CHAI LIFE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS:

THE LAST YIDDISH SPEAKER

by Deborah Zoe Laufer

Directed by Zelda Dean

Performances:
May 20, 24, 30 & 31
June 6–7 — 7 PM

Temple B'Nai Tikvah
900 47 Ave. S.W.

Tickets at
ChaiLifeyyc.ca

FOUNDERS' REMARKS

Thank you for being here. Your presence at Chai Life Productions' second show means more to us than we can express.

Chai Life was founded with a simple but urgent mission: to uplift Jewish creators, Jewish stories, and Jewish causes through art. Our first production, *Joseph*, explored Jewish narrative. *The Last Yiddish Speaker*, by Deborah Zoe Laufer, reaches even deeper—into identity, memory, and the fragile question of safety.

In a world where hate crimes are rising, where an openly anti-Israel candidate now leads New York City, and where other anti-Semitic voices found new platforms and new audiences, this play lands with a resonance we wish it didn't have.

Many in our community are asking questions we never imagined would feel relevant again: "Could I be forced to leave my home?" "Who would stand with me?" "How do we pass on our heritage when visibility feels dangerous?" Perhaps Laufer sensed this tremor in the world long before it reached the surface.

And yet, this story is not ours alone. The play also echoes the experiences of many marginalized communities—those who have been silenced, erased, or pushed to the edges. It invites all of us to listen, to reflect, and to imagine something better.

To our extraordinary creative team—Zelda, Shula, Laura, Scott, Dorothy, Derek, Sean, Tracy, Byron, Moira, Paije, Anastasia, Asher, Mila, Jeff—and to our cherished volunteers, generous donors, prolific journalists, and remarkable cast, Galya, Ari, Reva and Jonathan: Thank You! Your resilience, artistry, and heart have carried this production from first rehearsal to opening night.

With gratitude,

Ari, Tracy, and Laura

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The Last Yiddish Speaker by Deborah Laufer is a cautionary tale. Given the events of the past months playing out in the news, it is not as far-fetched as one may imagine.

We have become so polarized, on both sides of the spectrum, and this has led to the demonization of those who do not subscribe to our way of life.

We have lost our tolerance of others, and refuse, or are afraid to engage in meaningful conversation about challenging subjects.

Dialogue is the only way forward to the truth. It offers opportunities to try our theories on others without fear of reproach, or punishment. It breeds a spirit of give and take. Until such time as we can set aside the pressures of social media, and news outlets designed to enrage our sensibilities, we will be doomed to descend deeper into our respective echo chambers, and farther away from each other.

My grandparents escaped from Russia and Romania. They were curious about life, and taught me the value of being able to listen. I have struggled with this in my own life, but understand that if we are unable to open our ears, we cannot open our minds.

The Last Yiddish Speaker reminds us of the need to recognize the humanity in each of us; and to tolerate our differences to build a better society where all may flourish.

Zelda

THE LAST YIDDISH SPEAKER

PRODUCERS
LAURA SHULER
SCOTT ELLSWORTH &
DOROTHY HANSON

DIRECTOR
ZELDA DEAN

STAGE MANAGER
SHULA BANCHIK

The Last Yiddish Speaker was originally commissioned by Lucille Lortel Theatre, Caridad Svich, Artistic Director of New Play Development.

The Last Yiddish Speaker was first produced as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere by InterAct Theatre Company (Philadelphia, PA), Theatre Lab (Boca Raton, FL), and Oregon Contemporary Theatre (Eugene, OR). For more information, please visit nnpn.org.

No VIDEO or AUDIO recordings are permitted

***There is no intermission ***

temple b'nai tikvah
a reform jewish community

JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF CALGARY

Chai Life Productions Board of Directors

Executive

Ari Cohen (co-founder, Co-Chair)
Laura Shuler (co-founder, Co-Chair)
Tracy Smith (co-founder, Artistic Director)

Members at Large

Scott Ellsworth
Dorothy Hanson
Dan Hershcovis
Jeff Kerr
Mila Magri
Asher Magri

Loved the Show? Don't forget to vote!

Each year, Calgary-ACTS recognizes exceptional community theatre.
We hope you will show your support by nominating an individual artist or production at http://www.calgary-acts.com.

