

YIVO'S TREASURES FROM THE ARCHIVES SERIES

PRESENTS

# BREACH *of* PROMISE



A YIDDISH PLAY  
IN TRANSLATION

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Located in the Center for Jewish History · 15 West 16th Street, NYC

**July 31, 2019 · 7:00pm**

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

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It's really a joy to be able to work on a Leon Kobrin play again; it's been too long. Kobrin is one of the secret treasures of the Yiddish theater, and I don't know why he hasn't yet been 'rediscovered'... except maybe the fact that his plays were popular successes, which is something posterity always seems to have an issue with.

Kobrin's plays, perhaps more than any other Yiddish playwright of his era, reflect the place and time of their creation without ideological agendas, without genre cliches, and without formulas. He called this play a comedy – and it's full of funny things – but there isn't one moment in it that's calculated to get laughs by any means other than telling the truth. (There are no comedic tropes in Kobrin's plays.) Nor is there one emotional moment in the play that is 'built up to' for the sake of giving us a climax. His plays feel like he sat watching the passing parade and scribbling down notes, then rolled everything out onto the page as it rolled by him in life. Their atmosphere of authenticity is unique in Yiddish theater.

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And just a few thoughts in passing in case you didn't know:

1) A 'boarder' was a new immigrant, typically short of funds, who rented a room or a bed in someone's apartment until he was established enough to set himself up with his own place.

2) Hardly any Jews would have joined the Czar's army voluntarily, as Bertshik did; that army was the belly of the Russian beast, and only someone coarse, uneducated, and without strong ties to his community would even have considered such a thing. There was no reason why any Jew would have patriotic feelings about Czarist Russia, which was hideously antisemitic.

3) The characters in this play live in a multilingual milieu. As Russian Jews, all would have been fluent in both Yiddish – the language of the home – and Russian – the language of 'officialdom'; the men would have had varying degrees of familiarity with Hebrew, depending on the depth of their religious education; and everyone would have been learning English.

4) Yes, a "Breach of Promise" case was a real thing.

I'd also like to say thanks to our press rep Jim Randolph, and send regards to Robin Wright, Kobrin's granddaughter. (Hope you enjoy the show, Robin!)

— Allen

# BREACH *of* PROMISE

by LEON KOBRIN

Adapted, translated, and directed by ALLEN LEWIS RICKMAN

## Characters in order of appearance

BRUKHE TSIMBEL ..... Jackie Sydney

KHAIM-ZUSE PLUKH ..... Allen Lewis Rickman

KATIE TSIMBEL ..... Yelena Shmulenson

BERTSHIK ..... Brian Morvant

ITSE TSIMBEL ..... Jeremy Lawrence

SIMON ..... Sergey Nagorny

BERNARD ..... Kevin Sebastian

A SHERRIFF / A DOCTOR / Stage Directions ..... Trav S.D.

***The play takes place on the Lower East  
Side of New York in 1913.***

***Act 1: An evening in early spring***

***Act 2: The next morning***

***Act 3 Scene 1: Four weeks later***

***Act 3 Scene 2: Six weeks later***

***Act 3 Scene 3: Two weeks later***

## ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

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**JEREMY LAWRENCE\*** (*Itse Tsimbel*) Recent TV: MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL, DICKINSON, BLACKLIST, SHADES OF BLUE. NY Theatre: TROILUS AND CRESSIDA (CSC/OregonShakespeare Fest), JEWISH KING LEAR (Metropolitan Playhouse), FIVE BY TENN. (Manhattan Theatre Club), 4 shows at the Mint Theatre. Regional: FIDDLER (Goodspeed, the MUNY), NOISES OFF (Actors Theatre of Louisville), INTO THE WOODS (Baltimore Center Stage and Westport Country Playhouse), also TARTUFFE at Westport. He is the perennial "Scrooge" for the the 2300-seat Hanover Theater in Worcester, MA. Film credits: CRITTERS. He worked with Stephen Daldry, Ron Howard and Brian DePalma. His one-man shows as Tennessee Williams and his Queer Weimar Berlin Cabaret LAVENDER SONGS have received international critical acclaim. [www.jeremylawrence.net](http://www.jeremylawrence.net)

**BRIAN MORVANT\*** (*Berchik*) Theater: SCREEN PLAY (The Flea), THE RECKLESS SEASON (Boomerang), HAMLET, THE TEMPEST (American Globe), SOMEWHERE SAFER (NYC Fringe). TV / Film: GOTHAM (FOX), BLUE BLOODS (CBS), THE DEN (IFC Midnight), DARLING (Screen Media Films), THE MIND'S EYE (RLJ Entertainment), POD (Vertical Entertainment).

