

Jewish REVIEW

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NEW YORK'S famed Yiddish Art Theater housed at the 2nd Avenue Theatre was the center of a once vibrant and exciting American Jewish theater tradition. Now, Sacha Reich will bring contemporary Jewish theater to Portland.

Sacha Reich wants Jewish theater in Portland

By Sacha Reich

Jewish theater comes to Portland in June and July when the Jewish Theatre Collaborative opens its first season with a series of staged readings in conjunction with a Portland State University summer course, "Israel @ 60 Onstage!"

The program is offered by The Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies.

Director and founder Sacha Reich said "JTC's goal is to re-establish the centrality of story as a tool for exploring meaning in the human and communal experiences."

The PSU course officially launches The Jewish Theatre Collaborative, and will be followed by other community events and performances in the coming year, according to Reich.

"Stories have played an essential role throughout Jewish history," said Reich, who lived and worked in theater in Israel for many years. "They transmit and explore our inheritance, our values and traditions."

Reich believes that contemporary issues demand an ancient, time-honored response.

"We need stories now more than ever to help us understand our own experience, and the experience of others in this world."

Designed to commemorate Israel's 60th anniversary, Israel@60 Onstage! will use humor and drama to expose students and audiences to a complex tapestry of modern Israeli experience from secular Tel Aviv to Holocaust survivors and Russian immigrants to religious Zionists in the Territories.

The course will focus on the work of three contemporary Israeli playwrights exploring themes of family, grief, ethnic and religious divisions, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The plays will be presented as staged readings directed by Reich and guest director Mary McDonald-Lewis.

McDonald-Lewis directs “Master of the House” by Shmuel Hasfari. Reich will direct “Tea” by Roni Pinkovich and “Pangs of the Messiah” by Motti Lerner.

McDonald-Lewis recently directed Frank Dunlop’s stage adaptation of Katherine Kressman Taylor’s chilling 1939 Holocaust-eve novel “Address Unknown” for Readers Theater Repertory at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts.

The JTC summer program begins June 24, with a lecture led by Reich that will provide background on Israeli theater.

The readings begin July 1, with Hasfari’s tragic-comic “Master of the House” that exposes everyday life in Tel Aviv under the shadow of terrorist attacks. Named the best Israeli play of 2003, theatergoers witness the disintegration of one couple’s life against the backdrop of renovations to their apartment.

Pinkovich’s “Tea,” set for the following Tuesday, July 8, is a humorous drama about a small family and an extended family, about a transaction of poems for a kidney, and about that steaming cup of tea which always comes to the rescue when it seems that all hope is lost.

The third drama, Lerner’s “Pangs of the Messiah,” plays on Tuesday, July 15. Nominated for the 2008 Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play, Lerner’s story unfolds against a backdrop of advanced peace negotiations between Israel and Jordan. Fierce disagreements ensue over the courses of action by members of the community.

To register for the Israel@60 Onstage! class visit www.judaic.pdx.edu/osjs on line.

All three readings take place in the studio theater in Lincoln Hall on the PSU campus, 1620 SW Park Avenue. Class time on June 24 and show time for each reading is 7 p.m. The readings are open to the public; \$8 donations are suggested. Make reservations by e-mail or phone. The e-mail address is reservations@jtcpx.org. The phone number is 503-810-5408.

In addition to the background class on June 24 for those who register for the class, themes and issues raised by the plays will be explored with the audience in facilitated discussions after each reading.

Additional supporters of the event include Consulate General of Israel in San Francisco, Portland’s Institute for Judaic Studies, The Institute of Israeli Drama, the Oregon Israel Fund of the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation and PSU.

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ON STAGE—Richard Mathews and Michele Mariana, seen here as Herr Shultz and Fraulein Schneider in the Portland Center Stage production of “Cabaret,” for which Mariana won a Drammy

Award, are the featured artists in the July staged reading of Israeli playwright Roni Pinkovitch's "Tea" at Portland State University.

Israeli playwright on stage at PSU

By Jewish Review

"Be warned," says Jewish Theatre Collaborative (JTC) artistic director and founder Sacha Reich, "this teapot has been steeping a long time."

On July 8, Jewish Theatre Collaborative presents "Tea," directed by Reich. A staged reading of Israeli playwright Roni Pinkovitch's play, this is the second in a series of three staged readings being presented in conjunction with a Portland State University summer course, "Israel Onstage: Israeli Society through Drama" offered by The Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies.

"Our TV and radio bring us daily evidence" Reich says, "that war is a dehumanizing force. It dislocates people and leaves them deeply scarred. Over a steaming cup of tea, with equal parts humor and bite, playwright Pinkovitch explores how we recover our humanity and our faith in each other."