CAST

Sarah…….....	*Galya Wornovitsky*
John.....	*Jonathan Top*
Paul.....	*Ari Cohen*
Chava.....	*Reva Faber*

CREW

Producers……..……..…….	*Scott Ellsworth* *Dorothy Hanson* *Laura Shuler*
Director……..…..……...……	*Zelda Dean*
Stage Manager.……..……...	*Shula Banchik*
Costume Designer……...……	*Tracy Smith*
Hair & Makeup Designer.……	*Paije Hartwick*
Prop and Set Décor……..	*Moira Taylor &* *Tracy Smith*
Set Design...…….……..	*Derek Wilkinson*
Set Builder/Painter……..	*Sean Anderson* *Tracy Smith* *David Wilkinson* *Mark Wilkinson*

*Thank you to Sets and Stuff and Morpheus Theatre for set rental

Lighting Design and Tech.....……	*Derek Wilkinson*
Technical Apprentices.……..……	*Jack B & Max Thal*
Sound Design.……...……	*Mitch Barnes &* *Byron Hynes*
Sound Tech..……..	*Byron Hynes*
Photography..……	*Dorin McIntosh*
Program Designer.……...	*Ari Cohen &* *Tracy Smith*
Intimacy Director…….……	*Anastasia St. Amand*
Gun Consultant.……..	*Ian Pond*
Assistant Stage Manager……	*Moira Taylor*
Master Carpenter……..	*Tim Karpiak*
Graphic Design……..……	*Asher & Mila Magri*

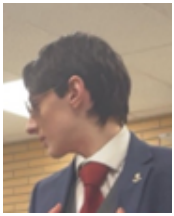
THE ARTISTS

Shula Banchik *(Stage Manager)*

Shula Banchik loves building community through shared, memorable moments. Her work with Trickster Theatre in youth-focused productions helps young people express themselves with confidence. She is excited to be able to collaborate with such passionate and talented artists. Shula is grateful to her mom, friends, and theatre community for their constant support—and to everyone who believes in saying YES to new adventures. Mazal Tov to the cast and crew of *The Last Yiddish Speaker!*

Mitch Barnes (*Sound Design*)

Mitch is pleased to have been able to contribute to The Last Yiddish Speaker which marks his 60th Sound Design production for stage, film, and radio. For this show the challenge was to take the viewer into this dystopian world while tapping into the imagination of the audience. Mitch would like to thank Zelda and Chai Life Productions for the opportunity to whisper to the audience, "Hey, listen to this!", and to Jo for her love and constant support.



Jack B *(Technical Apprentice)*

Jack is in high school in tech theatre 15. He enjoys having a little fun with creating props, being master of ceremonies, and manning the spotlights over the few school and youth plays he has been involved with. He wouldn't be doing this if not for the opportunities that his elementary teachers have offered him. He's looking forward to learning and doing something creative with this show. He is happy to help with whatever is needed.

Ari Cohen *(Paul)*

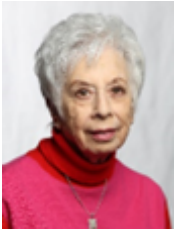
Acting was Ari's childhood dream that he chased until university. With the love of theatre never leaving him, after a 25 year pause in acting, Ari has started things up again. Coming off a high from performing in Chai Life's inaugural "Joseph", Ari is taking on his first dramatic role, which has been a great challenge. He is especially grateful to his wife, kids, family and friends who have enthusiastically supported this endeavor!

Zelda Dean *(Director)*

Zelda has been directing and producing theatre for 50 years, guided by a lifelong commitment to confronting racism, hate, and antisemitism. Through her work, she has built bridges between communities, creating shared artistic spaces for volunteers, artists, and audiences alike. She believes theatre is fundamentally about community - reflecting the audience back to itself and illuminating our shared humanity. Drawing on diverse cultural experience, her work highlights what connects us. Zelda is proud to champion new plays, and mentors emerging artists, both on and off the stage.

Scott Ellsworth (*Producer*)

The Last Yiddish Speaker makes it 2 for 2 for Scott with Chai Life Productions, after being cast in 2025's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Aside from the stage, Scott also sits on the board for Chai Life Productions, where his background in theatre and his commitment to community volunteering make for an exquisite match. Congrats to the cast and crew of *The Last Yiddish Speaker*—what is sure to be an amazing run!



Reva Faber *(Chava)*

Reva is excited to be part of *The Last Yiddish Speaker*. This marks her first foray into acting after six decades as an educator. She thanks her late mother, Doris Miller, her Yiddish-speaking role model, and her daughter, Michelle Love, for being her faithful script reader. Reva thanks Zelda Dean, the cast and crew for their camaraderie and encouragement. A heartfelt thank you as well to her family and friends for their continued love and support.

Dorothy Hanson (*Producer)*

Dorothy is thrilled to be part of Calgary's newest Jewish theatre initiative, Chai Life Productions, where she serves on the board and as a co-producer of *The Last Yiddish Speaker*. Being involved in building a vibrant space for Jewish storytelling and community connection is deeply meaningful to her, combining her passion for theatre with her commitment to celebrating culture, creativity, and community.

Paije Hartwick *(Hair & Makeup)*

Starting her career as a child/youth triple threat actor in Ukrainian & English theatre tweaked Paije's interest in special effects makeup and hair. Taking courses through the Citadel Theatre Edmonton, Paije has done makeup/hair for film and theatre. Artistically focused, Paije is also an awarded singer-songwriter and makes her living as lead vocalist for IN4RED. Proudly, she is founder Laura's adopted daughter, doing her second production with Chai Life.

