

For Immediate Release Please

**Theatre for a New Audience,
National Yiddish Theatre - Folksbiene,
NYU's Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts &
Peak Performances at Montclair State University
present
The First Major New York Revival of
Shlemiel the First
The Klezmer Musical Based on the Play by Isaac Bashevis Singer
Conceived and Adapted by Robert Brustein
Lyrics by Arnold Weinstein
Composed, Adapted and Orchestrated by Hankus Netsky
Arrangements, Additional Music and Music Direction by Zalmen Mlotek
Direction, Choreography and Editorial Supervision by David Gordon
Starring Michael Iannucci and Amy Warren**

December 13 - 31 at Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts

NEW YORK- The acclaimed 1994 world premiere of the Klezmer musical *Shlemiel the First*, was at Boston's American Repertory Theater (ART). *Shlemiel* went on to delight audiences nationwide. Peak Performances at Montclair State University produced *Shlemiel* in January, 2010 at the Alexander Kasser Theater in association with National Yiddish Theatre – Folksbiene. Previous productions appeared at Philadelphia's The American Music Theater Festival, San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater and Lincoln Center's Serious Fun! among other prestigious venues.

Now, Theatre for a New Audience, National Yiddish Theatre - Folksbiene, New York University's Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts and Peak Performances at Montclair State University present the first major New York revival of *Shlemiel the First* in nearly twenty years. A 24-performance engagement plays December 13 through 31, at New York University's Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, 566 LaGuardia Place with an opening set for Thursday, December 15 at 7:00pm. Leadership support for *Shlemiel the First* is provided by

The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust.

Shlemiel the First is conceived and adapted by **Robert Brustein** and based on the play by Nobel Laureate **Isaac Bashevis Singer** (1902-1991). Lyrics are by **Arnold Weinstein** (1927-2005) (*Dynamite Tonite!* and *Casino Paradise*); music composed, adapted and orchestrated by **Hankus Netsky**; arrangements, additional music and music direction by **Zalmen Mlotek**; sets by **Robert Israel**; lighting by **Jennifer Tipton**; costumes by **Catherine Zuber**; and editorial supervision, direction and choreography by **David Gordon**.

Michael Iannucci, whose recent stage appearances include *Fiddler on the Roof* on Broadway and *Enter Laughing* Off-Broadway, plays Shlemiel. **Amy Warren**, who made her Broadway debut in *August: Osage County* and played Daisy in Elmer Rice's *Adding Machine* (Nominee, Outstanding Actress in a Musical, 2008 Lucille Lortel and Drama Desk Awards), will be Mrs. Shlemiel.

This production is dedicated to the distinguished Alice Playten, who recently performed Mrs. Shlemiel at Peak Performances at Montclair State University and died earlier this year.

Shlemiel the First received rave reviews when it premiered in 1994. Stephen Holden, *New York Times*, celebrated *Shlemiel* as "A comic ode to the rejuvenating power of the erotic imagination...propulsively tuneful music and dazzling lyrics." John Lahr wrote in *The New Yorker* that "*Shlemiel* is busting its buttons with joy." John Heilpern, *New York Observer*, said, "It returns us to the heart of musical comedy...unapologetically playful, sweet, a bit mad and very funny."

A cast of eight, an unusual and innovative creative team and an eight musician live band bring the erotic, comic, surreal quality of Singer's story to life. *Shlemiel* takes place in Chelm, a village of fools. Half sad-sack clown, half accidental messiah, Shlemiel's charm is in his childlike innocence, and the charm of this musical is in its playfulness and unapologetic, unalloyed delight. It turns an already absurd world hilariously and redemptively, topsy-turvy.

Michael Iannucci and Amy Warren are joined by actors Bob Ader, Jeff Brooks, Jesse Means, David Skeist, Darryl Winslow and Kristine Zbornik.

