

# MANHATTAN



**Almost Ready:** Caryl Picker, left, applies the finishing touches to her sculpture, much to the satisfaction of Rabbi Harvey Tattelbaum, right.

*Photo by Paul Margolis*

by the Joffrey Ballet and Absolut Vodka and was recently displayed in the windows of Tiffany's, beat out several other artists for the Shaarey Tefila project. "We loved the exuberance" of the sculpture, says Nechemias, explaining that Picker had shown them a 2-foot model of what she intended to do.

"We were moved," adds Kadanoff. "It's quite awesome."

Next to the sculpture will appear a phrase from Isaiah 56: "Make them joyful in my house of prayer." Picker, when she chose this phrase, had no idea that on the front wall in the synagogue sanctuary appears the words "My house should be a house of prayer for all people" — the next verse in Isaiah 56.

While the sculpture may symbolize and celebrate the congregation's 150-year existence, the Torah project concerns the temple's future. At the end of September, Rabbi Moshe Klein, a fourth-generation Torah scribe, will begin a yearlong process of writing a new Torah for the congregation. "Every generation should write their own Torah," says Rabbi Harvey Tattelbaum, spiritual leader of Shaarey Tefila. "Symbolically, it's a great idea."

Financially, too. Members can sponsor parts of the Torah, ranging from \$54,000 for a book to the special kid's price of \$18 a letter. Proceeds will go to the congregation's religious endowment fund. This type of sponsorship gives "all members a chance to participate," according to Nechemias.

Members will have the chance to actually help create the new Torah by sowing together the parchment pages or holding the scribe's quill while he fills in the letters. Children will be designing a special chupah for the dedication ceremony in May, when the congregation "gets married" to the Torah.

At that ceremony, three musical compositions of the 150th Psalm will be presented by Robert Beaser, head of composition at the Juilliard School; Larry Grossman, composer of many Broadway musicals; and Simon Sargon, music director of Temple Emanuel in Dallas. Bruce Ruben, cantor of Temple Shaarey Tefila, explains he commissioned these three composers to write music for both the chorus and the keyboard to cap off "our final celebratory event."

But the celebration will actually continue into the future due to the oral history and archival projects the temple launched this year. While one committee tapes older congregation members willing to recount past experiences, another committee attempts to reconstruct the temple's archives. "It's been very exciting," says Kadanoff, explaining that a fire in 1937 destroyed much of the congregation's archives.

The surviving records help tell Shaarey Tefi-

## 150 Years Of Inclusion

*Shaarey Tefila has come a long way since 1845, literally and figuratively.*

**SUSAN JOSEPHS**  
STAFF WRITER

**I**n 1845, a group of Scotch and English Jews decided to break from the German-founded B'nai Jeshurun synagogue and form its own house of worship. Meeting for the first time over a stable on the Lower East Side's Franklin Street, these Jews created Shaarey Tefila, meaning Gates of Prayer. Though it changed "gates" over the years, Shaarey Tefila apparently never stopped praying.

Some 150 years and four buildings later the synagogue, now on 79th Street and Second Avenue, and one of Manhattan's oldest Reform congregations, will mark its sesquicentennial with a

"Year of the Torah" celebration. A sculpture, musical compositions of the 150th Psalm, the writing of a new Torah, and archival and oral history projects will be "a rallying point" for members to rejuvenate their involvement in synagogue life, says Eileen Kadanoff, chairwoman of the sesquicentennial committee.

This year "represents a reaffirmation" of commitment to synagogue life, says Dr. Charles Nechemias, president of Shaarey Tefila. "We want to get everyone to participate."

After 3 1/2 years of planning, the 150th anniversary celebration will officially kick off Sept. 9 with the dedication of the synagogue's new sculpture. Created by local artist Caryl Picker, the sculpture depicts a 6-foot bronze figure dancing with a Torah and an outstretched arm; it now stands in Shaarey Tefila's entrance, visible to the people waiting for the bus on Second Avenue. Picker says the sculpture "had a great deal to do with her inner soul. I wanted something uplifting, a sense of 'come inside,'" she says.

The sculpture emulates how the synagogue views itself — a Reform congregation with a traditionalist bent. At first glance, the figure looks like an 18th-century chasid kicking up his heels. But upon closer inspection, the left side of the figure's face appears distinctly feminine, while the right side looks masculine. Picker explains she wanted to create an androgynous character evoking chasidic dance movement, "the joyfulness of a moment's celebration that would give the feeling of both old and new."

Picker, whose work has been commissioned