

THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE, NATIONAL YIDDISH THEATRE - FOLKSBIENE,
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY'S SKIRBALL CENTER, & PEAK PERFORMANCES AT MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

present



SHLEMIEL the FIRST 360°

A VIEWFINDER: *Facts and Perspectives on the Play, Playwright, and Production*

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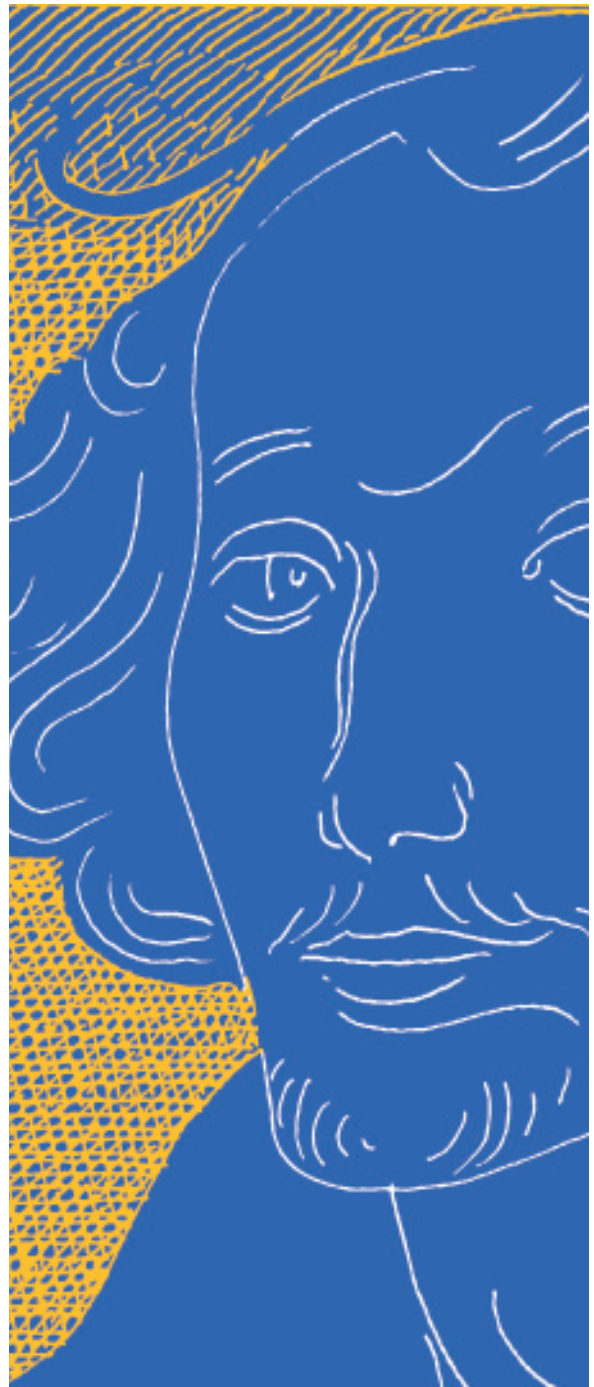
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Notes

This play guide will be periodically updated with additional information. Play guide last updated December 2011.

Credits

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THE PLAY: SYNOPSIS AND CHARACTERS

In the town of Chelm, we first meet Mrs. Shlemiel, who is lamenting over her lazy husband Mr. Shlemiel, still sound asleep in bed. He finally arises only because he has been summoned by the sages of the town to fulfill his works as a beadle—a lay official of a church or synagogue. Armed with his trusty dreydl, Shlemiel sets off to work.

Meanwhile, Gronam Ox assembles the sages of Chelm to find out who is the wisest man in the world. The sages determine that Gronam Ox must be the wisest man in the world, because he has many wise thoughts running through his head. They decide that Shlemiel should travel the world to tell everyone of Ox's wisdom. After deciding which of Ox's wisdoms Shlemiel will impart, they begin to tell Shlemiel—who has just walked in—about their plan. Before they can finish, however, Gronam Ox brings the problem of Zalman Tippish, a rich man from a wealthy suburb, to the sages' attention. Zalman does not want to die, and offers the sages money to keep him from dying. Shlemiel consults his dreydl and declares that Zalman should move to Chelm; since no rich men have ever lived in Chelm, no rich men have died in Chelm, and if rich men don't die in Chelm, Zalman's wealth will keep him immortal. Pleased, Zalman throws a big bag of money at Shlemiel and leaves. Jealous of Shlemiel's new-found wisdom, Ox redoubles his efforts to send Shlemiel away from the town and adds that he must leave immediately and travel for three years. Shlemiel, though not thrilled, accepts the mission. Mrs. Shlemiel is horrified by her husband's pending departure, even though she usually finds him worthless. She tries to convince Gronam Ox and the other sages that were he to leave, he would never find his way back again. But the men are determined. The Shlemiels say their good-byes, and Shlemiel begins his mission to spread the wisdom of Gronam Ox.

On the road Shlemiel meets Chaim Rascal, who is as devious as his name implies. Shlemiel, though tired, is reluctant to sleep because he worries he won't know which way he came from and which way to go once he wakes up. In exchange for latkes, Rascal tells Shlemiel to take off his boots and leave them with the toes pointing away from Chelm. That way, Rascal says, Shlemiel will know in which direction to travel. Once he falls asleep, however, Rascal reverses Shlemiel's boots so their toes point toward Chelm instead. Shlemiel wakes up and sets off in the direction the toes of his boots indicate. He soon arrives in a confusingly familiar town. When a man tells Shlemiel he's arrived in Chelm, Shlemiel decides there must be two Chelms!

Back home, Mrs. Shlemiel and the children lament Shlemiel's absence, when suddenly he walks back through the front door. Shlemiel cuts short his family's happiness, though, as he remains convinced that these versions of Mrs. Shlemiel, Mottel, and Gittel come from Chelm number two, not his own Chelm number one. Since Mrs. Shlemiel can't convince Shlemiel of the truth on her own, she decides to take him to Gronam Ox to set matters straight.

Gronam Ox and the sages, however, recall the story of the flood and realize how many things in nature come in twos. They conclude that there must be another Chelm after all, and since the Shlemiel from "their" Chelm is missing, this Shlemiel has to stay and take on the other Shlemiel's duties. Gronam Ox also permits Shlemiel to stay in Mrs. Shlemiel's house, but on one condition: to prevent scandal and possible adultery, Shlemiel and Mrs. Shlemiel have to put up a screen between his bed and hers. They are also forbidden to touch.

Cast of Characters

SHLEMIEL

TRYNA RITZA, Mrs. Shlemiel

GRONAM OX, the wisest man in the world

YENTA PESHA, wife of Gronam Ox

ZALMAN TIPPISH, a rich merchant

CHAIM RASCAL, a rascal

The Sages

DOPEY PETZEL

ZEINVEL SHMECKEL

MOISHE PIPIK

MENDEL SHMENDRICK

SENDER SHLAMAZEL

Shlemiel's Children

MOTTEL, a boy about 12

GITTEL, a girl about 10

The musical takes place in the legendary town of Chelm.

THE PLAY: SYNOPSIS AND CHARACTERS

Shlemiel and Mrs. Shlemiel lament this state of affairs, because each finds themselves more attracted to this “other” version of their spouse. They lie down on opposite sides of the screen, but when the screen falls over in the middle of the night, they can’t resist each other any longer. As they hold each other, they declare that they don’t care what punishments wait for them; the love they’ve found “feels too heavenly.” Gronam Ox disagrees, and after the Shlemiels confess what happened, he orders Shlemiel to leave. Heartbroken, Shlemiel runs from Chelm and falls asleep on the road. Chaim Rascal again turns the points of his shoes around.

