

UNICORN · COLONIAL · PLAYHOUSE
BERKSHIRE
THEATRE GROUP

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For Immediate Release, Please May 2, 2024:

Festival of New Jewish Plays

Produced by Berkshire Theatre Group, Jewish Plays Project and plays2gather

An immersive three-day experience celebrating the depth and diversity
of Jewish theatre from near and far.

Pittsfield, MA – Berkshire Theatre Group (BTG), Jewish Plays Project and plays2gather are proud to announce the Festival of New Jewish Plays coming August 15 through 17 at The Colonial Theatre. “We are excited to partner with the Berkshire Theatre Group on this festival to attract audiences to reflect, ask questions and help heal through a lens of Jewish drama and art,” said Festival co-founders David Winitsky and Wayne L. Firestone.

The transformative power of the performing arts is able to illuminate, instill hope and nurture empathy. Teaming up with the esteemed Jewish Plays Project (JPP) and plays2gather (p2g), we present an immersive three-day experience celebrating the depth and diversity of Jewish theatre from near and far.

The festival will feature a reading of Tony-winner Ari’el Stachel’s riveting solo piece *Out of Character*; the premiere of the winner of the JPP’s illustrious 13th Annual National Jewish Playwriting Contest; a series of cutting-edge short plays called “*OOO!* (On One Foot)” crafted by emerging playwrights and next-generation voices; and meet a Jim Henson three person puppet in the family-friendly musical workshop production *Library Lion* by the directors of Boston’s Adam Theater. In addition, enjoy enlightening artist talks in collaboration with the “Knosh and

Knowledge” series of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, which will share insights, experiences and creative processes, offering a captivating glimpse into the rich tapestry of Jewish theatre.

About The Jewish Plays Project

The Jewish Plays Project, founded in 2011, identifies, develops and advocates for 21st Century Jewish theater through one-of-a-kind explorations of contemporary Jewish identity between audiences, artists, and patrons.

The JPP has featured some of the best artists working in New York, including writers David Hein and Irene Sankoff (*Come from Away*), Robert Askins (*Hand to God*) and Lauren Yee (*Cambodian Rock Band*); directors Marc Bruni (*Beautiful*), Daniella Topol (Artistic Director, Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre) and Tamilla Woodard (WP Theater, 3LD); and actors Andrew Polk (*The Band’s Visit*), Ronald Guttman (*Mad Men, Homeland*), Kirrilee Berger (Amazon’s *Just Add Magic*) and Obie and Drama Desk nominee Marcia Jean Kurtz.

The JPP has received and vetted over 2,400 plays by more than 1,800 writers in 34 states and 10 countries. The JPP has actively developed 57 of those plays, 37 of which have gone on to production in cities across the globe, including New York, Los Angeles, London and Tel Aviv, playing for more than 100,000 audience members.

About Plays2gather

Plays2gather incubates plays at homes, stages and unusual places that are inspired by a vision of both ancient and inclusive Jewish culture.

Schedule of Events

National Jewish Playwriting Contest: Featured Workshop

at The Colonial Theatre

Thursday, August 15 at 7pm

Tickets: \$18

Over 1,000 artists and audience members have voted and the winner of the 13th Annual National Jewish Playwriting Contest is coming to the Colonial. Celebrate the JPP’s signature process, Artistic Democracy, and be a part of the future of Jewish theater. Six finalists are competing for this remarkable and impactful opportunity. The JPP will present the winner in its signature Reading+ format (script in-hand readings with targeted design support), created by New York’s best actors, directors, and designers.

The winning play will be announced on June 6th, 2024.

Knosh & Knowledge with the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires: Making Jewish Theatre in the 21st Century

In collaboration with the Knosh and Knowledge” series of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

at The Colonial Theatre in the Garage

Friday, August 16 at 10:45am

Tickets: \$18

Join us for a great conversation with local, national and international Jewish theatre makers, moderated by JPP Artistic Director David Winitzky. Learn about the state of contemporary Jewish drama and the unique challenges and needs of new, culturally-specific creative works. Hear directly from today's artists how they are celebrating our traditions, breaking new ground, and forging partnerships across communities to provide audiences with the possibility of hope and healing through a Jewish lens.

