What Happens When the Old South Meets an Even Older Tradition?

Sweet Tea & the Southern Jew, a New Salon Show from The Braid, Reveals What It Means to Have Complex, Dual Identities

left to right: Nathan Bock, Heidi Mendez, Kimberly Green

Santa Monica (Dec. 23, 2021) Stories come alive at the crossroads of cultures in the new storytelling theater experience, *Sweet Tea & the Southern Jew.* As the go-to Jewish story company, The Braid is excited to present authentic true tales about the complex challenges Southern Jews face as they navigate a life filled with both Judaism and Dixie. Vividly dramatized by a cast of professional actors, performances of these curated stories will be held *in person* in locations across the Los Angeles area January 10–23 (including four host synagogues) and live on Zoom for the whole world.

This is just part of The Braid's month-long celebration of Southern Jews, which also features an interview with famed character actress Caroline Aaron, who currently plays Midge Maisel's mother-in-law in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.* She'll be interviewed by author Lisa Rosenbaum for *Sunday Morning with The Braid* at 11 a.m. PT on January 16 to discuss her experiences as a Jew growing up in the American South. Also in January, there will be a special curated art show on Zoom with the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in New Orleans. Exhibits at the museum tell the stories of Jewish immigrants who came to the South seeking religious freedom, economic opportunity, and even adventure.

Sweet Tea & the Southern Jew is the first of four world-premiere storytelling theater experiences that will form The Braid's 2022 season. Subscribe to all of them for $140 and get benefits like behind-the-scenes access. Or see three for $125. *Sunday Morning with the Braid* is free to attend, but The Braid hopes you will consider choosing a virtual ticket. To purchase tickets to all Braid events and for more information, visit the-braid.org

"We toured the South in November of 2019 and were amazed at how the Jews there responded to our shows," recalls artistic director Ronda Spinak. "They may have different accents and flavor their food in a special and wonderful manner, but let me tell you, we always felt like part of the tribe. But as I heard their stories, I realized they also had a unique and fascinating Jewish experience. Many are multi-generational Southerners when so many of our LA-area patrons are

New York transplants or children of immigrants. They're as much Southerners as they are Jews, and a remarkable blend of both. Immediately, we knew we simply had to brighten our stages with these captivating Jewish American perspectives."

Sweet Tea audiences will be inspired by a powerful true tale written by Caroline Aaron of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.* She describes how her mother was not satisfied with an existence of "starched dresses, white gloves, and mandatory 'yes ma'ams and no sirs,' but as a widow raising three children, Aaron's mother fought tirelessly against all odds to integrate a deeply segregated Richmond.

They'll also be moved to tears by playwright Izzy Salant's gripping recollection of how his Maryland community responded in the wake of his mother's suicide. For a ten-year-old boy, such a loss could be utterly destructive. But not if Izzy's Jewish and non-Jewish classmates could help it. Their Southern hospitality sparked them to rise against the darkness of the moment.

And audiences will be on the edge of their seats when two young women driving to Miami find themselves stranded in the middle of the Florida wilderness. Writer Sophia Fischer recounts how a mysterious blond man in cowboy boots shows up, causing them to initially fear for their lives. But what happens instead leaves both women utterly astonished.

In addition to those described above, *Sweet Tea & the Southern Jew* will feature stories by Melissa Fay Greene, Lisa Jacobson, William E. Israel, Suzy Stein and Fernando Perez, Marissa Tiamfook Gee, and Rabbi Deborah Silver. They will be performed by actors Nathan Bock, Roni Geva, Kimberly Green, and Heidi Mendez.

The Braid won *The Argonaut's* Best of the Westside's "Best Live Theatre Award" in 2020 and was an Audience Recommended winner this year. The non-profit theatre also won *The Santa Monica Daily Press* award for "Most Loved" performance. In 2021, it was honored to present *Stories from the Violins of Hope* with the United Nations Programme on Holocaust Remembrance. The Braid presents inspiring Jewish stories, art talks, and other programming that highlight Jewish contributions to contemporary life. Now in its 14th season, The Braid's Salon theatre of original dramatic shows, 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.

Contact: Maureen Rubin, maureen@the-braid.org or call 310-433-0326 to arrange interviews or additional information.