Upon returning to “his” Chelm, Shlemiel reunites with Mrs. Shlemiel. Both admit that they met—and slept with—a second version of their spouses. The sages enter, roundly condemn Mrs. Shlemiel for her apparent adultery, and encourage Shlemiel to divorce her. After consulting his dreydl and remembering his own temptation, however, Shlemiel decides to forgive his wife, much to the sages’ consternation. Before the situation can get any worse, Gronam Ox’s wife Yenta Pesha arrives with Chaim Rascal in tow, who reveals the trick he played on Shlemiel. Everyone realizes that there’s only one Chelm—where when a person knows he’s dumb, he’s smart, and where only the stupid are wise.



Jeff Brooks, Michael Iannucci, and Amy Warren in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

THE PLAY: THE LEGENDARY TOWN OF CHELM

Shlemiel the First is set in the legendary town of Chelm, a mythical place that came to be known in Jewish folklore as the “village of fools.” Underneath the myth of Chelm, however, lies a real town of brick and mortar, complete with its own storied history and tragic events. Dating back to sometime around the ninth-century, the area in southeast Poland known as Chelm was home to Slavic pagans and Russian dukes. Eventually the area was incorporated into Poland, and the city became a commercial hub, due mostly to its advantageous location along commercial routes from the Black and Baltic Seas to Western Europe. It attracted people from all religions and backgrounds. Over the course of time, Jewish people found a community in Chelm where they could settle and thrive. Though no one knows why Chelm became the town of fools, the roots that the first Jewish settlers established in Chelm ran so deep that generations of Polish Jews heard and passed down the anonymous oral tradition that eventually solidified the town of Chelm in Yiddish folklore.

The legendary town of Chelm is generally inhabited by stock characters like sages, rabbis, longsuffering wives, and foolish clowns who are as colorful as the town they populate. They are never evil; they simply suffer from an excess of logical consistencies—or inconsistencies—from which the humor of the stories results. The stories begin with a logical problem or observation in need of a solution. The good intentioned townsfolk find a reasonable solution, but then a second action voids the good-willed, reasonable solution of the first, taking the solution one step too far and making a logical leap without considering the consequences. For example: Chelm purchases an extinguisher in order to fight fires. Delighted with their new purchase, they immediately begin to worry that thieves will steal it. And so they build a thick, impenetrable brick wall around the extinguisher, keeping both the thieves—and the hapless townsfolk—away.¹ Stories of the foolish townsfolk of Chelm are, in a sense, comical warnings against ill-considered—if good-intentioned—actions.

Far from the original Polish town, Chelm stories and themes have been carried to and appropriated by Jewish communities all over the world. Twentieth-century writers and story-tellers have retold and expanded the stories, keeping the stories alive in the form of children’s stories, artistic literature, and theatrical works like *Shlemiel the First*.

¹ I. Janasowicz, “The Myth of Chelm in Jewish Literature” in *Yisker-bukh Chelm* (Commemoration Book Chelm), translated by Gloria Berkenstat Freund. M. Bakalczuk-Felin, ed. Johannesburg, 1954. Pages 45-52.



Jeff Brooks, Darryl Winslow, Michael Iannucci, Jesse Means, David Skeist, and Kristine Zbornik in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

THE PLAY: A BRIEF HISTORY OF YIDDISH

Based on stories written in *Yiddish* by Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Shlemiel the First* is firmly rooted in the culture that developed and spoke the Yiddish language. This account has been drawn and edited from *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* by David Katz.¹

Over a thousand years ago, Jewish settlements in medieval Western Europe began to speak in a language that was a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic with local German dialects, as found in northern Switzerland (Regensburg) and Bavaria. This Jewish culture area became known as Ashkenaz (from the biblical great-grandson of Noah), and over time the language of the Ashkenazim became known as Yiddish, an Anglicized word derived from the German phrase “jüdisch deutsch” meaning Jewish-German. The linkage of Hebrew (the language of holiness, studied by men), Aramaic (the translation language), and Yiddish (*mame loshn*, the mother tongue or vernacular of Ashkenaz) forms the Jewish language chain that spans from antiquity to the twenty-first century.

Beginning with the First Crusade in 1095, the early history of Yiddish speaking people was one of massacres, expulsions, and suicides to avoid baptism and forced conversion to Christianity. The worst of these travesties included the Crusades (1095-1270), Rindfleisch massacres (1298-1303), and Black Death massacres (1348-1350) and, along with more local crimes, led to the mass migration of surviving Ashkenazim to Eastern Europe and other parts of Europe. Lingering elements of paganism in the East allowed for greater tolerance than western-style Christianity. Ashkenazic migrants were welcomed for their skills and trades. The effects of this population shift are still felt today, as the dialects of Yiddish spoken in the twenty-first century are varieties of East European Yiddish.

During the eighteenth century, a growing German anti-Semitism focused on Yiddish. This propaganda attacked Yiddish with the aesthetic judgment that it was an ugly and barbaric “jargon” emblematic of the Jews’ lack of civilization. German philosopher, writer, and dramatist Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) sought to counteract the intolerance he saw around him, and his last play, *Nathan der Weise*, championed German Enlightenment thought and tolerance for all peoples and their religions. It was Lessing’s Jewish friend, the esteemed philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), who undertook the task of Jewish assimilation in Germany. Mendelssohn believed that eradicating Yiddish and replacing it with German was a priority of modern Jewish life. Taking Mendelssohn’s lead throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, more and more German Jews disregarded the mother tongue and integrated into German societies. But Yiddish persisted.

At its height less than a century ago, Yiddish was understood by an estimated 11 million of the world’s 18 million Jews, and many of them spoke Yiddish as their primary language. During World War II, 85 per cent of the Jews who died—five million—were Yiddish speaking. Today less than two million people world-wide speak Yiddish. But in recent years, the *mame loshn* has experienced a resurgence and is now being taught at many universities, and many Jewish communities provide classes to learn Yiddish.



Blessing page, 1272, from the Worms Mahzor, the oldest surviving literary document in Yiddish, Jewish National and University Library of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem



Baking matzah and cleaning chametz, 1724, from *Juedisches Ceremoniel* by Paul Christian Kirchner, Center for Jewish History, New York



Amy Warren in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

¹ New York: Basic Books, a Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2004.

THE PLAY: ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER ON THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE

The following selection is excerpted from the Nobel lecture of Isaac Bashevis Singer, 1978.¹

The high honor bestowed upon me by the Swedish Academy is also a recognition of the Yiddish language - a language of exile, without a land, without frontiers, not supported by any government, a language which possesses no words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises, war tactics; a language that was despised by both gentiles and emancipated Jews. The truth is that what the great religions preached, the Yiddish-speaking people of the ghettos practiced day in and day out. They were the people of The Book in the truest sense of the word. They knew of no greater joy than the study of man and human relations, which they called Torah, Talmud, Mussar, Cabala. The ghetto was not only a place of refuge for a persecuted minority but a great experiment in peace, in self-discipline and in humanism. As such it still exists and refuses to give up in spite of all the brutality that surrounds it. I was brought up among those people.