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born in 1902 in Poland into a long line of rabbis. By the 1920s, he was both a reviewer at Yiddish literary magazines and a short story writer. In 1935, he moved to America and began writing for the *Jewish Daily Forward*, where many of his novels were serialized. By the 1950s, with his work being translated into English, his fame grew beyond the Yiddish reading world. In 1978, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. A resident of the Upper West Side, Singer died at age 87 in 1991.

Robert Brustein (2010 National Medal of Arts) is a playwright, actor, director, critic and scholar. He was the founding director of the Yale Repertory Theatre and the American Repertory Theater. He is author of 16 books on theatre and society and has written 112 adaptations and seven plays, his two most recent being his Shakespeare Trilogy--*The English Channel*, *Mortal Terror*, and *The Last Will*. Mr. Brustein has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was recently inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

Arnold Weinstein (1927-2005) 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 the 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 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 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 theater company in America. Mr. Mlotek was co-creator, music director and conductor of *These Were the Days*, the first bilingual musical honored with a Drama Desk Award and nominated for two Tonys.

David Gordon has constructed dance and theater events for his Pick Up Performance Co(s) since 1971. His commissions for directing and/or choreographing include: Danspace Project, Dance Theater Workshop, Dance Theatre of Harlem, White Oak Dance Project, American Ballet Theatre, American Repertory Theater, American Conservatory Theater, Joyce Theater, Theatre for a New Audience, New York Theatre Workshop, Guthrie Theater, Mark Taper Forum, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Serious Fun! at Lincoln Center, Spoleto Festival USA, Actors Studio, PBS/ WNET Great Performances, PBS/KTCA Alive TV, BBC/Channel 4, UK. His awards include two Obies, three Bessies, two Dramalogues, two Guggenheims, two Pew Charitable Trust National Residency Grants (in both Theater and Dance) three NEA American Masterpieces Grants (in Dance & Theater). He is a current member of Actors Studio and Center for Creative Research. He was a previous panel chair for the NEA Dance Program and is a founding artist for Grand Union and Judson Church Performances. He performed with Yvonne Rainer Co./James Waring Co.

Michael Iannucci, in addition to *Fiddler on the Roof* on Broadway and *Enter Laughing* Off-Broadway, has appeared in *Wallenberg* at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and *On the Waterfront* for Brave New World Rep. He appeared in national tours of *Annie* and *Fiddler on the Roof* and regionally in *The Most Happy Fella*, *Cats*, *Falsettoland*, *Rags*, *Crazy for You*, and *My Fair Lady*, among others.

Amy Warren made her Broadway debut in the Pulitzer Prize winning play *August: Osage County*. She received nominations for the Outer Critics, Lucille Lortel, and Drama Desk awards for Outstanding Actress in a Musical, for Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, composed by Joshua Schmidt and directed by David Cromer. She has played leading roles at the Goodman and Steppenwolf Theaters in Chicago. Television work includes appearances on HBO's *Boardwalk Empire* and *Law and Order*.

Robert Israel has designed sets and/or costumes for numerous opera companies, among them the Metropolitan Opera, the English National Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, the Paris Opera, De Nederlandse Opera, the 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.

Jennifer Tipton is well known for her work in dance, theater and opera. Her recent work in dance includes Paul Taylor's *The Uncommitted* and Alexei Ratmansky's *The Nutcracker* for American Ballet Theatre. Her recent work in theater includes Bergman's *Autumn Sonata* at the Yale Repertory Theatre and the Wooster Group's version of Tennessee Williams's *Vieux Carre*. Her most recent work in opera includes Gounod's *Romeo Et Juliette* directed by Bart Sher at La Scala and Mozart's *La Clemenza Di Tito* directed by David McVicar at the Aix Festival in France. Ms. Tipton teaches lighting at the Yale School of Drama. Among many awards she is the recipient of the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize in 2001 and the Jerome Robbins Prize in 2003. In 2008 she became a United States Artist "Gracie" Fellow and a MacArthur Fellow.

