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# BERKSHIRE

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THEATRE GROUP

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**For Immediate Release, Please August 5, 2024:**

**Festival of New Jewish Plays**

**Produced by Berkshire Theatre Group, The Jewish Plays Project and  
plays2gather**

An immersive three-day experience celebrating the depth and diversity of Jewish theatre from near and far featuring works by Deborah Zoe Laufer and Ari'el Stachel and performances by Josh Malina, Ella Stiller, Mimi Lieber and Thom Niemann

**Pittsfield, MA** – Join us from August 15 to 17 at The Colonial Theatre for the inaugural Festival of New Jewish Plays, presented by Berkshire Theatre Group (BTG), Jewish Plays Project (JPP) and plays2gather. This festival promises an immersive three-day journey into the development of new Jewish plays destined for stages around the country.

Festival co-founders David Winitsky and Wayne L. Firestone invite you to explore the transformative power of Jewish drama and art. "We are thrilled to partner with Berkshire Theatre Group to create a space for audiences to reflect, ask questions, and find healing through these powerful stories," they share.

Highlights include:

- A reading of Tony-winner Ari'el Stachel's riveting solo piece *Out of Character*.

- The premiere of *The Last Yiddish Speaker*, winner of the JPP's prestigious 13th Annual National Jewish Playwriting Contest, featuring TV and Broadway star Joshua Malina and Julliard grad (and scion of the stellar artistic family) Ella Stiller.
- "OOF! (On One Foot) Plays for Healing," a Friday evening of ritual and cutting-edge short plays by emerging playwrights, featuring Shira Kline, co-Founder of Lab/Shul.
- A family-friendly musical workshop production of *Library Lion* created by Israeli artists, featuring an amazing puppet by the Jim Henson Creature Workshop.
- An accompanying visual art exhibition, "Memory Fragments" by Elizabeth Samet

Plus, enjoy enlightening artist talks in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' "Knosh and Knowledge" series. Gain insights into creative processes and unique challenges of making vibrant tapestry Jewish theatre in today's landscape.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to engage with innovative performances and meaningful conversations. Get your tickets now and be part of this extraordinary celebration!

Diane Troderman and Harold Grinspoon are lead sponsors of the Festival for Berkshire Theatre Group. Marvin Krislov; Audrey Weiner and Jeffrey Solomon; Meg Mortimer Lloyd and David Lloyd; Judd and Susan Shoval; Dr. Cathy Demain Mann and Frederic Freidman are co-sponsors of the event for Berkshire Theatre Group. The Dr. David Milch Foundation and Gary Zimmerman are lead sponsors of the Festival for Jewish Plays Project, and Stephanie and Andrew Sklover are co-sponsors. Glenda Turner and Michael Halpern are sponsors of *The Last Yiddish Speaker*.

### **Schedule of Events**

#### **National Jewish Playwriting Contest Winner: *The Last Yiddish Speaker***

written by Deborah Zoe Laufer

directed by David Winitsky

On Stage at The Colonial Theatre

**Performance Date:** Thursday, August 15 at 7pm

**Tickets:** \$18

Step into a gripping, magical-realist dystopia with *The Last Yiddish Speaker*, a powerful new play set in a post-insurrection, Christian America. When an ancient Yiddish-speaking woman unexpectedly arrives on Hannah and Paul's doorstep, they face an impossible choice: hide her or save themselves.

Chosen as the winner of the 13th National Jewish Playwriting Contest, this extraordinary play captivated over 800 audience members from Silicon Valley to Tel Aviv, outshining more than 320 submissions from 30 states and 5 countries. Director David Winitsky praises the play for its "theatrically vibrant, beautifully heartfelt, and terrifyingly relevant" portrayal of the Jewish community's current challenges and fears.

Join an exceptional cast for an unforgettable reading: **Mimi Lieber** (*Indecent*) as the mysterious visitor, Broadway and television star **Joshua Malina** (*Leopoldstadt, The West Wing, Sports Night, Scandal, The Big Bang Theory*), rising talent **Thom Niemann** (*FBI: Most Wanted, Blue Bloods*) and recent Juilliard graduate **Ella Stiller**, from a distinguished artistic family.

Don't miss this chance to experience a story that resonates with audiences of all backgrounds, blending urgency, empathy, and hope in a captivating theatrical journey.

**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

**Performance Date:** Friday, August 16 at 10:45am

**Tickets:** Free

Join us for a participatory conversation with Berkshires legend actress Annette Miller, NYC director Alexandra Aron (*King of the Jews*) and JPP playwright Alexa Derman, 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

**Performance Date:** 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, directed by JPP Artistic Producer Illana Stein and BTG regular Katie Birenboim.

**Boston's Adam Theater Presents The Library Lion**

Based on the *New York Times* bestselling book, written by Michelle Knudsen and illustrated by Kevin Hawkes  
musical play by Eli Bijaoui  
directed by Ran Bechor  
music by Yoni Rechter  
Lion Puppet by Jim Henson's Creature Shop

at The Colonial Theatre

**Performance Date:** Saturday, August 17 at 12pm

**Tickets:** \$18

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.

This play will have its World Premiere on September 17, 2024 at Boston Public Library, Main Branch.

### **Out of Character by Ari'el Stachel**

at The Colonial Theatre

**Performance Date:** Saturday, August 17 at 7pm

**Tickets:** \$36

Join us for an exclusive presentation of *Out of Character*, a tour de force solo comedy by Tony Award winner Ari'el Stachel. Experience this captivating performance before it heads to Washington, D.C., and New York City!

*Out of Character* delves into what it means to belong in America. Ari'el Stachel, known for his role in *The Band's Visit*, draws from his own life as an Israeli American of Yemeni Jewish descent growing up in Berkeley. After 9/11, Ari hides his Middle Eastern background to escape taunts and threats, embarking on a complex journey of identity, code-switching and navigating anxiety. And then 10/7 changes everything again.

This raw and authentic comedy explores the intersections of race, mental health, and survival, offering an entertaining and thought-provoking experience. Don't miss your chance to see this powerful performance before it heads to Washington D.C. in a co-production between Theater J and Mosaic Theater!

## **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 are on sale now. 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/](http://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.

### **About The Jewish Plays Project**

The Jewish Plays Project, founded in 2011, identifies, develops, and presents new works of theater via one-of-a-kind explorations of contemporary Jewish identity between audiences, artists, and patrons. The JPP's innovative and competitive development process engages Jewish communities in the vetting, selecting, and championing of new voices and secures mainstream production opportunities for the best new plays. 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.

### **About Plays2gather**

plays2gather (p2g) incubates plays at homes, stages and unusual places that are inspired by a vision of both ancient and inclusive Jewish culture. Founded in 2018 in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia region) as a volunteer grassroots play makers network, it has evolved around the Jewish World and virtually to curate theater readings and the OOF! Short play competition.