My father's home on Krochmalna Street in Warsaw was a study house, a court of justice, a house of prayer, of storytelling, as well as a place for weddings and Chassidic banquets. As a child I had heard from my older brother and master, I. J. Singer, who later wrote *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, all the arguments that the rationalists from Spinoza to Max Nordau brought out against religion. I have heard from my father and mother all the answers that faith in God could offer to those who doubt and search for the truth. In our home and in many other homes the eternal questions were more actual than the latest news in the Yiddish newspaper.

In spite of all the disenchantments and all my skepticism I believe that the nations can learn much from those Jews, their way of thinking, their way of bringing up children, their finding happiness where others see nothing but misery and humiliation. To me the Yiddish language and the conduct of those who spoke it are identical. One can find in the Yiddish tongue and in the Yiddish spirit expressions of pious joy, lust for life, longing for the Messiah, patience and deep appreciation of human individuality. There is a quiet humor in Yiddish and a gratitude for every day of life, every crumb of success, each encounter of love. The Yiddish mentality is not haughty. It does not take victory for granted. It does not demand and command but it muddles through, sneaks by, smuggles itself amidst the powers of destruction, knowing somewhere that God's plan for Creation is still at the very beginning.

There are some who call Yiddish a dead language, but so was Hebrew called for two thousand years. It has been revived in our time in a most remarkable, almost miraculous way. Aramaic was certainly a dead language for centuries but then it brought to light the Zohar, a work of mysticism of sublime value. It is a fact that the classics of Yiddish literature are also the classics of the modern Hebrew literature. Yiddish has not yet said its last word. It contains treasures that have not been revealed to the eyes of the world. It was the tongue of martyrs and saints, of dreamers and Cabalists—rich in humor and in memories that mankind may never forget. In a figurative way, Yiddish is the wise and humble language of us all, the idiom of frightened and hopeful Humanity.



Isaac Bashevis Singer

¹ from *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1968-1980*. Editor-in-Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Sture Allén, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 1993..

THE PLAY: A KLEZMER MUSICAL

Composer Hankus Netsky drew his inspiration for the music in *Shlemiel the First* from traditional klezmer music. Under the musical direction of Zalmen Mlotek—who also composed and arranged additional music for the show—*Shlemiel* became what adaptor Robert Brustein calls “a klezmer musical.” This account was drawn and synthesized from Yale Strom, *The Book of Klezmer: The History, the Music, the Folklore*¹ and Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer!: Jewish Music from Old World to Our World*.²

Trying to explain and define klezmer is as difficult as defining what is jazz today. Just as jazz is rooted in southern blues, spirituals, and African rhythms, so is klezmer rooted in the prayer modalities of the Jews of ancient Israel. Klezmer, the musical language of the Jews, and Yiddish, the spoken language of the Jews, have journeyed together down the same roads. When Jewish villages began appearing on the banks of the Rhine over a thousand years ago, Ashkenazic or European Jewish instrumental music was born. It developed side by side with Yiddish and evolved into what we know today as klezmer. As the Jews traveled eastward and eventually settled in Eastern Europe and the Ukraine, Yiddish adopted new vocabularies from the local languages, just as its cultural twin klezmer adopted new musical vocabularies from Germanic, Slavic, Romanian, and Balkan sources.

The word klezmer comes from two Hebrew words: *klei* means vessels or tools and *zmer* means melody. In Yiddish, the word klezmer literally means “vessels of the music.” The first klezmer guild in Prague, founded in 1558, used the fiddle as its emblem. The guilds solidified the klezmer community, so much so that it developed its own language, klezmer shprakh, a coded version of Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew, and German used to clue in band members and exclude outsiders.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, klezmer nearly disappeared in Germany, Austria, Moravia, Bohemia, and Holland. However klezmer musicians (*klezmerim*) continued to flourish in the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe: Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania, Carpathian Hungary, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. They had become indispensable to all Jewish celebrations, particularly weddings, in Eastern Europe, a situation that lasted through the eve of World War II.

As an essential component for all life cycle rituals, klezmer was so important that it was said, “A wedding without klezmer is worse than a funeral without tears.” During a wedding the klezmerim might perform over fifteen styles of dances. Despite the klezmer’s importance at a Jewish wedding, his social standing in the *shtetl* (village) was rather dubious. Playing music generally paid poorly, thus making it difficult for the klezmer to provide for his family. To many *shtetl* inhabitants, the klezmer was a kid who just never grew up.

With no written record of early klezmer, little is known about how the music sounded overall. Many of the musicians playing klezmer were unable to read or write music. Before the mid-nineteenth century very little was notated. Much of what is known about the repertoire the klezmerim played from the mid-nineteenth century to the eve of World War II comes from the few surviving collections, manuscripts, and single sheets of music.

Sh. An-ski (1863-1920), a folklorist and ethnographer best known as the author of the Yiddish play *The Dybbuk* collected Yiddish folksongs, klezmer melodies, oral histories, photographs, and instruments in southern Ukraine

¹ [Chicago, Illinois: A Cappella Books, an imprint of Chicago Review Press, 2002]

² [New York: Schirmer Books, an imprint of Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1999]



Green Violinist (Violinist) by Marc Chagall, 1923–24, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Wedding procession, 1724, from *Juedisches Ceremoniel* by Paul Christian Kirchner, Center for Jewish History, New York



Traditional Klezmer Band by Sarah Hagay

THE PLAY: A KLEZMER MUSICAL

from 1911-14. Menahem Kipnis (1878-1942), a singer, writer, and folklore collector, published 140 Yiddish folksongs with music in two volumes in Warsaw in 1918 and 1925. Yehuda Leyb Cahan (1881-1937) published his collection of over five hundred Yiddish folksongs in New York in 1912.

An important figure in klezmer history is Abraham Goldfaden (1840 - 1908) who founded the first Yiddish theatre in Romania in the 1870s. The Yiddish theatre, both in the old world and in the new, was a major influence in the creation and popularization of Jewish songs. Sheet music and recordings became increasingly available. By the twentieth century more people had access to radios and listened to European and American klezmer tunes. Yiddish films from America and Eastern Europe were available. And some Jews now had the means to travel back and forth from the new world to the old world. Yiddish songs like "Roumania Roumania," "Mayn Shtelle," "Papirosn," and "Vu Zaynen Mayne Zibn Gute Yor" were all written in the United States, yet became popular among Jews in Europe during the 1920s and '30s. All of these factors created a flood of Yiddish music.

The use of the piano, clarinet, saxophone, and trumpet, all synonymous with swing and big band music, pushed the more traditional klezmer violin, already on the wane, even more into the background. The art of the klezmer violin began to disappear in the 1920s when the clarinet became the preferred leader of the klezmer kapleyes (bands).

Today klezmer is an infusion of musical genres like jazz, rock 'n' roll, Latin, Cajun, and reggae into a nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century East European klezmer sound. Klezmer music was and will always be a reflection of the evolving Ashkenazim, their culture, and their host's culture. And it will always be grounded in Yiddish, as klezmer is the musical abstraction of the Yiddish language.



Abraham Goldfaden



Kristine Zbornik, Dmitri Slepovitch, David Skeist, Amy Warren, Nick Morrison, and Darryl Winslow in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

THE PLAY: PERSPECTIVES

The following quotes are selected perspectives on the play from notable scholars and artists.