Roni Pinkovitch, a playwright, director and actor, served as artistic director of the Haifa Municipal Theatre and as resident director at the Habimah National Theatre and the Haifa Municipal Theatre.

He has directed a variety of plays, including his own and appeared in films and television series.

The cast reunites Michele Mariana and Richard Mathews, of recent Portland Center Stage "Cabaret" success. They are joined by David Berkson, Elizabeth Garrett and Rick Sanders.

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Jewish theater group plans staged reading

By Jewish Review

Portland's Jewish Theatre Collaborative will present a staged reading Sept. 14 at Portland State University of David Bezmozgis' short story "Roman Berman, Massage Therapist" as part of the Institute for Judaic Studies' three-day 25th anniversary celebration.

Directed by Sacha Reich, the story has been adapted for the stage—word for word—and will be performed by eight actors.

The story is from Bezmozgis' acclaimed collection entitled "Natasha."

Writing for the Los Angeles Times, Daniel Schifrin said of this work, "This hysterical, merciless yet open-hearted excavation of a Jewish family in the process of assimilating gives his (Bezmozgis') literary predecessors a run for their money." Schifrin counted among those predecessors Isaac Babel, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow.

Registrants for the IJS event may attend free. Others are welcome to attend for a \$5 fee, said Reich. The reading will take place at 3 p.m. in Room 222 of the PSU's Broadway Building, 1970 SW Broadway.

SELF PORTRAIT by Charlotte Salomon showing her at work on an empty sketch pad in which the seascape before which she is seated shows through, suggesting the artist's imperative of transforming the real into art, as is also suggested by the text she has painted on her back, "Leben oder Theater?" Life or Theater.

JTC brings Charlotte Salomon story to stage

By PAUL HAIST

Portland's Jewish Theatre Collaborative will present "Charlotte Salomon: Life? Or Theatre?" for just three performances on Feb. 14 and 15 at the West End Theater downtown.

The script was adapted by JTC founder Sacha Reich from what today might be called a graphic novel by the German Expressionist painter Charlotte Salomon, who was murdered at Auschwitz in 1943 at age 26.

Salomon, whose Berlin family found refuge for her in 1939 at Villefranche in the south of France, spent the last year of her life there painting more than 1,200 images in which she chronicled her life and that of much of her family. She called it a diary. In something akin to reverse manuscript illumination, Salomon added text to the images on paper overlays and, sometimes, directly on a painting, the latter in the manner of several Expressionist painters.

In a biographical preface to the 1963 book “Charlotte, A Diary in Pictures” which bears Salomon’s name as the author and which also includes reproductions of 80 of her paintings, Emil Strauss, who knew Salomon near the end of her life, says, “She opened her heart and poured forth the images she had been storing up for so long—at a headlong pace, never stopping to rest, as though suspecting how little time she had ahead of her.”

Reich, who directs the new production, said “Life? Or Theatre” tells the story of a young girl striving to find her voice as an artist against the backdrop of the rise of the Third Reich. The JTC production with a cast of eight will incorporate projections of Salomon’s paintings with live and recorded music.

Reich explained that Salomon makes references to music throughout her work. The performance will include music from the composers Franz Schubert, J. S. Bach and Frederick Hollander to modern art songs composed for this production by composer sound designer and musical director Rodolpho Ortega, whose work also can be seen or, more accurately, heard at the current Profile Theatre presentation of Neil Simon’s “Biloxi Blues.”

The cast of “Life? or Theatre?” includes Drammy award winner Michele Mariana and critically acclaimed singer, Cantor Ida Rae Cahana. Other players are Bill Barry, Doren Elias, George Lederer, Jamie M. Rea, Darrel Salk and Hannah Treuhaff. Other members of the production design team are Sara Gahagan, Mark Loring and Peter West.

Reich said she did not know much about Salomon until she visited Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem last fall. “Charlotte’s work is in their exhibit because it is unique and she gave artistic expression to what was happening around her,” said Reich, who added that she has “immersed herself” in Salomon ever since.

Reich came up with the idea of creating this theater presentation while “brainstorming with (Oregon Jewish Museum Executive Director) Judy Margles” for a project on which the museum and JCT could collaborate.

OJM co-sponsors this JCT production with the German American Society of Portland.

The production was made possible by a \$9,000 opportunity grant from the Regional Arts and Culture Council.

Performance time on Saturday, Feb. 14, is 8 p.m. There will be a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, Feb. 15, followed by a 7 o’clock performance that evening. The West End Theater is located at 1220 SW Taylor St. Following each performance there will be a discussion of themes and issues in the play. Tickets are \$20 general admission and \$10 for students. Purchase tickets at the Oregon Jewish Museum, 310 NW Davis St., or on line at www.ojm.org.