

THE WESTON PLAYHOUSE THEATRE COMPANY



INDECENT

THE TRUE STORY OF A LITTLE JEWISH PLAY

SHOW NOTES 2019

Synopsis

This deeply moving work charts the true story of a group of artists who risked their lives to put on a Broadway production and were arrested on opening night. *Indecent* follows the writer, his play, and the people who fought to perform it against all odds. This Tony-award winning play by the author of *How I Learned to Drive* and *The Long Christmas Ride Home* is Weston's 5th American Masters production.

About the Author

Paula Vogel

Paula Vogel has written *How I Learned to Drive* (Pulitzer Prize, New York Drama Critics Award, Obie Award, Lucille Lortel, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and many more.) Other plays include *A Civil War Christmas*, *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *Hot 'N Throbbin*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *The Oldest Profession*.



Her plays have been produced by Second Stage, New York Theatre Workshop, the Vineyard Theatre, Roundabout, and Circle Repertory Company. Her plays have been produced regionally all over the country at the Center Stage, Intiman, Trinity Repertory, Woolly Mammoth, Huntington Theatre, Magic Theatre, The Goodman Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Dallas Theatre Berkeley Repertory, and Alley Theatres to name a few. Harrogate Theatre and the Donmar Theatre have produced her work in England.

Her plays have been produced in Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand as well as translated and produced in Italy, Germany, Taiwan, South Africa, Australia, Romania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland Slovenia, Canada, Portugal, France, Greece, Japanese, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Brazil and other countries.

John Simon once remarked that Paula Vogel had more awards than a "black sofa collects lint." Some of these include Induction into the Theatre Hall of Fame, Thornton Wilder Award, Lifetime Achievement from the Dramatists Guild, the William Inge Award, the Elliott Norton Award, two Obies, a Susan Smith Blackburn Award, the PEN/Laura Pels Award, a TCG residency award, a Guggenheim, a Pew Charitable Trust Award, and fellowships and residencies at Sundance Theatre Lab, Hedgebrook, The Rockefeller Center's Bellagio Center, Yaddo, MacDowell, and the Bunting.

But she is particularly proud of her Thirtini Award from 13P, and honored by three Awards in her name: the Paula Vogel Award for playwrights given by The Vineyard Theatre, the Paula Vogel Award from the American College Theatre Festival, and the Paula Vogel mentorship program, curated by Quiara Hudes and Young Playwrights of Philadelphia.

FROM COURTROOM TO STAGE: THE MAKING OF INDECENT

“When one writes a play, one is no longer alone.”

This line from Sholem Asch is met with a resounding “oy” in *Indecent*, but the sentiment rings true for Paula Vogel (playwright) and Rebecca Taichman (director), the team that originally co-conceived the play. Both encountered the play while in graduate school, roughly 25 years apart. Vogel was astonished by Asch’s bravery and compassion. Taichman was drawn to the controversy around the play’s Broadway debut and staged the transcript of the trial as her MFA thesis. Seventeen years later, the artists came together to create their own retelling of *The God of Vengeance*.

While Vogel had seen Taichman’s thesis production in 2000, the two did not begin collaborating on *Indecent* for over a decade. As she launched her career as a director, Taichman remained struck by what she had unearthed during her time at Yale. She reconnected with Vogel in 2011 to pitch the idea of turning the trial into a play. Within a few minutes, the two had agreed to embark on an artistic partnership with one caveat from Vogel—that they also explore Sholem Asch as a literary figure and the journey of *The God of Vengeance* from conception to its Broadway opening.

Initial development of *Indecent* was supported by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Yale University, and the MacDowell Colony. Vogel and Taichman spent years digging through primary source documents and accounts of *The God of Vengeance* from across the globe, creating a somewhat fictional, somewhat historical through-line. They quickly realized that music was an essential part of the story and opened up their collaboration to composers Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva. Throughout early rehearsals, the company staged and restaged each moment of the play, digging through countless ideas to find the honesty in each scene. In an interview with *Variety*, Taichman described the process as “intense... Sometimes it led to glorious chaos, and sometimes it led to totally frustrating chaos.”

As the production took shape, it was produced at La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego, Yale Repertory Theatre, and the Vineyard Theatre in New York. Eventually the play’s great success led to it transferring to Broadway. It was nominated for three Tony Awards and won two, including Best Direction of a Play.



Forrest Malloy and Brian Bock in rehearsal

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JORDAN FEIN



RACHEL LIFF: When did you first encounter *Indecent*?

JORDAN FEIN: I had heard a lot about it when it was in New York but never saw it, mostly because I was out of town that year. I read it for the first time after Susanna had asked me to consider directing it.

RL: What excites you most about working on this play?

JF: I feel really seen by this play. It is a Jewish play about homosexuality, which does already exist in other plays, but this is a major examination of these identities' intersectionality as well as what it means to be American. I think, at its core, this play is about the people who are making it. It is about all those actors on that stage making it every night. The actors don't get to walk on and assume a character—they're coming on as themselves, as an ensemble, to tell this story to this audience. That's the core of this play. You can feel when you read it that it was made by a specific group of actors, so coming into this room with a very different group of actors, I was most excited to figure out what their version of the play would be.

RL: What has made this process unique?

JF: Being in Vermont has been awesome. It's such an intense piece that has so many layers to it both in its form and in its content. To live within a five-minute radius of the theatre and get to focus on the piece with such a generous group of humans has been really reenergizing in a way I did not anticipate. I really do feel like all of our brains are constantly thinking about it and constantly digesting the work we're doing. We all get to be in this space without distraction to focus on it.

RL: What is your relationship with Paula Vogel's work?

