

# THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY NEWSLETTER

"Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel"

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## OUR MAN IN SAO PAULO, BRAZIL

His name is Silvio Santos. Although unknown to most people in the United States, he may well be the most famous man in Brazil. Perhaps with only a bit of exaggeration, his 1972 authorized biography is entitled The Spectacular Life of Silvio Santos.

For nearly 100 hours each month, he is seen by more than 50 million Brazilian viewers watching the SBT television network, the second largest in Brazil and owned by Silvio Santos himself.

His acumen as a businessman is legendary. From a young sidewalk salesman working the streets of Rio de Janeiro, he is now, at the age of 57, the owner of "Bau da Felicidade," an economic empire begun in 1958 that includes 49 businesses and more than 16,000 employees. He runs his business with the help of other family members, including his brothers, Henrique and Leo, his wife Irma (with whom he is frequently photographed), and his nephew, Guilherme Stoliar.

An interview published in the October 1987 issue of the Brazilian magazine, Caderno 2, describes him as one of the last self made men in Brazil, a television star and magnate who has achieved great power in Sao Paulo. His personal wealth is estimated at one trillion cruzados (\$150 million), although he modestly describes his fortune as "all a question of zeros."

Why is there an interest in Silvio Santos? Because his real name is Senor Abravanel, the son of Alberto Dom Abravanel, a Greek immigrant from Salonika, and Rebeca Abravanel, a Turkish immigrant from Smyrna. In the interview in Caderno 2, he describes at some length his family background and his descent from Don Isaac Abravanel, who, he explains to the reporter, had been minister of finance in Portugal. Silvio's father wished to name him "Dom" after the famous family member, but, informed that Brazilians did not use the title "dom," but "senor," his father chose the name "Senor."

Silvio Santos, or Senor Abravanel, is a recipient of this Newsletter, and will hopefully provide his own thoughts for publication in a future issue.

Please address all correspondence to:  
Allan R. Abravanel, 111 SW Fifth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204  
(503) 295-4400

## UPDATE ON LINA ABARBANELL

In the first issue of the Newsletter, an inquiry was made regarding the actress "Alice Abravanel." The following response was received from JONATHAN ABARBANEL (Chicago, Illinois), a theater critic and member of the executive committee of the American Theater Critics Association:

"Even though theatre is my work, I don't know who Alice Abravanel is/was. I once heard of an actress in the Yiddish Theatre, years ago, who used Judith Abarbanel as her stage name (she was not a blood Abarbanel). Also, in the mid-19th century there was an Abarbanel in New York City who was a prominent editor and publisher, and occasional playwright. It is my intention on a trip to New York to do some scholarly research at one of the theatre collections, and see if any of his plays survive.

"The best known theatrical Abarbanel was, of course, Lina Abarbanell, originally from Vienna. She made her American debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, 1904, in the title role in Franz Lehar's THE MERRY WIDOW. Later, she toured the nation in the role. She had a successful career in Broadway operetta that lasted until about 1930, after which she went into theatrical management and producing. She died in the mid-1960's. Today, I still meet many theatre professionals who ask me if I am related to 'Madame Abarbanell.' She helped many newcomers along the way, and is remembered gratefully by all who knew her. Her daughter married the composer Mark Blitzstein, who met an untimely and grisly end (murdered) in 1964."

## DAVID ABARBANEL LINDO

A recent passing reference in a book on Jewish genealogy linked the Abarbanel family with the Lindo and Disraeli families in Great Britain. With that clue, the entries for the Lindo and Disraeli families in the Jewish Encyclopedia provide more disclosure. The Lindo family section describes, for example, David Abarbanel Lindo (1772-1852), a leader of the London Jewish community and a prominent Sephardic of his day.

David Abarbanel Lindo played a very significant role in the life of young Benjamin Disraeli, the future prime minister of Great Britain. Disraeli, who became an Anglican at the age of 13, was born a Jew. David Abarbanel Lindo was the mohel at Disraeli's brit milah. This story should be a true conversation stopper at your next cocktail party -- how many other people today can claim (or care) that a member of their family was the mohel for a British prime minister?

