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Notes from editor (not for publication):

—I did a search for some examples of performers because I was curious. Happy to swap in or add others if you prefer.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Oy, what a show!

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####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 A zany homage to the Borscht Belt vaudeville of
3 yesteryear comes to Brattleboro

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4 TEXT BODY:

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5 On Saturday, June 27, in the Vermont Jazz Center (VJC)
6 space, Kinetic Theory Theatre will present “A Bissel Borscht Belt:
7 a Yiddish Vaudeville Extravaganza,” promising, according to a
8 press release, to bring “you back to a simpler place and time” in
9 “a fun-filled tribute to the Catskills’ variety shows of yesteryear
10 that truly shaped modern American entertainment.”

11 Under the direction of Stephanie Bass Abrams, Kinetic
12 Theory Theatre, creating experimental theater and circus
13 productions since 2001, had produced numerous shows in San
14 Francisco and Los Angeles before relocating to Brattleboro.
15 Moreover, the award-winning circus-theater company has created
16 and presented more than 30 original productions to audiences
17 around the U.S. and in China.

18 For this event, Abrams goes back to an era when
19 Grossinger's and other resorts in New York's Catskill Mountains
20 presented what might be called "variety shows" today but were,
21 in fact, vaudeville — one of American theater history's most vivid
22 forms of popular entertainment.

23 Having emerged in the 1870s, vaudeville thrived
24 throughout the U.S. for several decades before it was eclipsed by
25 the advent of cinema, but Abrams points out that "vaudeville
26 variety shows continued in the Catskills (Borscht Belt) and were a
27 big draw for the resorts through the 1960s."

28 The Borscht Belt style "began as a segregated circuit
29 featuring Jewish immigrants performing for Jewish communities
30 primarily in New York's Lower East Side," Abrams says. The
31 performers later migrated north to the Catskills, where one could
32 find accommodations suited to a range of income levels, a sporty
33 atmosphere, and an abundance of entertainment, including some
34 of the best-known and rising entertainers of the time, including
35 George Burns, Milton Berle, and Joan Rivers.

36 The Brattleboro show will feature Abrams herself, an
37 award-winning mime/director, and her husband, Patrick
38 Branstetter, formerly of Blue Man Group. They'll be joined by
39 other acts, including acclaimed hand-balancer/contortionist
40 Flecky Flanco of Greensboro; the Flying Lin-Bianco Brothers,
41 based in Las Vegas and San Francisco; and Diavolo, a dance
42 theater group; and the western Massachusetts-based Klezmer
43 Kapelye featuring Rachel Leader (violin), Ariel Shapiro
44 (accordion), and Ozzy Gold-Shapiro (vocals/ukulele).

45 The show, the release states, is filled with “live Klezmer
46 music, dancing, comedy, juggling, acrobatics, Yiddish language
47 and culture, schtick, spiel, kvetching, and cursing [that] will have
48 you kibitzing, kvelling, and getting verklempt from all the
49 meshuggaas!”

50 Abrams says it will be “interactive,” telling *The*
51 *Commons* that there will be “audience participation bits as well
52 as music set by the band after the show when dancing is
53 encouraged.”

54 “It’s not about like you come and sit there and just watch
55 the show,” she adds. “You really are able to get involved both
56 physically and verbally.”

57 Abrams says she has a rule that heckling is allowed only
58 in Yiddish. “Okay. So you better be a fluent speaker if you’re
59 gonna heckle,” she says.

60 “But,” she adds with a chuckle, “I’m not a fluent
61 speaker.

62 **Capturing the vibe for today’s** 63 **audiences**

64 “I’ve done many vaudeville shows, but I have always sort
65 of snuck in the Jewish and Yiddish humor,” Abrams says, “but this
66 is the first time I’m doing a full-themed show that’s Yiddish
67 vaudeville.”

68 Aiming for historical accuracy, Abrams’ research led to
69 the discovery that in the actual Borscht Belt comedy and in
70 vintage vaudeville, the “jokes are really offensive by today’s
71 standard.” She quickly realized, “We can’t say any of this, even in
72 Yiddish. The Yiddish speakers will be upset.”

73 So she has “tailored the comedy to capture that vibe, but
74 still make it appropriate for modern audiences.”

75 Her research has also found ironies around, for example,
76 how women were a notch below men in the hierarchy, yet in

77 vaudeville, they became stars for their innovation, daring, and
78 quirky characters — sometimes played in drag.

79 The band is “really excited about this project,” she adds,
80 and “to play more Yiddish pop of the 1950s, not just klezmer,”
81 which is “a big part of the culture, granted, but not all there is in
82 popular Yiddish music.

83 “Even within the Yiddish arts world,” Abrams says,
84 people “forget there’s theater, there’s literature, there’re other art
85 forms within this realm of Yiddish and Jewish culture. So this isn’t
86 just klezmer music, it’s klezmer mixed with this very specifically
87 Borscht Belt-style.”

88 Musical comedy, too, is “tied in and integrated into this
89 show,” she says.

90 The comedy and physical theater in the June 27 show are
91 offered primarily by Abrams and Branstetter, now a piano tuner,
92 whom she met in the circus. “I’ve gotten him back involved
93 ’cause I was like, ‘This has to be a family affair, you know: That’s
94 a tradition.’”

95 Other acts will feature tap dancing, acrobatics with
96 integrated dance, juggling, barrel contortion, and hand
97 balancing.

98 The show, Abrams explains, “is also designed so that the
99 acts can easily interchange based on availability of artists. If we
100 go up to Burlington or if we go across the country, we can plug
101 local artists into the show for the variety acts. The format stays the
102 same. And some of the comedy bits are built in, but the rest of it
103 is very interchangeable.”

104 That, she says, is the concept of vaudeville: “You can see
105 something different all the time.”

106 Co-sponsored by the Brattleboro Area Jewish
107 Community, Abrams’ project received seed money through a
108 grant from the Yiddish Book Center, part of the Yiddish Arts and
109 Culture Initiative for Jewish Communities, based in Amherst,
110 Massachusetts.

111 Jewish Communities of Vermont has been supportive, as
112 has the VJC, to the extent that all donations taken at the door can
113 go directly to the performing artists, Abrams explains.

114 And she adds: “even though it has the Jewish culture
115 element, it’s not just for Jewish audiences. No, no. It’s
116 vaudeville!”

117 “Feel free to dress up and wear some vintage,” Abrams
118 urges. “Grab your 1950s Catskills outfit, OK?”

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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119 The show is at the Vermont Jazz Center, 72 Cotton Mill
120 Hill #222, in Brattleboro on Saturday, June 27, at 7:30 p.m.
121 Admission by donation (\$5 to \$10 suggested; cash or Venmo only
122 at the door). For more information, visit kinetictheorytheatre.com.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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