JF: This is the first Paula Vogel play I've directed. I think her work is amazing. It makes me want to work on her other plays. I know this is a different sort of play for her because it was made through such a strong collaboration with the original director. I've always thought she was an extraordinary playwright. The language in her plays is so beautiful and what she puts on the page is totally remarkable. [Her language] is the blueprint of this piece because this play goes to so many locations and everyone plays so many characters. It is the grounding force we can always come back to. She was also a professor at Yale for so many years. So many other playwrights were clearly deeply influenced and inspired by her, and their work has been a big part of my life.

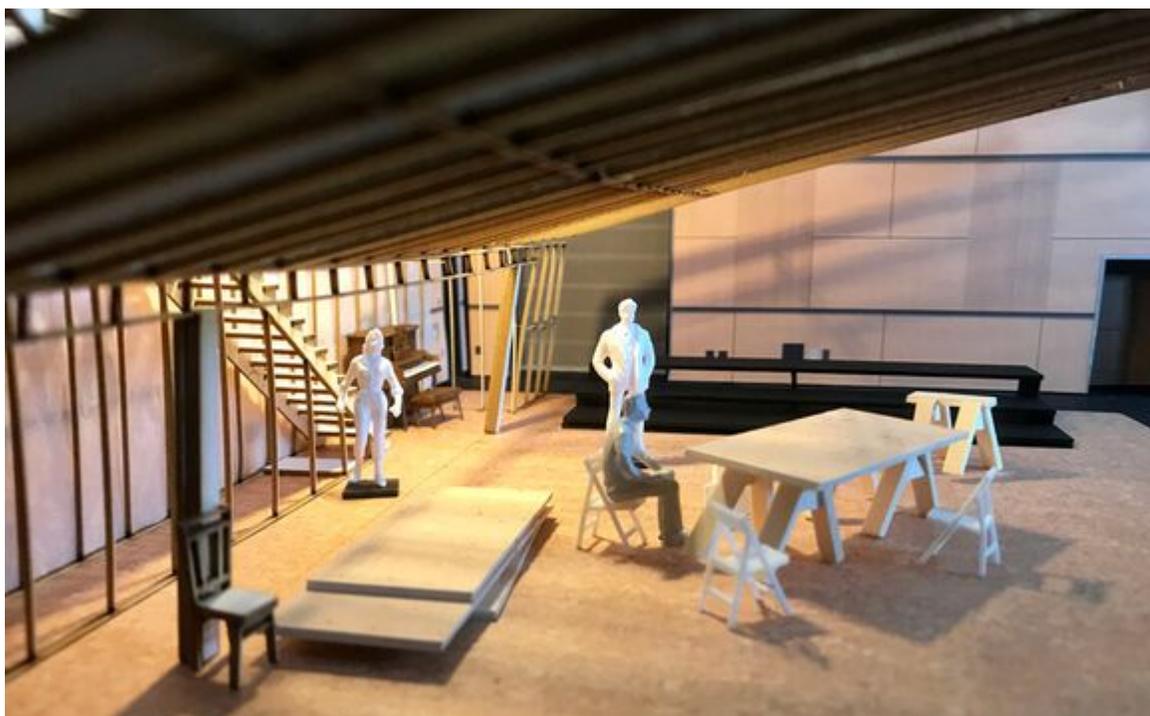
RL: Why perform this play today? What do you hope audiences take away from this production?

JF: This play is so immediate. It's about making art and making theatre in a time when awful atrocities are occurring. It asks the questions "why do we do it?" and "how do we do it?". It is overwhelming to think about how immediate and relevant it is. I think there's also this notion among theatre folk that ideas about homosexuality have been explored and put onstage, but Paula Vogel has managed to get at some big questions that haven't been put onstage. This play is about immigration, homosexuality, religion, assimilation, war...but ultimately, it's about how one continues to make art and live their lives in beyond-challenging times.

I hope audiences can come in and experience this play as an emotional journey. I hope they feel something. I hope it can move beyond being a history lesson. I hope they feel the immediacy of it. It's a play that starts over a hundred years ago, but there's not a thing in this play that is purely of its time. Every single moment of this play can feel immediate and I hope audiences are excited to feel that.

DESIGNS AND RENDERINGS

Indecent transports us from a living room in Warsaw to Broadway, the great stages of Europe to Ellis Island. Take a look at how set designer Kimie Nishikawa created an imaginative, versatile canvas for this 50-year journey.



READING LIST

Other plays by Paula Vogel

The Baltimore Waltz

Civil War Christmas

Desdemona, A Play about a Handkerchief

How I Learned to Drive

The Long Christmas Ride Home

Related Reading

American Judaism: A History by Jonathan D. Sarna, Yale University Press, 2005

American Passage: The History of Ellis Island by Vincent J. Cannato, Harper, 2009

Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century by John Houchin, Cambridge University Press, 2009

The God of Vengeance by Sholem Asch, translated by Donald Margulies, Theatre Communications Group, 2004

Jews on Broadway: An Historical Survey of Performers, Playwrights, Composers, Lyricists and Producers by Stewart F. Lane, McFarland & Company, 2017

Lodz Ghetto: A Community History Told in Diaries, Journals, and Documents edited by Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides, Viking Adult, 1989

New York's Yiddish Theater: From the Bowery to Broadway by Edna Nahshon, Columbia University Press, 2016

The Passing Game: Queering Jewish American Culture by Warren Hoffman, Syracuse University Press, 2009

Discography

Indecent - Original Broadway Cast Recording, Yellow Sound Label, 2019

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WHAT ARE SHOW NOTES?

Show Notes are tailor-made audience guides that accompany every production. They allow patrons and company members to dive into each show and gain well-rounded understanding of what makes this production unique. You can find Show Notes in the lobby before each performance or online at westonplayhouse.org.



Director Jordan Fein in rehearsal with Brian Bock and Molly Carden

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