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## **It's So Chewish! Jewish Women's Theatre Explores Special Connection between Food and Jewish Life**

*The Matzo Ball Diaries*, a New Salon Theatre Show with Performances across the Southland,  
A Tasteful Exhibit and A Famous Cookbook Author  
Will All Celebrate this Unique Cultural Culinary Connection



by Marilee Tolwin

*"They tried to kill us, we won, now let's eat"*  
Famous joke

Santa Monica, CA (January 5, 2017) Ask any Jewish man, woman or child to describe a favorite memory and the response will likely to be a story about family, friends and food. The sights, sounds, and smells all have special meaning, but it is memories of the tastes that bring the most smiles.

Food and Jewish life have been inseparable throughout history. The Old Testament says the Israelites celebrated their newfound freedom from the Pharaoh with a communal meal of roast lamb and herbs. Even since then, Jewish people and food have been linked symbolically and socially. "Ess my kind" is a universal anthem.

Jewish Women's Theatre (JWT) is honoring this cultural culinary connection through three different art forms during January and February. "JWT will use theatre, art and literature to

explore the special meanings that Jewish people give to food,” said Ronda Spinak, JWT’s artistic director. “Writers, actors, painters, sculptors and a master chef will all contribute to our month-long celebration of the meaning of food in Jewish lives. After all, we’re JWT and food is just so Jewish,” she joked.

### **JWT At-Home – Salon Theatre Series January 21-31(Various locations)**

Beginning January 21, 11 salon-style theatre performances of *The Matzo Ball Diaries* will take place at homes and unique venues in the South Bay, Westside, Valley, Beverly Hills/Hancock Park, and Fairfax area. The stories, performed by a cast of professional actors, will feature original works by an international cast of writers sharing personal histories about the meaning of food in their lives.

The stories range from a reminiscence of childhood obesity caused by over indulgence in the dreaded K foods (kreplach, kishka, knishes); to Jewish struggles with anorexia; to cultural glimpses into Iranian chicken pluckers and the etiquette of accepting pistachio treats; to making one last tomato omelet before leaving a lover; to the fascinating story of how the International House of Pancakes was started.

Participating writers include:

**Shelly Goldstein** has written for every genre of TV, film and stage. Her one-woman shows played to sell-out crowds throughout the US and UK where she co-starred with Sir Derek Jacobi and Vanessa Redgrave. She has written or punched-up sitcoms, dramas, films, award shows, documentaries, and special material for such artists as Barbra Streisand and Steven Spielberg.

**Ron Wolfson** is the Fingerhut Professor of Education at LA’s American Jewish University, where he has been on the faculty for forty years. He is the author of 14 books on Jewish life, including *Shabbat, Passover, Hanukkah, God's To-Do List, The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven, Relational Judaism*, and a memoir, *The Best Boy in the United States of America*.

**Esther Amini** is an author and a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. Her writings have appeared in *Elle Magazine, Tablet, The Jewish Week, Barnard Magazine, InscapeLiterary Magazine*, and *Lilith*. Two of her stories were staged at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan in a JWT show entitled *Saffron and Rosewater*, and the Bowery Art and Science Center in Manhattan.

**Barbara Bottner** writes for adults and kids. Some of her more than 40 books for children and teenagers have garnered national awards and appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Jim Henson sang her lyrics. She’s also written for children’s television, *Cosmopolitan, Playgirl, LAWEEKLY, The Miami Herald*, and *New York Times*.

**Farideh Goldin** was born in Shiraz, Iran. She immigrated to the US in 1975 in search of her imagined America. While she uneasily settled into American life, political unrest in Iran intensified and in February of 1979, her family was forced to flee Iran on the last El-Al flight to Tel Aviv. In her books, essays and scholarly articles, she explores issues of identity in her life and the lives of Iranian women writers.

**Albert Kallis** is one of the founders of IHOP, International House of Pancakes. A professional illustrator and art director, Kallis' clients included Universal Pictures, 20th Century Fox, and Capitol Records. As a documentary filmmaker, Kallis produced numerous foundation films and he is a founding member of the Los Angeles Children's Museum, among other charitable organizations.

For tickets and additional information about the poignant, hilarious and thought provoking *The Matzo Ball Diaries*, visit [www.jewishwomenstheatre.org](http://www.jewishwomenstheatre.org)

### **New Art Gallery Show: *Nourishing Tradition*, January 21 – March 5, 2017**

JWT's new art gallery show, entitled *Nourishing Tradition*, will feature paintings and sculptural assemblies by eight well-known local artists. *Nourishing Tradition* will open at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 21, the same night as the first performance of "The Matzo Ball Diaries." At 7 p.m. featured artists will discuss their work. The artists will participate in an informative Art Talk on January 30 and 31 at 6:30, preceding an 7:30 p.m. performance of *The Matzo Ball Diaries*. Visit [www.jewishwomenstheatre.org](http://www.jewishwomenstheatre.org) for tickets and more information.

"We put out a call to the West Coast art community to locate both serious and whimsical pieces that reflect Jewish connections to food and how they nourish the body, the mind and the soul," explains gallery director Marilee Tolwin. "Our show will give viewers an inside look at how each artist uses food to convey emotion and to connect food to Jewish tradition and community."

Participating artists include:

**Harriette Estel Berman**—For nearly three decades, Harriette Berman has made it her sacred mission to create work that addresses cultural issues and political hot buttons. Her 1982 mixed media sculpture "Toast to the Bride" was fabricated from sheet and wire to look like a manufactured domestic appliance as a social commentary on the roles of women and the value and influence of consumer goods in our society. The piece is highlighted through a time travel video.