[The name of the chieftain] Shelumiel ben Tsurishaddai of the tribe of Shim'on (Numbers 1:6)...seems to underlie the Yiddish term for a chronically hapless loser, "schlemiel." What his parents had in mind we may venture to translate as "God is my well being" or (with New York University scholar Baruch Levine) "El is my ally." But what their son wound up with is a name that no one would saddle a child with today. It is not only speakers of Yiddish who know the term in its mocking, pejorative sense. So do readers of 19th-century German author Adalbert von Chamisso, who gave an unlucky character the name Peter Schlemihls under the influence of the Yiddish, or of ETA Hoffmann, who employed the term in a story used by Offenbach in his opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*. North Americans too know the term and the comic figure it depicts so well that they became the subject of a book by literary historian Ruth Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (University of Chicago Press, 1971). In contemporary Hebrew, to do something in Shelumielesque fashion means so inept as to be destined hopelessly to fail.

—RABBI PERETZ RODMAN, *THE JEWISH DAILY FORWARD*, 2006

Klezmer, short for "klei zemer" (musical instruments), refers to the conglomeration of Greek and Central/Eastern European music played at Jewish celebrations. A pure klezmer band has no vocalist—it just turns up the volume and swings the music faster. Unlike rock, or African-influenced music, klez is made for dancing while holding hands, or dancing with a partner. It doesn't bounce, it flows. It swings, it cries. Traditionally, there wouldn't even be a drummer (and, in fact, the difference between a modern "Bar Mitzvah band" and a good band of klezmerim often relies on just that distinction. Bar Mitzvah bands have drummers). Klezmerim create a motion and feel that doesn't fit easily into 4/4, and certainly aren't comfortable with "a one and uh two." It's no accident that when Jewish musicians abandoned the "old world" music and moved into the American idiom, many of them (most notably Benny Goodman) moved into jazz.

—ARI DAVIDOW, "ABOUT THE KLEZMER REVIVAL," 1986

In this little town of fools
We don't need to follow rules
Men are smart like mules.
We're talking Chelm.
We're talking Chelm where dumb is smart
Where stupidity's an art.
The foolishness that we impart
Sends our IQs off the chart.
We put the horse behind the cart.
We never meet until we part.
We're done,
It's time to start.

—ARNOLD WEINSTEIN, LYRICS FROM *SHLEMIEL THE FIRST*



This picture was taken from the periodical *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, Paris, 1840. Peter Schlemihl is a character created by German writer Adalbert von Chamisso, and who appears in Peter Schlemihl's Remarkable Story, written in 1814.



klezmer, 2009 by Boris Dubrov



Nick Morrison and Amy Warren in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

THE PLAY: PERSPECTIVES

My work should be done fast, like Shakespeare—not slow, like Chekhov.

—ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, LETTER TO ROBERT BRUSTEIN, 1974

In most Yiddish fiction...the central “character” is the collective destiny of the Jews in galut or exile; the central theme, the survival of a nation deprived of nationhood; the central ethic, the humane education of men stripped of worldly power yet sustained by the memory of chosenness and the promise of redemption. In Singer the norm of collective life is still present, but mostly in the background, as a tacit assumption; his major actions break away from the limits of the shtetl ethic, what has come to be known as Yiddishkeit, and then move either backward to the abandon of false messianism or forward to the doubt of modern sensibility.

—IRVING HOWE, “I.B. SINGER,” 1966

Yes, I [believe in God]. I’m not, however, an observant Jew. I believe in God but not in man insofar as he claims God has revealed himself to him. If a man came to me and tells me he has been to the planet Mars, I would call him a liar, but I would not stop believing in the existence of the planet. I believe that the Higher Powers do not reveal themselves so easily; you have to search for them. Consequently, I have no faith in dogmas of any kind; they are only the work of men.

—ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER (1963)



Isaac Bashevis Singer



Kristine Zbornik, Michael Iannucci, and Darryl Winslow in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

THE PLAYWRIGHT: BIOGRAPHY OF ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

Born in 1904 in a poor, insular Jewish shtetl in Poland, Singer went on to enjoy a life of international renown, celebrated for his wildly imaginative, recklessly passionate, and subtly modern novels, stories, poems and plays about the Eastern European Jewish experience, Jewish folklore, and Jewish American immigrant life. He is the only Yiddish writer to have won international recognition during the post-World War II era—a period when the world’s population of Yiddish-speakers was shrinking dramatically from assimilation and traumatized by the Holocaust.

The author’s father was a Chasidic rabbi, his mother the descendent of rabbis in the opposing rationalist tradition, and he was consequently buffeted from early childhood on by strong countercurrents of mysticism and worldliness, religious piety and liberal skepticism, tradition and modernity. His older brother Israel Joshua, whom he revered as a literary model, teacher, and guide, introduced him to secular literature at age 10, and soon after Isaac Bashevis began writing poems and stories in Hebrew. He moved to Warsaw in 1921, ostensibly to enter a Rabbinical seminary, but dropped out to pursue a literary life, supporting himself by proofreading for the Yiddish magazine *Literarische Bletter*, which published his first stories, and translating fiction by Knut Hamsun, Stefan Zweig, Thomas Mann, and others.

The Singer brothers both recognized the Nazis’ intentions regarding the Jews very quickly and emigrated to New York City. Settling in Coney Island in 1935, Isaac Bashevis suffered a seven-year creative dry spell, regaining his voice only gradually in journalism and fiction. His first major novel, *The Family Moskat*, was published serially in the New York Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Forverts*, which became his principal outlet. Of his decision to write in Yiddish in his adopted country, Singer said: “a writer...must feel that he writes for people who know everything he knows—not for the stranger. It’s only when you write for your own people and when you don’t think about anybody else that the other people reading in a foreign language will appreciate your work and like it.” Singer collaborated closely on all the English translations of his books published during his lifetime. Singer’s literary celebrity dates from 1953 when Saul Bellow’s translation of his story “Gimpel the Fool” appeared in *Partisan Review*. Thereafter esteemed critics such as Irving Howe and Cynthia Ozick wrote penetrating essays about him, glossy magazines such as *Playboy* and *Esquire* clamored for his work, and several of his stories were adapted into popular movies, including *Enemies, a Love Story* and *Yentl*. *Shlemiel the First* was first adapted for the stage by the author from one of his children’s stories and directed by Robert Brustein at Yale Repertory Theatre in 1974. The current musical adaptation was first performed at the American Repertory Theatre in 1994. Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1978 and died in Florida in 1991.

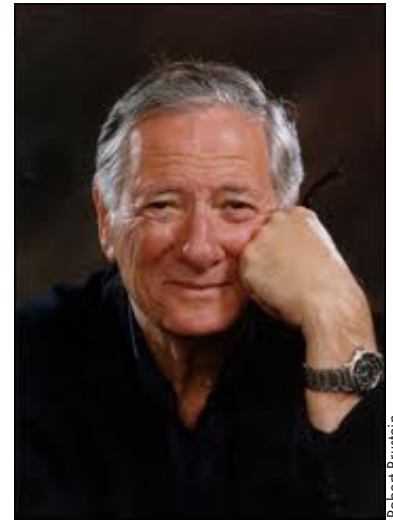


Isaac Bashevis Singer, 1930.