Catherine Zuber 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*. Additional Broadway credits include *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *Seascape* (Tony nomination), *Joe Turner...* (Outer Critics Circle nomination), *Oleanna*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Cry-Baby*, *Mauritius*, *Doubt*, *Little Women*, *Dracula*, *Frozen*, *Dinner at Eight* (Tony, OCC nominations), *Twelfth Night* (Tony nomination). Opera credits include *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Doctor Atomic*.

Theatre for a New Audience www.tfana.org was founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, artistic director. Its mission is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. The Theatre has produced twenty-eight of the Bard's plays with directors who include Sir Peter Hall, Mark Rylance, Bartlett Sher and Julie Taymor, and a diverse repertory by authors such as Harley Granville Barker, Edward Bond and Adrienne Kennedy. It has played on Broadway, toured nationally and internationally. In 2001, Theatre for a New Audience became

the first American theatre invited to bring a production of Shakespeare to the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Stratford-upon-Avon. *Cymbeline*, directed by Bartlett Sher, premiered at the RSC and in 2007, Theatre for a New Audience was invited to return with *The Merchant of Venice* starring F. Murray Abraham and directed by Darko Tresnjak. In June, 2011, Theatre for a New Audience broke ground for its first home, a center for Shakespeare and classic drama in downtown Brooklyn in the BAM Cultural District slated to open in 2013.

The Drama Desk Award-winning National Yiddish Theatre – Folksbiene, www.folksbiene.org Zalmen Mlotek Artistic Director, and Bryna Wasserman, Executive Director, is the longest continuously producing Yiddish theatre company in the world, and America's sole-surviving professional Yiddish theatre. Now celebrating its 97th consecutive season, Folksbiene presents plays, concerts and literary events in English and Yiddish, with English and Russian supertitles accompanying all performances. 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.

The Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts www.nyuskirball.org 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.

From its inception in 2005, **Peak Performances at Montclair State University** (www.peakperfs.org), under the artistic direction of Jedediah Wheeler, has 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 theater artist Romeo Castellucci, Wayne MacGregor, Brazilian choreographer

Sonia Destri, Bob MacGrath, Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite, Jazz composer Fred Hersch, David Gordon and Belgian artist, writer, 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.

The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust was created by Harold Steinberg in 1986 in the names of himself and his late wife Miriam, sometimes known as “Mimi.” The Trust’s primary mission is to support and promote the American theater as a vital part of our culture by nurturing American playwrights, encouraging the development and production of new American plays, and providing significant support to theater companies across the country.

Since its inception, the Trust has given in excess of \$50 million to more than one hundred not-for-profit theater organizations. These gifts have funded countless productions, as well as the commissioning of playwrights, playwriting programs and arts-in-education outreach programs for thousands of children in an effort to create and educate new generations of theatergoers.

The Trust also collaborated with the American Theater Critics Association to create and fund the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award. The award is presented annually during the Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theater of Louisville. Recent winners of this award include Craig Lucas, Lynn Nottage, Lee Blessing and Nilo Cruz.

The members of the Board of Directors of The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust are Carole A. Krumland, James D. Steinberg, Michael A. Steinberg, Seth M. Weingarten and William D. Zabel.

Box Office

Shlemiel the First runs December 13 through 31. Performances are Tuesday through Saturday evenings at 7:00pm with an additional Monday evening performance at 7:00pm on December 26. Matinees are Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2:00pm with and an additional 2:00pm matinee Friday, December 23 and one 3:00pm Sunday matinee December 18.

Single tickets are \$10.00 for ages 25 and under or full-time students and \$75 for adults. Tickets may be purchased online at www.nyuskirball.org by phone by calling 866.811.4111 (Monday through Friday, 9:00am to 9:00pm, Saturday and Sunday 10:00am to 6:00pm); and in person at 566 LaGuardia Place at Washington Square South (Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 6:00pm and two hours before curtain).