**Judy Dekel**—Tarzana printmaker Judy Dekel studied at the University of Judaism, UCLA and Haifa University where she explored Fine Art Printmaking, Etching, Lithography and Silk Screen. With the advent of digital photography, she now incorporates visual ideas into her work. Her 2015 watercolor "Abundance" will display how she was influenced by the forms, shapes and colors in nature. She has participated in numerous juried shows in Israel, Asia, and throughout the greater Los Angeles area.

**Benny Ferdman**—A visual artist and educator, Benny Ferdman reclaims and reworks cultural and historical iconography inspired by ancient Jewish manuscripts and rare photographs of now-destroyed wooden synagogues. He is the recipient of a Milken Jewish Educators Award for his work as founding faculty and Arts Director at deToledo High School (formerly New Community Jewish High School). He has studied diverse cultures and is creating a work for *Nourishing Tradition*, inspired by his mother and yiddishkeit.

**Harriet Glaser** – Although she became a serious artist in her 50's, Jewish tradition has always been a focal point of Glaser's life so it was natural for her themes to center on Judaica. She initially worked in watercolors, then studied oil painting under Regina Lyubovnaya where she learned chiaroscuro, using light as it flows through the painting. She found the early Dutch Masters' style to be a perfect medium to match the glow of her rich Jewish heritage.

**Betty Green** – Mixed media painter and Emmy Award-winning designer Betty Green is a familiar face to museum and gallery visitors throughout California. She attended Cornell and UCLA, where she studied under the tutelage of Richard Diebenkorn and Tony Berlant. She is the recipient of an International CLIO and received the "City of Los Angeles Certificate of Tribute" for exemplary contributions in the arts. Her *Pear Fantasy* mixed media painting on canvas will be on display during *Nourishing Tradition*.

**Marleene Rubenstein**-- *Milk and Honey*, Rubenstein's mixed media sculpture, tells the story of the importance of continuing the cycle of Torah reading each year. Even during the darkest days of the Warsaw ghetto, the Jewish people honored the Torah by dancing with their children. She uses pre-WWII photographs of European children in her sculpture to send messages of survival, mourning and memorial to those she never knew. For her, the Torah is an eternal source of nourishment

**Penny Wolin**—Since photographing rodeos as a teen in her native Wyoming, Wolin has been creating wry and insightful documentary portraits. Her work has been featured in the Smithsonian Institution and she has received grants from National Endowment for the Arts, among others. Her new book, *American Photographers of Jewish Ancestry: A Visual and Verbal Dialogue with Jewish America* was featured at JWT this year and her "Pastrami and Cheese on Kosher Rye," is featured in *Nourishing Tradition*.

**Marilee Tolwin** – Director of Gallery@The Braid, Tolwin finds that painting allows her to connect more deeply to Judaism. Her work displays Jewish ideas and rituals through a contemporary lens. Many times, Hebrew text obscures images in her paintings, thus helping her to connect to her ancestors through her art. She is a frequent participant in group exhibits and the resident artist at Jewish Women's Theatre.

Visit [www.jewishwomenstheatre.org](http://www.jewishwomenstheatre.org) for gallery hours, tickets and more information.

**Bagels & Bestsellers: Special Edition at the Skirball Cultural Center with Judy Zeidler, January 29, 10:30 a.m.**

The popular Bagels & Bestsellers program is going on the road this month with the delicious Judy Zeidler, who will discuss her culinary journey from gourmet Jewish cooking, through kosher recipes, with a few international stops and featuring her latest publication, *Ciao Italy*. The brunch will take place on Sunday, January 29, 2017, 10:30 a.m. at the Skirball Cultural Center.

The cost is \$45 and will include a copy of the yummy book along with a light brunch, an author talk, a cooking demonstration and a chance to sample her famous biscotti, free parking and all-day admission to the Skirball Cultural Center.

LA's Zeidler is the author of the widely acclaimed *The Gourmet Jewish Cook* and *Judy Zeidler's International Deli Cookbook, 30-Minute Kosher Cook* and *Master Chefs Cook Kosher*, which is based on her syndicated television show *Judy's Kitchen*.

She has also co-authored a cookbook with French chef Michel Richard, *Home Cooking with a French Accent*.

Judy and her husband are founders of the popular Citrus restaurant in Los Angeles, the Broadway Deli, Capo, Cora's, and the Brass Cap in Santa Monica; and Brentwood Restaurant in Brentwood. She is also consulting at the Zeidler's Cafe, which is located in the Skirball Cultural Center.

Los Angeles readers look forward to Zeidler's Jewish holiday articles which appear in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Jewish Journal*. Her potato latke recipe has won a Los Angeles Times Best Recipe Award. She is often a guest on national television and radio programs and is on the board of several food and wine societies.

Zeidler believes that the shared enjoyment of food and wine is one of the most fulfilling elements in life and that cooking and entertaining should be fun. Through her cooking classes she inspires her students to cook and entertain at home. She is never too busy to open her kitchen, and to donate cooking classes to benefit charitable organizations.

For tickets and additional information, visit [www.jewishwomenstheatre.org](http://www.jewishwomenstheatre.org)

JWT provides a home for the diverse and eclectic community of artists and creators who comprise L.A.'s Jewish community. Both at its home in The Braid theatre and art gallery in Santa Monica's Bergamot Arts District, in intimate salons throughout the city, and on tour throughout the country, JWT stages and displays traditional and contemporary works that provide a forum for the development, performance and showcasing of Jewish talent. Visit [www.jewishwomenstheatre.org](http://www.jewishwomenstheatre.org) for tickets and more information.

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