

## Emerging Artists Create Surprising New “Homes” for Original Theatre

**While Finding Their Own Creative Home, Emerging Artists Perform Theatre  
In a Thrift Store and Other Meaningful Venues**



Santa Monica (May 21, 2019) What’s NEXT? It’s the name of a group of emerging artists who will create theatre in a thrift shop in Studio City, a fabric store in Venice, a downtown art gallery and five other LA venues from June 8 to 18. Eight productions of *The Way Home*, NEXT’s original salon-style show, will travel throughout the city to showcase a new generation of emerging artists who create theatre that speaks to all generations.

NEXT, now in its third year, is a professional development fellowship program from Jewish Women’s Theatre (JWT). Each year, a group of emerging artists are selected from a competitive applicant pool. The fellows then select a theme and invite the Los Angeles community to submit stories, poems, plays, musical works and art around that theme. NEXT fellows then collaborate to curate, cast, direct, and produce an original show and companion art exhibit over a nine-month period.

This year's theme, captured by the title *The Way Home*, was assembled from the best of over 80 story submissions from aspiring and professional writers who were asked to theatrically explore what 'home' means to them.

Tickets for *The Way Home* are \$18 and may be purchased at [bit.ly/wayhometix](http://bit.ly/wayhometix). Performances will take place in downtown LA, Santa Monica, Reseda, Fairfax/Melrose, Venice, Studio City and Silverlake. The Santa Monica performances on Sunday, June 9 and Saturday, June 15 will be at The Braid, JWT's art and performance space in Santa Monica, and will include opportunities to view a NEXT-curated exhibit featuring paintings, sculpture and other displays by emerging artists whose work expresses *The Way Home* theme.

"This year's show is all about finding our sense of belonging in the world," explains Andrew Fromer, an alumnus of the program who now serves as NEXT's Executive Producer and JWT's Assistant Artistic Director. "We wanted to examine the meaning of home. Is home a place? Is it a feeling? Our show explores the intriguing idea of 'home' and the importance of community."

Daphna Shull, another program alumna and now NEXT's Literary Manager, adds a second meaning to the theme. "*The Way Home* also honors the creative 'home' that JWT established when it created NEXT for emerging theatre professionals. In a large entertainment town like Los Angeles, it's priceless to have a supportive community and place for budding artists to work together to gain hands-on training and experience. Here, my peers are my confidantes and creative collaborators, which is extremely refreshing."

NEXT fellows learn and build on JWT's unique salon theatre model. "Our aim with *The Way Home* is to bring affordable and original live theatre to a wide array of residents throughout our city," said Ora Yashar, a member of this year's NEXT cohort. "We hope to especially excite and engage younger audiences who may not necessarily be avid theatre goers. The salon style theatre implemented within JWT's unique format allows our shows to travel to unexpected community venues from thrift stores to art galleries, because we tell stories without costumes, props or sets. Therefore, it's easy to transform each venue into a magical new home for theatre."

Ronda Spinak, JWT's Artistic Director elaborates, "For example, we're going to the National Council of Jewish Women's Thrift Store in Studio City on June 16. Before the show, we are giving audience members a 10% discount. This promotion echoes the theme of *The Way Home* because our program will help give thrift shop clothes a new home. On June 13, we'll be in Venice, where our audience members can tour a textile shop and learn about the owners' history and how they found their way home to America."

NEXT fellows also believe the professional development they receive is making a creative difference in their work. "JWT's leadership is willing to find the balance between holding our hands and letting us go," said Fromer. "What started as very direct involvement between the mentors and the mentees, changed to 'run with what you got' and I was able to create our own marketing brand and branch out. JWT asked me what I wanted to do, then I got to do it."

"This growth and escalation of freedom and responsibility is exactly what we wanted to happen," said JWT's Artistic Director Ronda Spinak. Dr. Jonas Salk said, 'Good parents give their

children roots and wings. Roots to know where home is, wings to fly away and exercise what has been taught them.’ This was what we hoped NEXT would accomplish. And we are overjoyed that it is happening.”

In addition to professional development, NEXT also provides stipends to its seven members and compensation to its writers and cast. Generous funding from grantors also helps to ensure affordable theatrical experiences for younger audiences. *The Way Home* is supported by grants to JWT from the Department of Cultural Affairs of Los Angeles, the Y&S Nazarian Initiative, a program of The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles and the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles, the Erwin Rautenberg Foundation and generous support from individual champions like Gail Solo, a JWT board member.

“This year’s Department of Cultural Affairs Grant coupled with support from local foundations and individual donors is a shining example of what can happen when LA’s Jewish community and local government come together to support emerging artists. It changes the LA cultural arts landscape for today and tomorrow,” said Sharon Landau, JWT’s Managing Director.

“It’s been great having the opportunity to gain new skill sets while working in the arts,” adds Chandler Turk, a new NEXT fellow who was chosen this year. “NEXT has allowed us to use our voices to come together to create a remarkable new show.”

Nearly 2,000 L.A. residents have been able to see NEXT productions thus far. “Arts make us better people,” Fromer states. “It allows us to have conversations that need to be had. It allows us to amplify voices that need to be heard. Funding for the arts provides opportunities to hear younger voices that can go off into the future and do the same for the next generation -- *L’dor, V’dor.*”

This year’s NEXT Fellows are Judith Goldstein, Julie Lanctot, Kyra Morling, Arnon Z. Shorr, Chandler Turk, Aysha Wax and Ora Yashar.

Tickets for *The Way Home* are \$18 and may be purchased at [bit.ly/wayhometix](http://bit.ly/wayhometix). The website also lists performance dates for venues throughout the Los Angeles area. The Santa Monica performances on Sunday, June 9 and Saturday, June 15 will take place at The Braid, JWT’s art and performance space, and will include opportunities to view a NEXT Council-curated exhibit featuring art on the same theme of *The Way Home*, by emerging artists.

JWT’s The Braid, voted one of the “Best Live Theatres on the Westside” two years in a row by *The Argonaut*, stages original dramatic performances, contemporary art exhibits, classes, and other events showcasing the diverse community of writers, artists and creators who celebrate Jewish life, one story at a time.

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## **Calendar Listing**

### ***The Way Home* by Emerging Theater Artists Will Travel Throughout LA in June**

What is the meaning of home? Is it a place or a sense of belonging? Is it a building or a feeling of community that can comfort and connect people anywhere? NEXT, Jewish Women's Theatre's professional development program for emerging Jewish theatre professionals, will explore this question in *The Way Home*, an original new show that will travel throughout the city from June 8 to 18. *The Way Home* will be performed in a thrift shop in Studio City, a fabric store in Venice, a downtown art gallery and five other L.A. venues. For a full schedule, and to purchase \$18 tickets, visit [bit.ly/wayhometix](http://bit.ly/wayhometix).