



Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, UC Berkeley, CA

Sunday, June 23 at 1:00 pm, 2024

Directed by Bruce Bierman

English Translation by Caraid O'Brien

CAST

Reb Khonen , a successfully retired pious merchant, age 80	Naomi Newman
Malka , his wife, a traditional Jewish housewife	Laura Sheppard
Rokhl-Leah , their maid	Anne Hallinan
Barukh aka Boris , their oldest son, a prosperous Warsaw merchant	Dov Hassan
Helena , Boris' wife, a sophisticated woman	Bekka Fink
Andrzej aka Anshel , Barukh's son, a college student in Bern	Dan Wolf
Justyna aka Yentele , Barukh's daughter, a university student in Crakow	Lena Sibony
Yosef , Khonen and Malka's younger son, a struggling small town trader	Randy Solomon
Hanna , Yosef's wife, a traditional Jewish woman	Leni Siegel
Chaim , Yosef and Hanna's eldest, an artisan and a Democratic-Socialist	Kaya Mey
Ben-Zion , their middle son, an ex-Yeshiva student turned Zionist	Wes Lieberman
Moishe , their youngest son, a Yiddishist	Irwin Keller
Aunt Bertha , Malka and Khonen's daughter, acts like a German woman	Karen Sellinger
Uncle Kahn , Bertha's husband, a German Jew from Leipzig	Bill Liebman
Queen Esther of Poland	Diana Bukowska

Time and Place: A country estate in Poland, 1905

Yiddish Theatre Ensemble is a fiscally sponsored project of KlezCalifornia

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Special Thanks to the staff of the Magnes for their support and collaboration

Hannah E. Weisman, Executive Director, Dan Alter, Learning and Engagement Coordinator , Laura Bratt, Marketing and Communications Manager, Arashi Cesana, A/V Technician

Yiddish Theatre Ensemble

Laura Sheppard & Bruce Bierman, *Co-Artistic Directors*

Mark Faulkner, Dorrit Geshuri, Dov Hassan, Jeremy Knight, Zack Rogow, Karen Sellinger, Esther Shaw

For information about Yiddish Theatre Ensemble’s productions, auditions or to volunteer, visit our website: <https://klezcalifornia.org/yiddish-theatre-ensemble/> info@yiddishtheatre-ensemble.org

“...The play is filled with the bright, deep and beautiful nature of its young creator. Do you want to know the story? Nobody is in love with each other, no one kills anyone else, no one is involved in any intrigue... These deeply philosophical figures, elevated by such wonderful poetry, is written in the Jewish vernacular... Yes, this poem in vernacular is a true literature, true poetry. The Jews of this play are not the Jews of yesterday or the Jews of tomorrow, no, they are the Jews of the present, of today... Today’s Jew walks around shining with illuminating insights on our world, with sweet dreams and idealistic aspirations. Something is awakening, something new is being born, great and trembling... simmering and ripening... from the souls of their prophetic forefathers, the soul of a new messiah.”

–Quote from Adler’s “*Grand Teater vet Oyfgefirt,*” *Di Vorhayt*, Sept 19, 1906, p3 (Yiddish translation of Russian review in Art of Theater).

SYNOPSIS

Act One unfolds in the dining room of a prosperous Jewish family in Poland in 1905. Reb Khonen and his wife Malka have gathered their scattered family members from the cities of Europe. They reveal their imminent departure to end their last days in the Holy Land. Righteous arguments and heated debates ensue as to what is the best life for them and the entire Jewish people. The grandparents, Reb Khonen and Malka, embody traditional religious values, while their children and grandchildren represent a spectrum of ideologies, including capitalism, Zionism, paganism, socialism, and cultural assimilation.

Act Two opens in Reb Khonen’s lush garden, where the family continues their discussions amidst the natural beauty of the Polish countryside. The granddaughter, Justyna, a college student--shares an ecstatic vision of encountering the mythical Queen Esterka of Poland. Her brother Andrzej, also a college student, seeks a purpose in life amidst the ideological battles between his sibling and cousins. Reb Khonen and Malka visit the cemetery to bid farewell to their ancestors, symbolizing the impending departure from their homeland.

Act Three takes place under the moonlight on a hilltop near the ruins of Queen Esterka’s castle. Each family member faces the ultimate decision of whether to stay in Poland or move to Zion. Reb Khonen bids farewell to his family, urging them to find their own paths while holding onto their shared heritage. The act concludes with a vision of a messianic future, as the family members confront their past and contemplate their destinies in an uncertain world.

