Complex and Complicated Stories About Family to Be Explored with Love and Tears in The Braid's New Salon Show

New Stories, Song, and Film to Highlight Newest Zoom Show from The Braid (formerly Jewish Women's Theatre)

Jasmine Curry and Rick Zieff

Virtually Everywhere (February 16, 2021) "Family is not an important thing. It's everything," actor and health activist Michael J. Fox has said. His words provide a fitting introduction to *Family Matters*, a brand-new salon show from The Braid, formerly Jewish Women's Theatre, opening on March 6 and available to audiences across the globe, live on Zoom.

In this time of COVID, when everyone thinks about the health of their loved ones from morning to bedtime, our families are on our minds perhaps like never before. The original stories and songs that have been assembled by both new and experienced writers to form The Braid's new salon show *Family Matters* reveal the complex and complicated relationships that come together to make up the loaded word "family."

"An unknown poet once wrote, 'Families are like branches in a tree. We grow in different directions, yet our roots remain one,'" observes Ronda Spinak, The Braid's artistic director. "The creative, personal, and revealing stories we have selected for our new salon show how our roots do indeed bind us, but how we all struggle to develop and strengthen ourselves because of or in spite of them."

Family Matters will be performed live on Zoom at 8 p.m. PST on March 6 and 7:30 p.m. on March 11 and 15 plus a matinee on Sunday, March 7, at 11 a.m. PST. Tickets and additional information are available at: www.the-braid.org.

The Braid's virtual audiences at the performances will be given an abundance of theatrical riches, a few centering on health and well-being. They will meet the sister of identical twin physicians, who are both hospitalized with COVID and who are serenaded online by 32 of their family members from across the country, who've gathered to sing *Mi Shebeirach,* the Hebrew prayer for healing. Then there's a daughter who calls her elderly father 3000 miles away, just because she "felt" that he was having a health crisis. He was, and that feeling of hers probably saved his life.

Judaism and its lifelong penetration of our minds and souls forms another theme. One writer who hasn't seen her mother for ten years visits her only to find that she is an addict—but still a Jew, as she pays off her dealer at least in part with something "very Jewish." A rabbi whose father, a former Marine war hero who was captured by the Japanese during World War II and who abandoned him when he was young, finally understands desertion when he invites another vet to speak to his congregation.

There is a story of a young woman who is shocked to learn she was adopted as she was cleaning up her parents' papers after they died. This discovery led to crucial information and the feeling that her birth parents were trying to tell her something that would save her life.

Two other non-Jewish writers tell their stories too. One explains how the Jewish families of his partner tell him to eat more and dress more warmly. Another, an immigrant from India who attended Jewish nursery school because it was the only full-time child care available, marries a Jewish man and truly finds home. And another mother finds out how her son's different lifestyle leads to his happiness.

The show features four of The Braid's most talented and compelling actors, who are all among The Braid's favorites: writer-actress-singer-comic Shelly Goldstein, who is also writing a new story for the show; Emmy award nominee Rick Zieff, who specializes in portraying "the Jewish experience" and voicing dogs; Jasmine Curry, who often appears in improv and sketch comedy shows with groups such as The Groundlings; and actress Kate Zentall, who has appeared in scores of television shows, such as *Picket Fences* and *Cheers.*

For the first time the performance will also feature a short film in which the company of Braid actors tell favorite stories about their own families.

The theme of *Family Matters* will also be explored in a complementary Zoom art talk, *Family Matters: Ritual and Memory,* with LA conceptual artist Marleene Rubenstein on March 7 at 4 p.m. PST. Her distinctive creations, which bridge the intangible past to the present, will be displayed, along with a discussion of her themes and techniques.

This art show is free, but The Braid hopes you will consider making a donation so we can continue our work as America's go-to Jewish story company and the leading national nonprofit organization for creating, curating, producing, and preserving Jewish culture and experience.

The Braid (formerly Jewish Women's Theatre), welcomes new members to be part of its family. It is also the 2020 winner of *The Argonaut's* Best of the Westside's "Best Live Theatre Award"and *The Santa Monica Daily Press* award for "Most Loved" in the live theatre category. Its performances present inspiring Jewish stories, art, and other programming that highlight Jewish contributions to contemporary life. Now in its 13th (bat mitzvah) season, The Braid's salon theatre of original dramatic works, each written to a specific theme, displays the diverse and eclectic community of writers, artists, and creators who celebrate Jewish life, one story at a time. Learn more about The Braid at: www.the-braid.org

For tickets and additional information about *Family Matters* and the Art Talk with Marleene Rubenstein, visit: www.the-braid.org.

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