THE PRODUCTION: A NOTE FROM THE ADAPTER

Shlemiel originated on a cold autumn day in 1993 when my friend Joel Grey invited me to watch him emcee a benefit at the New England Conservatory of Music. Enter a group of Jewish musicians calling themselves the Klezmer Conservatory Band, led by an intense, scholarly luftmensch named Hankus Netsky, who thereupon launched into a set of Yiddish numbers that had me literally dancing in my seat. In a state of near ecstasy, I determined to create a klezmer musical for the American Repertory Theatre's 1994 season in Cambridge. There was one terrific possibility for the book of the musical—Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Shlemiel the First*, which he wrote in the '70s for Yale Repertory Theatre when I was in New Haven. Singer had based the play on some of his children's stories set in the mythical town of Chelm, about the dumbest men in the world who believe they are the smartest. To me it sounded like klezmer music in prose form, containing exactly the right brand of goofiness to support such a musical. Hankus came up with a medley of traditional melodies that again had me dancing in the aisles. And when a superb group of collaborators committed to the project, with Hankus providing the music, Zalmen Mlotek additional music and music direction, David Gordon the imaginative stage direction and inspired choreography, Robert Israel the set and the A.R.T. company the acting, I spent the summer adapting Singer's script for the musical stage. *Shlemiel* still needed a centerpiece, and, by coincidence, in 1950 I had once been employed as an actor for a few weeks in a Yiddish theatre on Second Avenue where I nightly watched the great Aaron Lebedev (reputedly a major influence on Danny Kaye) perform his mesmerizing number "Rumania, Rumania" ["Geography Song"]. This would be our show-stopper. I had been looking for a lyricist for the show. Arnold Weinstein, composer William Bolcom's chief writer, an old friend and collaborator of mine, was an obvious candidate. But he was a highly cultivated Harvard poet with English-Jewish antecedents, and I wasn't sure his Yiddishkeit was ripe enough to distill all the ethnic juices out of the piece. So I gave him "Geography Song" as an audition piece, and he (marrying "Rumania" with a hundred other unexpected rhymes—including "I'll explain ya"), transformed that legendary Yiddish scat song into an unforgettable Jewish-American vaudeville in less than three hours of writing. It became the hit of the show. And the late Arnold Weinstein not only proved the perfect lyricist for *Shlemiel the First*. He provided a great deal of its heart and its soul. But that was true of everyone associated with the project. It is not often that a theatrical collaboration brings one so much joy. *Shlemiel* gave pleasure to all its associates—cast, creative team, musicians, designers, technicians and audiences—though regrettably not to Singer, who died before the first performance. And its Socratic maxim still seems perfect for our past political decade: namely, that you achieve wisdom only when you know that you're dumb.

—Robert Brustein



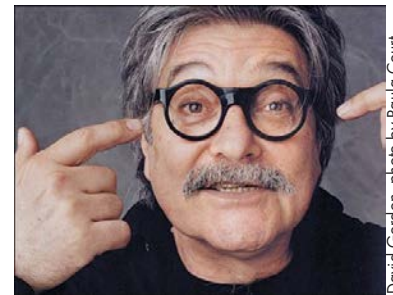
Robert Brustein

THE PRODUCTION: DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was lucky, 17 years ago, to direct and choreograph Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Shlemiel the First* adapted by Robert Brustein. I was amused by Chelm "fools" but intoxicated with middle-aged married Shlemiel and Tryna Ritza, fallen out of love and into habit in a mismatched alliance, but wait! *Shlemiel* is sent on a "foolish" journey from Chelm and "foolishly" winds up where he started out. Oh no! Oh yes! He believes he's in another town (he's a "shlemiel"!) like his own and here's a house like his and two kids like his and a wife just like his, but wait! They can't keep their hands off each other. Madly, passionately in love they do musical battle to get together and stay together with witty, beautiful lyrics by Arnold Weinstein and contagious foot-tapping klezmer music by Hankus Netsky and Zalmen Mlotek in a tilted topsy-turvy landscape by Robert Israel, but wait! Tryna needs other wives to talk to? Yes! I invent (with Mr. Brustein's OK) Chelm wives (transformed by Cathy Zuber's padded pinafores) in a postmodern farce with painted rocks and trees, musicians pulled on cloths and a wooden chair dance.

I dedicate these performances to my friend Alice Playten.

—David Gordon



David Gordon, photo by Paula Court



Any Warren and Michael Iannucci in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

THE PRODUCTION: CAST, CREATIVE, AND PRODUCTION TEAM

Bob Ader (Dopey Petzel/Zalman Tippish)

is happy to be returning to *Shlemiel the First*. Broadway credits include *All the Way Home*. Regional theatre: *The Tin Pan Alley Rag* (Cleveland Play House), *Olympus on My Mind* (FST), *The Nerd* (Phoenix Theatre) and many others. TV: "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," "Unsolved Mysteries," "David Letterman" and "The Onion News Network." Film: *It's Complicated*. Bob did his first professional acting job at the age of six in *The Naked City*. He is also a member of Project Rushmore Theatre Company.



Bob Ader

Jeff Brooks (Gronam Ox)

Broadway: Mickey in *A History of the American Film*, Phil in *Loose Ends*, the Bellhop in *Lend Me a Tenor* (Outer Critics Circle Award), Pasty in *Gypsy* with Tyne Daly, Spider Malloy in *Nick and Nora*, Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls* and Cogsworth in *Beauty and the Beast*. Off-Broadway: *Sister Mary Ignatius...* and the leading role in *The Actor's Nightmare*, the title role in *The Foreigner* and multiple roles in *Talk Radio*. Feature films include *The Secret of My Success*, *The Lemon Sisters*, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, *IQ*, and *Julie and Julia*. Several guest appearances on "Law & Order."



Jeff Brooks

Michael Iannucci (Shlemiel)

NY credits: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Enter Laughing* (York Theatre), *Spellbound* (Fringe Festival), *Wallenberg* (NYMF), *On the Waterfront* (Brave New World Rep), *The Cradle Will Rock* (St. Mark's in the Bowery). National tour: *Annie*, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Regional: *The Most Happy Fella*, *Cats* (TUTS), *Rags*, *Phantom*, *Crazy for You* (Fulton Opera), *Falsettoland* (Caldwell Theatre, Carbonell nomination), *Patience* (Sorg Opera), *Ragtime* (Carnegie PAC), *Steel Pier* (Actors' Playhouse), *Noises Off* (Playhouse on the Green). Stock: *Broadway Bound*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Sleuth*, *The Foreigner*, *Guys and Dolls*, *I Do! I Do!*, *Gypsy*, *Chicago*.



Michael Iannucci

Jesse Means (Zeinvel Shmeckel/Man In House)

began his professional career on Broadway in *Show Boat*. Recent theatre credits include Booker T. Washington in Portland Center Stage's production of *Ragtime*, Enoch Snow in the national tour of *Carousel*, NoMax in *Five Guys Named Moe* and Augustus in the York Theatre production of *A Good Man*. Means has been featured on ABC's "One Life to Live" and "Jimmy Kimmel Live." His film credits include supporting roles in *Argentine in New York* and DreamWorks' *Ghost Town*.



Jesse Means, photo by Nolè Noir

David Skeist (Mendel Shmendrick)

Previous collaborations with David Gordon include *Uncivil Wars: Moving w/ Brecht & Eisler* and *Beginning of the End*. New York: *Los Angeles* (Flea), *Political Subversities* (Joe's Pub), *Havana Journal* (IINTAR), *The Misanthrope* (CSC Young Co.), *Kinderspiel* (Stolen Chair). Film and TV: "Law & Order: SVU," "All My Children," *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Memorial Day*. Founding member of CABORCA Theatre. M.F.A., Columbia; B.A. Harvard; graduate of Public Theater Shakespeare Lab.