**SERGEY NAGORNY** (*Simon*) is a New York-based actor and one of the founding members of the Lost & Found Project theatre company. With the Lost & Found Project, Sergey has performed around the United States, as well as abroad in Canada and Russia. Their highly acclaimed original work includes such stage productions as ДОРОГА, KNOCK, THE KING OF CHELM, OLD NEW YEAR, and the award-winning COVERS. Other theatre credits include Misha in Theatre 167's JACKSON HEIGHTS, 3AM, Yakov in STEPS Theater's ASK JOSEPH, and Mariengoff in Novi Most Theater's DANCING ON THE EDGE. On TV, Sergey can be seen in such series as THE AMERICANS, LIMITLESS, CRIMINAL MINDS: BEYOND BORDERS and MACGYVER. He will star as Igor Sikorsky in the new PBS documentary ACROSS THE PACIFIC due out in late 2019.

**KEVIN SEBASTIAN\*** (*Bernard*) NYC: THE ADDING MACHINE (Off-Broadway), WAITING FOR THE BUS (American Globe Best Actor Award), SAMARITANS OR WHERE IS SYLVIA (Best Supporting Actor nom.), THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST, COMPLETE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE ABRIDGED, INTERMEZZO (NYC Opera at Lincoln Center), ROLLO'S WILD OAT (Metropolitan Playhouse), DARK OF THE MOON, and HAMLET. Regional: R&G ARE DEAD

(Mirror Repertory), NOISES OFF (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis), DEATH OF A SALESMAN (Arkansas Repertory), SICK (NJ Repertory), THE UNDERPANTS (White Heron Theatre Co), CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE (Daily Record Award) and THE MOUSETRAP at Centenary Stage, VALHALLA (Star-Ledger nomination) at The Theater Project. Film & TV: BLUE BLOODS (CBS), MURPHY BROWN, "BULL, Netflix's FRIENDS FROM COLLEGE", Amazon's PRODUCING JULIET, SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, KILLSWITCH (Cannes), THE GRID TV pilot (NYC IFF Best Pilot Award), JOÃO, O MAESTRO (Greenwich IFF), hit web series YOU'RE THE PEST (Best Supporting Actor nom). Upcoming: ALMOST FAMILY on FOX. Honored to jump into a bit of our history, and drama. Love from your no-goodnik, @KevSebastian. L'chaim!

**YELENA SHMULENSON\*** (*Katie Tsimbel*) is perhaps best known as the icepick-wielding 'Dora' in the Coen brothers' Oscar-nominated film A SERIOUS MAN (with Mr. Rickman). Other film and TV credits: ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK ('Inmate Boyle', recurring), BLUE BLOODS, MADAME SECRETARY, THE KNICK, BOARDWALK EMPIRE (as 'Mrs. Manny Horvitz'), CHICAGO MED, Robert De Niro's THE GOOD SHEPHERD, ROMEO & JULIET IN YIDDISH, and CHINESE PUZZLE (w/Audrey Tautou). Stage credits include THE GOLEM OF HAVANA (LaMama/Miami New Drama), THE ESSENCE: A YIDDISH THEATER DIM SUM (Fringe/tour), two seasons at the Ellis Island Theatre, COVERS, KNOCK, OLD NEW YEAR with The Lost & Found Project, TEVYE SERVED RAW (NYC) etc. She has also been a Yiddish coach/translator for numerous projects, has won three Earphones Awards for her recorded books (in English), and is fluent in five languages. Upcoming: KVETCHES OF 1932, a Yiddish vaudeville revue, with Mr. Rickman, at Centenary Stage (Hackettstown, NJ), November 14-17, 2019.

**TRAVIS STEWART** (*Sheriff/Doctor/stage directions*) Writer and performer Trav S.D. ([www.travsd.com](http://www.travsd.com)) is best known for his books NO APPLAUSE, JUST THROW MONEY: THE BOOK THAT MADE VAUDEVILLE FAMOUS (2005) and CHAIN OF FOOLS: SILENT COMEDY AND ITS LEGACIES FROM NICKELODEONS TO YOUTUBE (2013). He has written for the NY Times, the Village Voice, American Theatre, Time Out NY, Reason, the Villager and numerous other publications. Trav has been in the vanguard of New York's vaudeville and burlesque scenes since 1995, when he launched his company Mountebanks, presenting hundreds of acts ranging from Todd Robbins to Dirty Martini to Tammy Faye Starlite to the Flying Karamazov Brothers. He has directed his own plays, revues and solo pieces at such venues as Joe's Pub, La Mama, HERE, Dixon Place, Theater for the New City, the Ohio Theatre, the Brick, and 6 separate shows in the NY International Fringe Festival. In 2014 he produced and directed the smash hit

"I'LL SAY SHE IS, the first ever revival of the Marx Brothers hit 1924 Broadway show in the NY International Fringe Festival.

