction of Wajsberg. She later joined a troupe at the “Lira” Society. This was during the period of World War I. At that time, the most popular cinema, the

“Odeon”, also offered a side program. For several weeks, with great success, Jewish vaudeville was presented under the direction of the famous actor Cymbalista. Fela also took part in that.

Fela joined the Groser Club, led by → Josef Aronowicz, → Jakub Rozenberg, Abram Szaja Sztrojs, Lederman and others. In 1918, she left for Berlin, where a large number of refugees, still from Tsarist times, lived. In the spring of 1918, she was arrested for her participation in the anti-war movement. After sitting in a women’s prison for two months, she was sent back to Modlin. After being released from the fortress in 1918, she again left for Berlin. She joined a Jewish troupe under the direction of Szudłower. This troupe also included Aleksander Granach, who would later become famous. In 1923, with the help of a friend, → Mendel Szuchter, she left for Montreal (Canada) and, there, played in the Monument National Theatre.

In 1924, she came to New York. When the Wilno Troupe came there, she joined it and performed in a number of plays. There, she learned to pay attention to the purity of language. Soon after, the “Freiheit” Drama Studio was established which later became “Artef”. Under the tutelage of recognised authorities, the theatrical arts were studied seriously there, performances were prepared and so a better type of Jewish theatre was created.

Fela also performed with Moris Szwarc at the *Kunst-Teater*. She appeared in a number of performances in New York and in the provinces. From 1940, she devoted herself to the Jewish word. She performed recitations of both classical and modern Jewish poetry. After the end of World War II, she performed programs of Jewish songs and poetry about the Holocaust.

Her husband was → Szymon Biro, with whom, in circa 1932, she had a son - John Reed.

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