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## THE ABRAVANELS IN LITERATURE

The Abravanel family name and the Abravanel character have played vibrant roles in Jewish history. The name and the character have also been portrayed in fiction. JANE AMLER LEWIS (Binghamton, New York), an Abravanel family member, reports she has written an unpublished novel based on the life of Don Isaac Abravanel, entitled The Fifth Kingdom. The "Fifth Kingdom" is the final kingdom "of the saints of the most high" that, Abravanel explains in one of his messianic works, will eventually appear to rule over the world.

One of the earliest references in fiction to the Abravanel appears in some Spanish editions of Don Quixote, by Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes mentions in a footnote that the library of books that drove the country aristocrat mad, changing him into Don Quixote de la Mancha, included a copy of Dialogues of Love, a philosophical treatise written by Leone Ebreo, or Don Judah Abravanel.

Another reference to the Abravanel is found in Heinrich Heine's famous unfinished story, "The Rabbi of Bacherach, A Fragment," in which a Sephardic grandee named Don Isaac (supposedly a young nephew of his more famous uncle), strolls through a Jewish ghetto in medieval Germany. A rabbi meeting this young Don Isaac, who more closely resembles the Cisco Kid than a famous rabbi, exclaims "and I will personally vouch for it that Don Isaac Abarbanel, the great rabbi's nephew, has sprung from the best blood in Israel, if not in fact from the royal race of David."

Irving Howe, in World of Our Fathers, reports that the Abravanel name was prominent in the plays of the Yiddish theater. Howe describes the role of this name in the rivalry between the theater companies of Horowitz and Lateiner: "When Horowitz's company produced Don Isaac Abravanel, 'an oriental opera in four acts' that had nothing to do with the historical figure after whom it was named, Lateiner's company countered with Don Joseph Abravanel, reputedly authentic."

The Abravanel name appears again in the works of Philip Roth. Felix Abravanel, in Roth's The Ghost Writer, is a brilliant writer: "Poor marvelous Abravanel (I mean this without satire) -- even what was intended to guard the great rose window of his inner brilliance was itself so damn beautiful that the ungifted multitudes and art lovers of the world could not but find him all the more alluring."

## THE NAME AT YAD VASHEM

JOSEPH BARBANEL (Coconut Creek, Florida) reports on a 1985 visit to the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem in Israel. File names are maintained in the archives of the memorial for individual victims of the Holocaust, with information supplied by relatives or friends of the deceased. Mr. Barbanel explains that he found 69 forms completed for persons with the name "Abravanel" or its variations. The countries of origin of the deceased were as follows:

Yugoslavia	40
Poland	12
Greece	11
Russia	2
Miscellaneous or undetermined	<u>4</u>
TOTAL	69

All of the entries for Greece were from the city of Salonika. Although the Abravanel's claiming Spanish citizenship survived (see the story about Jack Abravanel in issue no. 1 of this Newsletter), many other Abravanel's residing in Salonika during World War II apparently perished.

Among those Salonika residents for whom reports were filed were Regina Abravanel, the widow of Lazare Abravanel, and her four children: Mathilde, Edovard, Jacques and Therese. The report in each case was filed by Chaim Abravanel in 1955, who resided in Jaffa, Israel. Another report was filed by Ethel Oro in 1957 for six of her relatives: Sol, Jakow, Matilda, Alberto, Rachel and Nehama Abravanel, all of Salonika.

The Newsletter would appreciate receiving additional information from any readers who may have access to other records of Abravanel's in the Holocaust.

## THE BIOGRAPHY OF DON ISAAC ABRAVANEL

The modern definitive biography of Don Isaac Abravanel is the Jewish Publication Society's edition authored by Benzion Netanyahu. The Newsletter was recently able to obtain copies of this biography in paperback form. Although the list price for this book is \$6.95, the Newsletter will make available its copies at a cost of \$3.75 (the price includes postage and handling). Copies are available to fill the first dozen requests to be received in Portland, Oregon. Please make all checks payable to Allan R. Abravanel.