OOF!: On One Foot 10-Minute Play Festival

On Stage at The Colonial Theatre

Friday, August 16 at 7pm

Tickets: \$36

21st Century Jewish Community Playwright Fellow Wayne Firestone is proud to announce a new ten-minute play festival that seeks to heal the world. The "OOF! On One Foot Contest". Inspired by Hillel the Sage's teaching, given when he was asked if he could summarize the whole of the Torah while standing **on one foot**: "That which is hateful to you, do not do unto your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Now, go and learn."

Enjoy a fantastic and diverse array of six 10-minute plays, four from competing writers from all over the world, alongside two established writers, directed by JPP Artistic Producers Illana Stein and Will Steinberger.

Boston's Adam Theater Presents "The Library Lion"

at The Colonial Theatre

Saturday, August 17 at 12pm

Tickets: \$18

Based on the *New York Times* bestselling book, written by Michelle Knudsen and illustrated by Kevin Hawkes

Musical play by Eli Bijaoui

Director Ran Bechor

Music by Yoni Rechter

Lion Puppet by Jim Henson's Creature Shop

Premiere September 17, 2024, Boston Public Library, Main Branch

In the library, there are books. There are also rules: no shouting, no running, no eating or drinking. These rules are not so hard for people to follow. But what happens when one day a lion comes to the library? He doesn't roar or rampage; in fact, he peacefully joins story hour. The children are delighted, but others are not so sure about this visitor. Can he learn to behave properly in the library? Maybe...but when disaster strikes, the lion comes to the rescue the only way he knows how. Is it ever okay to break the rules? Prepare for a theatrical experience that

will roar its way into your heart. Don't miss this enchanting adaptation, where stories come alive and where even the wildest of guests might just find a place to belong.

Out of Character by Ari'el Stachel

at The Colonial Theatre

Saturday, August 17 at 7pm

Tickets: \$36

Come see a new presentation of a tour de force comedy about what it means to belong in America, before it heads on to productions in Washington, D.C. and New York City!

Before he won the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical (*The Band's Visit*), Ari'el Stachel grew up in Berkeley, an Israeli American of Yemeni Jewish descent. Then came 9/11. Desperate to avoid taunts and threats at school, Ari hides his Middle Eastern background, setting off a years-long journey of trying on different identities, code switching and navigating debilitating anxiety. *Out of Character* explores the intersections of race, mental health and survival in a way that's raw, authentic and entertaining.

At The Colonial Theatre

Festival of New Jewish Plays

Produced by Berkshire Theatre Group, Jewish Plays Project and plays2gather

at The Colonial Theatre

Performance Dates: Thursday, August 15 through Saturday, August 17

Tickets: 3-Day Passes \$90

Single Tickets for events are available.

Season Discounts & Ticket Information

EBT Card to Culture Program

EBT Card to Culture is a collaboration between the Mass Cultural Council and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services' Department of Transitional Assistance. This is available to anyone with EBT, WIC, or ConnectorCare Insurance. This offer includes two tickets to the majority of BTG's shows at the rate of \$5 each. All additional fees are also waived. These tickets are subject to availability as seating is limited. This offer is available by phone or in person only.

Tickets for these events go on sale Friday, May 3 at 12pm. The box office is open Tuesday through Saturday 12pm to 5pm or on any performance day from 12pm until curtain. BTG's Pittsfield Campus is located at 111 South Street, (The Colonial Theatre) Pittsfield, MA.

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Safety Protocols

For safety protocols please visit BTG's COVID-19 information page:

www.berkshiretheatregroup.org/covid-19-information/

About Berkshire Theatre Group

The Colonial Theatre, founded in 1903, and Berkshire Theatre Festival, founded in 1928, are two of the oldest cultural organizations in the Berkshires. In 2010, under the leadership of Artistic Director and CEO Kate Maguire, the two organizations merged to form Berkshire Theatre Group (BTG). Berkshire Theatre Group's mission is to support wide ranging artistic exploration and acclaimed performances in theatre, dance, music and entertainment. Every year, BTG produces and presents performances to over 68,000 attendees and, through our Educational Program, serves over 10,000 Berkshire County school children annually. In July 2020, Berkshire Theatre was the first company in the United States to earn approval from Actors' Equity Association to produce a musical (*Godspell*) in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In 2028, Berkshire Theatre Group will celebrate 100 years of theatre.