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## Tuneful immigrants get down with Moses

By JOYCE SHELBY

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Years ago, when cellist Alla Dashevskaya played a selection of Negro spirituals during her graduation concert at the Kurdistan Institute of Music, she never imagined the songs one day would help her learn English.

But on Dec. 18, Dashevskaya, 61, took part in another concert at another graduation exercise. This time, instead of being in an orchestra playing spirituals, she was in a chorus with more than 20 other Russian-speaking seniors singing "Go Down, Moses."

The song was part of a concert of American tunes that the seniors performed before getting certificates for completing a course that taught English as a second language, civics, American music and culture.

The students, who ranged in age from 60 to 80-plus, spoke little, if any, English before the start of their course at the Dorchester Senior Citizens Center in Flatbush, instructor Fira Kalendareva said.

But after 28 sessions, they were holding conversations and giving overviews of the songs they sang.

Dashevskaya, who came to the U.S. from St. Petersburg in February of last year, said, "I came here with a big zero in English."

But songs such as "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "The Erie Canal," "God Bless America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner" helped her with the language and offered insights into the history and culture of her new



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**Jonathan Fields leads chorus of graduates of 10-week English as a Second Language program at Dorchester Senior Center in Flatbush.**

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homeland. And some songs, such as "Oh My Darling Clementine," were just plain fun.

Other students also found the musical approach to English beneficial.

"We learned grammar and pronunciation and the music was a relaxation therapy," said Lyudmila Libina, an engineer from St. Petersburg, who came to the U.S. in 1999.

The course for Russian-speaking seniors was sponsored by the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island in partnership with the Department of Continuing Education at Kingsborough Community College.

Funding was provided by the state Department of Education and the city's Department of Youth and Community Development.

Rabbi Moshe Wiener, executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island, said that since the program started in 1996, more than 1,500 senior immigrants had participated.

"Usually people think that when somebody becomes older, they might be a little weaker than they used to be. They might not have as much energy as they had in the past," Wiener said.

"But we know, every moment of life that Almighty God gives us is there for a purpose," Wiener said.

The rabbi told the graduating seniors that their learning English would benefit the entire community, as well as the seniors themselves, who would have improved communications with doctors, pharmacists, merchants and neighbors.

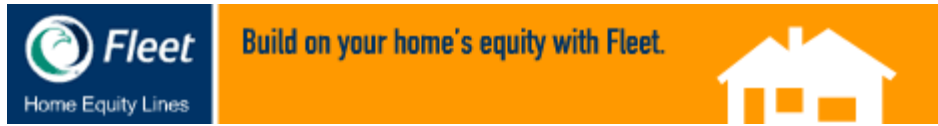
Saul Katz, dean of continuing education at Kingsborough, told the graduates, "Someday, I hope I will welcome all of you to take [more] classes. ... The road we all travel on to be successful in the American way of life is the road of education."

Dashevskaya and Libina said they hoped the class they had just completed would make one road in particular a bit easier to travel - the one leading to U.S. citizenship.

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