**JACQUELINE SYDNEY\*** (Brukhe Tsimbel) Theatre: Halley Feiffer's A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY UNIT... (MCC) Other stage credits: DEAR HARVEY (NY Fringe – Best Ensemble Winner), THE KITCHEN TABLE (NYIT Award Best Supporting Actress Nominee), and work with TOSOS, Astoria Perf Arts Center, NY Fringe, Planet Connections, Target Margin among years of others. Film: this April she was nominated for Best Female Actor for her leading role in the feature PAMELA at Queens World Film Festival where it won Best First Feature and the film is an official selection (and won awards) at many other festivals. Other recent film and TV: THE PRESIDENT SHOW (Comedy Central), SEVEN SECONDS (Netflix), ELEANOR, FILMIC ACHIEVEMENT, and lots of others. Jacqueline is thrilled to be working at YIVO for the third time with Allen and his theatre mishpokha. [www.jacquelinesydney.com](http://www.jacquelinesydney.com)

**ALLEN LEWIS RICKMAN** (*Director/Translator-Adapter/Khayim-Zuse*) is a director, writer, translator, and actor, with extensive credits both in English and Yiddish.

Acting credits include the Coen brothers' Oscar-nominated A SERIOUS MAN (with his wife Yelena Shmulenson), Barry Levinson's YOU DON'T KNOW JACK (with Al Pacino), John Turturro's FADING GIGOLO (with Woody Allen), THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL (as Red Skelton), recurring roles on BOARDWALK EMPIRE and Steven Spielberg's PUBLIC MORALS, and RELATIVELY SPEAKING on Broadway (with Marlo Thomas); and he has worked extensively Off Broadway, in regional theatre, and in Yiddish theatre.

His play TEVYE SERVED RAW ("authentic Sholem Aleichem performed by authentic Yiddish-speaking actors") played to rapturous reviews Off-Broadway; a selection from it was recently presented at Carnegie Hall. He co-adapted and directed the Drama Desk-nominated Yiddish PIRATES OF PENZANCE, and two other plays each for the Folksbiene and New Yiddish Rep. He directed his original musical CHRISTMAS AT THE SMALL EMPIRE for Centenary Stage; other plays he's written have been produced in France, Denmark, Spain, Luxembourg, Sweden, Romania, and the U.S. His co-authored farce OFF THE HOOK was published in French in L'Avant-Scene Theatre, and his revue THE ESSENCE: A YIDDISH THEATER DIM SUM has toured widely and was published in the anthology "Yiddishkeit", edited by the late Harvey Pekar.

This is his third translation for the Treasures From the Archives series, following readings at YIVO of MONEY, LOVE, AND SHAME! (also produced by the Target

Margin company) and Paula Prilutski's ONE OF THOSE. His subtitle translations for nine classic Yiddish films were recently screened at Film Forum and will be released on home video by Kino/Lorber.

*\* Member, Actors' Equity Association*

**LEON KOBRIN** (*playwright*) Born on March 15, 1873 in Vitebsk, Leon Kobrin emigrated to the United States, settling initially in Philadelphia. He worked as a shirt-maker, cigar maker, and baker in Philadelphia and rural Pennsylvania, and subsequently moved to New York City. Before his emigration Kobrin wrote in Russian, but in the United States Kobrin became devoted to writing in Yiddish. Kobrin worked as a journalist, translator and writer. As a journalist, Kobrin was a staff writer at *Der tog*, and also a contributing writer to *Der forverts*, *Tsukunft*, *Varhayt*, and *Morgn frayhayt*. Kobrin published his first novel in 1898, and wrote short stories and around 30 plays. As a playwright he was known as a disciple of Jacob Gordin however his own work was more realistic and less polemical. His plays were very successful in their time featuring many of the leading actors of the New York Yiddish stage including Jacob P. Adler, David Kessler, Boris Thomashefsky, Bertha Kalich, Maurice Schwartz, Paul Muni, and Stella Adler. In addition to his many performances in NYC, Kobrin's work was produced around the world including by the Moscow Art Theater in Russia and Habima in Palestine. Kobrin died at the age of 73, on March 31, 1946 in New York. In an obituary on April 1, 1946, *The New York Times* noted as "a pioneer in American-Yiddish literary movement [Kobrin] did much to raise the Yiddish stage from its burlesque and vaudeville standards."

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