David Skeist

Amy Warren (Tryna Ritza)

made her Broadway debut as Karen Weston in the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *August: Osage County*. She was nominated for Outer Critics Circle, Lucille Lortel and Drama Desk awards for Outstanding Featured Actress in a Musical for her performance as Daisy in *Adding Machine*, composed by Joshua Schmidt and directed by David Cromer. She has played leading roles at the Goodman and Steppenwolf theatres in *Chicago*. Television work includes HBO's "Boardwalk Empire" and "Law & Order."



Amy Warren

Darryl Winslow (Mottel/Moishe Pipik/Chaim Rascal)

returns to Chelm (Peak Performances 2010) after performing as Edna in *Hairspray*, Dave in *The Full Monty* and Louis in *Wild Women of Planet Wongo* (Best Actor Festival Award). He created the role of Jake in the Off-Broadway cult hit *Evil Dead: The Musical*. Favorite New York credits include *Avenue Q* (Broadway), *Bonnie & Clyde: A Folk Tale*, *Unlock'd*, *Brigadoon* and *Camelot*. TV/film: Great Performances' "Sondheim: The Birthday Concert!," "The View," "LATER!"



Darryl Winslow

Kristine Zbornik (Gittel/Sender Shlamazel/Yenta Pesha)

has appeared in *A Catered Affair* on Broadway, as Roz in the first national tour of *9 to 5* and as Rosie in *Mamma Mia* in Las Vegas. Off-Broadway and regional credits include *Road Show* (The Public Theater); *Forbidden Broadway Cleans Up Its Act!* (original cast) and *20th Anniversary* (original cast); *Splendor* (Sue Ella Lightfoot, Chelsea Playhouse); *An Evening with Joan Crawford* (Ethel Merman); *Man of La Mancha* (Housekeeper, Goodspeed Opera House); and *Nine* (Paper Mill Playhouse). Cabaret and one-person shows include *Jackie Hoffman* and *Kristine Zbornik* (Joe's Pub); *Holiday Hams*, *Blow Up World*, *Ball of Confusion*, *Serving Mankind* and *Zbornik in a Trunk*.



Kristine Zbornik

THE PRODUCTION: CAST, CREATIVE, AND PRODUCTION TEAM

Yaeko Miranda Elmaleh (Violin)

is a graduate of New England Conservatory of Music. A recipient of many awards, she studied under Michele Auclair, Fudeko Takahashi, Ran Blake and Hankus Netsky. As a member of the world-renowned Klezmer Conservatory Band she has performed in such venues as Avery Fisher Hall and the Walt Disney Concert Hall. She is currently an active performer and has just released her first CD of Jewish/Gypsy/Klezmer music.

Daniel Linden (Trombone)

has worked with Slavic Soul Party, the Klezmer Conservatory Band and Frank London's Klezmer Brass All Stars. He has performed with The New Hampshire Pops, the National Lyric Opera and the Astoria Symphony, and has toured with the *Porgy and Bess* 75th Anniversary US tour. An avid educator, Daniel has taught trombone at Brandeis University and is a member of Epic Brass, which performs educational concerts throughout the Northeast.

Nick Morrison (Banjo/Mandolin/Guitar).

Multi-instrumentalist Nick Morrison was born to American parents in Paris, France, where he grew up playing classical piano. He was exposed to jazz and contemporary improvised music while attending the University of Chicago and began studying guitar and upright bass. Since moving to Boston in 2009 he has studied and performed with musicians such as Joe Morris, Cecil McBee, Hankus Netsky, Anthony Coleman and Jerry Leake. He will be moving to Berlin in May.

Dmitri "Zis" Slepovitch (Clarinet)

is a clarinetist, pianist, composer, singer, ethnomusicologist; leader of the Litvakus and Minsker Kapelye bands; Yiddish instructor at The New School; music director, composer, musician and actor in shows produced by the Folksbiene, Castillo Theatre, and New Yiddish Rep, as well as the films *Defiance* and *The Burning Land*; teacher of seminars in Jewish studies and Yiddish music worldwide, including BIMA at Brandeis University. dmitrislepovitch.com

Grant Smith (Drums/Percussion)

A member of The Klezmer Conservatory Band, Grant Smith was in the original production of *Shlemiel the First* at American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge. Mr. Smith has toured globally from Crakow to New Zealand. He has performed with Itzhak Perlman, Don Byron and Jane Wang, among many others. Studies include hand drums with Jamie Haddad, Tabla, Afro-Cuban percussion, frame drums with Glen Velez, drum set with Alan Dawson.

Ezra Weller (Trumpet)

is Boston-area trumpet player, composer, improviser and educator. He has premiered works by Anthony Coleman, Matti Kovler and Samuel Harry Chabrow, the latter two as soloist. Recently, his attentions have been focused on composition, and his first large ensemble work was premiered by the Senior Massachusetts Youth Wind Ensemble in May, 2011.

Stephen Cain (Ensemble)

Shlemiel the First marks Stephen's second staged show since graduating from the William Esper Studio in May. Stephen is thankful to be given the opportunity to work and learn from a great group of performers on this piece. Stephen would like to thank his director and fellow cast for being such an inspiration. Stephen also thanks his family and friends for their continued love and support.

Brandon Lavon Hightower (Ensemble)

NYC/Off-Broadway: *DreamBabies* (Niko), *Denial: Time to Face the Musical* (Man #1), *Christmas Rappings* (Narrator), *Chopsticks & Dirty Laundry* (Jericho), *You Are Here* (Jay). Regional: *Dreamgirls* (ReVision Theatre), *Rent* (The Theater Company), *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (The Secret Theatre), New York, New York: 9/11 Benefit Concert (Palace Theatre). TV: "Celebrity Ghost Stories" (Ahmad Rashad/The Biography Channel), "Boardwalk Empire" (Featured/ HBO). Studio/concert: Kenny Rogers (Background Vocals), Chris Wade's "29 Lives" (Soloist).

Amanda A. Lederer (Ensemble)

New York: Agnes in *The Divine Sister* (RP at Stageworks/Hudson), Anne in *The Dunes* (Gallery Players). Regional: Leah in *The Trial of FDR* (New Stage Performing Arts), Angel in *Make Sure It's Me* (BTF), Honey in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Abby in *Fiction* (Aglet Theatre), Stella (u/s) in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Sonya in *Uncle Vanya*, Ensemble in *Guys and Dolls* (New Harmony Repertory). Amanda is a member of Project Rushmore Theatre Company. B.A., Theatre Arts, Catawba College.

Brandon Monokian (Ensemble)

works as an actor, director and writer. He was last seen on the New York stage in PearlDamour's *How to Build a Forest*. He can currently be seen in the documentary web series *In Development* which follows the creation of a new theatre piece created in collaboration with Monokian, actress Suzzanne Douglas, playwright Regina Taylor and poet Yorri J. Berry. indevelopmentseries.com

Aaron Netsky (Ensemble)

makes his NYC stage debut in *Shlemiel the First*. He has performed in a variety of musicals in his hometown, Rochester, NY, including *Zorba*, *Peter Pan* and *The Pirates of Penzance*.

THE PRODUCTION: CAST, CREATIVE, AND PRODUCTION TEAM

David Gordon (Director/Choreographer)

has directed/choreographed for his Pick Up Performance Co(s) since 1971. Commissions include ABT, The Actors Studio, A.C.T., A.R.T., BAM, BBC 4 UK, Danspace, DTW, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Guthrie, The Joyce, Mark Taper Forum, NY Theatre Workshop, PBS/WNET Great Performances, PBS/KTCA Alive TV, Serious Fun! at Lincoln Center, Spoleto USA, Theatre for a New Audience, White Oak Dance Project. Awards include two Obies, three Bessies, two Drama-Leagues, two Guggenheims, two Pew Charitable Trust National Residency Grants (Theatre & Dance), three NEA American Masterpieces Grants (Dance & Theatre). Member: The Actors Studio, Center for Creative Research. Founding artist: Grand Union. Judson Church Performances. Mr. Gordon has performed with Yvonne Rainer Co./James Waring Co.

Arnold Weinstein, 1927–2005 (Lyrics)

was a playwright, librettist, poet and professor. His plays include *Red Eye of Love* and an adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. With composer William Bolcom he wrote the operas *McTeague*, *A View from the Bridge* and *A Wedding*, and theatre-opera works, among them *Dynamite Tonite!* and *Casino Paradise*. He was Chair of the Yale Drama School playwriting department and taught poetry and dramatic writing at Columbia.

Hankus Netsky (Composer)

is chair of the Contemporary Improvisation Department at the New England Conservatory. Founder and director of the Klezmer Conservatory Band, he is music director for Itzhak Perlman's klezmer music project, *In the Fiddler's House* and for his new cantorial, klezmer and Yiddish music project, *The Soul of Jewish Music*. He has composed for film, theatre and video and collaborated with Robin Williams, Joel Grey and Theodore Bikel.

Zalmen Mlotek (Musical Arrangements/Additional Music/Music Director/Conductor/Piano)

is an internationally recognized authority on Yiddish folk and theatre music and is a leading figure in the Jewish theatre and concert worlds. He is artistic director of the National Yiddish Theatre-Folksbiene, the longest-operating Yiddish theatre company in America. Mr. Mlotek was co-creator, music director and conductor of *Those Were the Days*, the first bilingual musical honored with a Drama Desk Award and nominated for two Tonys.

Michael Larsen (Associate Music Director/Conductor/Piano)

Broadway: *Annie*, *Nine*, *42nd Street*. Off-Broadway: *Perez Hilton Saves the Universe*, *The Golden Land*. Regional: *Stormy Weather* (Pasadena Playhouse), *Breakin' up Is Hard to Do*, *Shlemiel the First* (Geffen/A.C.T.), *...Forum*, *Ruthless!* (Carbonell Award nomination, Best Director), *Only a Kingdom*, countless others. Conductor: Bruce Adler, Theodore Bikel, Judy Kaye, Larry Kert, Elaine Stritch, many others. Twenty-four years as Master Teacher/Director at world-renowned Stagedoor Manor. International Director/ Music Supervisor of *Menopause the Musical*, including London and Toronto, celebrating six years at the Luxor in Las Vegas.

Robert Israel (Scenic Designer)

has designed sets and/or costumes for numerous opera companies, among them the Metropolitan Opera, English National Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, Paris Opera, De Nederlandse Opera, Royal Danish Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, New National Theatre of Tokyo, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera and Festival di Due Mondi in Spoleto. He is a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Obie Award and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Catherine Zuber (Costume Designer)

has won Tony Awards for her work on *South Pacific*, *The Coast of Utopia*, *The Light in the Piazza*, *Awake and Sing!* and *The Royal Family*. Other Broadway credits include *On a Clear Day...*, *How to Succeed...*, *Women on the Verge...*, *Seascape* (Tony nom.), *Joe Turner...* (Outer Critics Circle nom.), *Oleanna*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Cry-Baby*, *Doubt*, *Dinner at Eight* (Tony, OCC noms.), *Twelfth Night* (Tony nom.). Other credits include The Bridge Project (BAM and Old Vic), *Le Comte Ory*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, the 125th Anniversary Gala, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Doctor Atomic* (Metropolitan Opera), *Romeo and Juliet* (La Scala and Salzberg Festival), *Two Boys* (English National Opera) and the *Ring Cycle* (San Francisco Opera).

Jennifer Tipton (Lighting Designer)

Recent work in opera includes Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (La Scala) and *La Clemenza di Tito* (Aix-en-Provence Festival). Recent work in dance includes Alexei Ratmanský's *Romeo and Juliet* (National Ballet of Canada) and Paul Taylor's *Gossamer Gallants*. Recent work in theatre includes *Autumn Sonata* (Yale Repertory Theatre) and the Wooster Group's version of Tennessee Williams' *Vieux Carré*. Ms. Tipton teaches lighting at the Yale School of Drama. Awards include the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, the Jerome Robbins Prize and the Mayor's Award for Arts and Culture in New York City. She is a United States Artists "Gracie" Fellow and a MacArthur Fellow.

David Meschter (Sound Designer)

Has created sound designs for a variety of organizations and artists including John Cage, LaMonte Young, Meredith Monk, Ping Chong, Ridge Theater, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Lincoln Center, Houston Grand Opera, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York City Opera, Gotham Chamber Opera and The Public Theater, among many others. His work for the Broadway production of *Medea* was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for best sound design of the 2002–03 season. Meschter is the sound supervisor for Lincoln Center Festival.

THE PRODUCTION: CAST, CREATIVE, AND PRODUCTION TEAM

Ed Fitzgerald (Production Stage Manager)

has been a professional stage manager for 35 years, working on Broadway (*Da, A Little Family Business, The Tap Dance Kid, Carrie, The Violet Hour*), Off-Broadway (*Manhattan Theatre Club; The Best of Friends; tick, tick...BOOM!*), Off-Off Broadway and in major theatres throughout the country and overseas (London, Berlin, Singapore, Seoul, Avignon, Strasbourg). He has been associated with David Gordon, Ain Gordon, and Pick Up Performance Co(s) for 21 years.

Theatre for a New Audience (Producer)

See page 22 of this Viewfinder

The National Yiddish Theatre – Folksbiene (Producer)

is America's preeminent Yiddish theatre. Established in 1915 and led by Zalmen Mlotek, Artistic Director, and Bryna Wasserman, Executive Director, the Folksbiene is committed to promote and develop Yiddish theatre for current and future generations and enhance the understanding of Yiddish culture as a vital component of Jewish life. Now celebrating its 97th consecutive season, the Drama Desk Award-winning Folksbiene presents plays, concerts and literary events in English and Yiddish accompanied by English and Russian supertitles at all performances. Folksbiene programs include award-winning and critically acclaimed Off-Broadway productions; touring productions; a series of free concerts, workshops and readings at City University of New York campuses; and children's programs which portray the history and traditions of an immigrant people in a contemporary venue. Folksbiene productions draw new generations of audiences and artists who are working in Yiddish as they reinforce Jewish identity, renewal and pride within a multicultural world. The company's mission is to celebrate the Jewish experience through the performing arts and to transmit a rich cultural legacy in exciting new ways. nationallyiddishtheatre.org

The Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts (Producer)

is the premier venue for the presentation of cultural and performing arts events for New York University and lower Manhattan. Led by Executive Producer Jay Oliva (President Emeritus, NYU) and Senior Director Michael Harrington, the programs of the Skirball Center reflect NYU's mission as an international center of scholarship, defined by excellence and innovation and shaped by an intellectually rich and diverse environment. A vital aspect of the Center's mission is to build young adult audiences for the future of live performance. nyuskirball.org

Peak Performances at Montclair State University (Producer)

under the artistic direction of Jedediah Wheeler, has, from its inception in 2005, brought a wide range of internationally acclaimed artists and productions to the Alexander Kasser Theater. With an emphasis on inter-disciplinary work, Peak Performances has presented over 50 world and American premieres by artists such as Bill T. Jones, South African director Robyn Orlin, Susan Marshall, Italian theatre artist Romeo Castellucci, Wayne McGregor, Brazilian choreographer Sonia Destri, Bob McGrath, Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite, Jazz composer Fred Hersch, David Gordon and Belgian artist, writer and director Jan Fabre, among many others. By bringing together artists of uncommon imagination with audiences of adventuresome spirits, Peak Performances fosters a greater understanding and appreciation of creativity. The 2010 Peak Performances production of *Shlemiel the First* was made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts as part of American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius. peakperfs.org



Michael Iannucci in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

FURTHER EXPLORATION: GLOSSARY

Beadle

A lay official of a church or synagogue who may usher, keep order, make reports, and assist in religious functions

Beer-sheba to Haran

Beersheba and Haran were both cities in ancient Israel. This line is a reference to Genesis chapter 28, verse 10: "And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran." On this journey, Jacob fell asleep and had a dream where he saw a ladder extending from earth to Heaven. God appeared to Jacob and promised him protection on his journey and a safe return home.

Blintz

A thin rolled pancake filled with cheese or fruit and then fried or baked

Borscht

A Russian or Polish soup made with beets and usually served with sour cream

Challah

A loaf of yeast-leavened egg bread, usually braided, traditionally eaten by Jews on the Sabbath, holidays, and other ceremonial occasions

Chelm

A legendary Jewish town of foolish persons

Dreydl

A toy similar to a top with four sides marked with Hebrew letters: nun, gimel, hey, shin

Dybbuk

Soul condemned to wander for a time in this world because of its sins. (To escape the perpetual torments inflicted upon it by evil spirits, the dybbuk seeks refuge in the body of some pious man or woman over whom the demons have no power. The dybbuk is a Cabalistic conception.)

Gabardines

A smooth, durable twill-woven cloth, typically of worsted or cotton

Gehenna

A place or state of torment or suffering

Gevalt (Also G'vald!)

Cry of distress for help; wail of sorrow

Gimel

The 3rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet. On a dreydl, gimel stands for gants, which means "all."

Goulash

A highly seasoned Hungarian soup or stew of meat and vegetables, flavored with paprika

Hey

The 5th letter of the Hebrew alphabet. On a dreydl, hey stands for halb, which means "half."

Kaballah

The ancient Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of the Bible, first transmitted orally and using esoteric methods (including ciphers)

Kasha

A soft food made from cooked buckwheat or similar grain

Ketzele (Kets'!)

Kitten

Klezmer

The word comes from two Hebrew words: kley means vessels or tools and zmer means melody. In Yiddish, the word klezmer literally means "vessels of the music."

Kneidle

Matzoh ball; also k'naidel

Knip

A pinch

Kvell (Or Kvelen)

Glow with pride and happiness, beam; be delighted

Kvetch

Whine, complain; whiner, a complainer

Latke

Fried potato pancake

Matchmaker

A person who arranges relationships and marriages between others

Matzoh (K'naidel)

Brittle flat bread eaten at Passover

Matzoh Ball

A small dumpling made of seasoned matzoh meal bound together with egg and chicken fat

Mensch

A human being; a decent person

Meshugah (Meshugeh)

Crazy

Meshuganah

Crazy person

Midrash

An ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew scriptures

Moyel

A person who performs the Jewish rite of circumcision

Nebech

A person who suffers from making other people's problems his own

Nun

The 14th letter of the Hebrew alphabet. On a dreydl, nun stands for nisht, which means "nothing."

Oy Vay

An exclamation of dismay or exasperation meaning "oh pain."

Plotz

Collapse or be beside oneself with frustration or another strong emotion

Shin

The 21st letter of the Hebrew alphabet. On a dreydl, shin stands for shetl arayn, or "put in."

FURTHER EXPLORATION: GLOSSARY

Shlemiel

Clumsy bungler, an inept person (An old joke illustrates the distinction between three types of fool: a shlemiel spills his soup, it falls on the shlimazl, and the nebech cleans it up.)

Shlamazel (Shlimazel)

Unlucky person; incompetent person; one who has perpetual bad luck

Shlemielke

-ke is a diminutive suffix in Yiddish. "Shlemielke" might therefore be translated as "little Shlemiel."

Shlep

To carry clumsily or with difficulty

Shmatte

An old rag

Shmegeggy

Baloney; hot air; nonsense

Shnorrer

A beggar who makes pretensions to respectability; sponger, chiseler, moocher; a parasite, but always with brass and resourcefulness in getting money from others as though it were his right

Shtetl

Village

Talmud

The body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah (text) and the Gemara (commentary).

Torah

The law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures (the Pentateuch)

Tsatskele

A term of endearment for a child

Yenta

Busybody

Yodler

A yodeler

Zaftig

Pleasantly plump and pretty; sensuous looking; also Zaftik

Zhlob

A jerk; foolish, stupid, uncouth; also Zhlob

Zuider Zee

Southern Sea



Amy Warren and Michael Lannucci in *Shlemiel the First*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

FURTHER EXPLORATION: RESOURCES

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 Assistant General Manager:
 Courtney F. Caldwell
 Associate to the Artistic Director:
 Danya Taymor

About Theatre for a New Audience

Founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, the mission of Theatre for a New Audience is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. Theatre for a New Audience produces for audiences Off-Broadway and has also toured nationally, internationally and to Broadway. We are guided in our work by five core values: a reverence for language, a spirit of adventure, a commitment to diversity, a dedication to learning, and a spirit of service. These values inform what we do with artists, how we interact with audiences, and how we manage our organization.

Theatre for a New Audience Education Programs

Theatre for a New Audience is an award winning company recognized for artistic excellence. Our education programs introduce students to Shakespeare and other classics with the same artistic integrity that we apply to our productions. Through our unique and exciting methodology, students engage in hands-on learning that involves all aspects of literacy set in the context of theatre education. Our residencies are structured to address City and State Learning Standards both in English Language Arts and the Arts, the New York City DOE's Curriculum Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, and the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts. Begun in 1984, our programs have served over 122,000 students, ages 9 through 18, in New York City Public Schools City-wide.

A New Home in Brooklyn

After over 30 years of being an itinerant theatre, Theatre for a New Audience has broken ground on a new home in the BAM Cultural District in Downtown Brooklyn. Scheduled to open in fall 2013, our new home will be a place to gather, learn and explore. In it, we will be able to expand our education and humanities programs to include activities on weekends, after-school and during school vacations for students; as well as lectures, seminars, workshops, and other activities for artists, scholars, adults and families.

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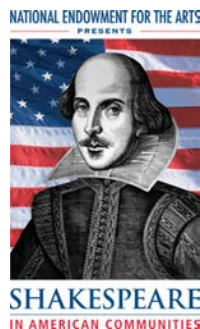
Even with capacity audiences, box office and other earned income account for just 30% of the Theatre's \$3.5 million operating budget. The Theatre expresses its deepest thanks to the following Foundations, Corporations and Government Agencies for their generous support of the Theatre's Humanities, Education, and Outreach programs.



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Theatre for a New Audience's Humanities programming receives support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in these programs do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Theatre for a New Audience's Education Programming is also made possible in part with public funds from The National Endowment for the Arts; Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national initiative sponsored by The National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest; the New York State Council on the Arts – a state agency; and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Additional support for these programs is provided by the generosity of the following Foundations and Corporations through their direct support of the Theatre's Education programs and through their general operating grants to the Theatre's Annual Fund:

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