Byron Paul Hynes *(Sound Design, Sound Tech)*

Byron Paul is delighted to help you hear every word in this play. Recent sound work includes Dads (Misfit), Joseph (Chai Life), Junior editions of Patience (Morpheus), and Rocky Horror (Misfit). He loves volunteering, while managing tech/sound in sports, and co-writing magical urban fantasy novels (rainbowsorcerers.com). He is also thrilled that Chai Life is mentoring young people in technical theatre and is glad to be supporting that, and part of this vibrant Calgary community theatre scene.

Dorin McIntosh *(Photography)*

Dorin has been into photography ever since borrowing his dad's SLR during family vacations in Grade 4. He has enjoyed taking photos for several local theatre companies over the past ten years. He is thrilled to join with Chai Life in their inaugural season and congratulates them on bringing Jewish theatre back for Calgary audiences!

Laura Shuler *(Producer)*

After performing with the Beth Israel Players until their final curtain in 1986, Laura took what she thought would be a brief intermission that somehow stretched into forty years—not unlike Moses wandering in the desert. She returned triumphantly as Yente in Fiddler on the Roof, proving theatre never really leaves your bloodstream. That spark led her to co-found Chai Life Productions with Tracy Smith and Ari Cohen. Laura is thrilled to work again with director Zelda Dean and is deeply grateful to the cast and crew of The Last Yiddish Speaker, a production that affirms every voice's right to exist.

Tracy Smith *(Costume Designer)*

Tracy is thrilled to share this incredibly poignant story with audiences as the Chai Life's second production—and is also delighted to be costuming the show. She is immensely proud of all that the Chai Life has achieved in its first year and looks forward to sharing many more stories and songs with the community for years to come.

Anastasia St. Amand *(Intimacy Director)*

Anastasia (she/her) is happy to be working with Chai Life on this engaging production. She is a certified intimacy director, coordinator, and fight designer from Mohkinstsis (Calgary) on Treaty 7 Territory. With over 100 theatrical productions, she is passionate about creating dynamic stories within collaborative rehearsal spaces. Special thanks to her loved ones for their ongoing support.

Moira Taylor (*Prop Master)*

Moira has worked on several shows in the past 4 years in different capacities. These include ASM, Hair and Make-up Design, Props Master, and Lighting Board operator. The Last Yiddish Speaker is her first production with Chai Life Productions, and she is humbled to be invited to work with this amazing company, cast and crew as Props Master.

Max Thal *(Technical Apprentice)*

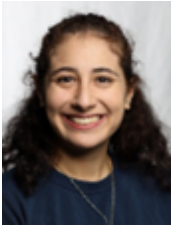
Max is 14 years old and in Grade 9. This year he has been involved in tech theatre, where he especially enjoys working with sound and helping bring the show to life behind the scenes. Being part of the crew has been a great experience, and he has learned a lot about how much work goes into making a production run smoothly. He is really grateful to be part of this team and help support such a talented cast.

Jonathan Top *(John)*

Jonathan Top (He/Him) is a musician and actor with numerous credits, including shows with Imagine Theatre, Fire Exit Theatre, The Calgary Fringe and more. He's also an experienced theatre advisor and art maker, having worked alongside other creators connected with Ambrose University, Trickster Theatre, and even the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo. For Jonathan, there aren't many things more powerful than exploring difficult questions and finding a bit of comedy in unexpected places. He hopes you enjoy the show!

Derek Wilkinson *(Set and Light Designer)*

Derek loves the magic of technical theatre whereby a few painted bits of wood on a stage in Calgary can become an aging brownstone apartment somewhere in upstate New York. Working that magic in a conventional theatre space is tough enough, and many many thanks go out to the rest of our tech crew and the staff here at Temple for their help in getting the lights and set together for this show.



Galya Wornovitzky (*Sarah)*

Galya is super excited to be part of this production of The Last Yiddish Speaker. She has a few years of acting experience from high school, and enjoys how rewarding it has been to be back on stage. This story feels especially meaningful right now to her, and is grateful to be part of such a wonderful cast. She gives thanks to her family for their constant love and support, and is grateful to be included in Chai Life Productions' first year.

VOLUNTEERS

Carol Abbott
Jenna Anderson
Judy Chetner
Julie-Anne Cleyn
Sara Drabinsky
Zena Drabinsky
Donna Gaylord
Deb Katz
Joyce Kerr
Mirielle Klaver
Gwen Stewart
Niki Tapp
Cheryl Wheat

MEDIA

Irena Karshenbaum *(Alberta Jewish News)*
David Sklar *(Chai There Podcast)*
Don Schapira & Jared Shore *(The Schmooze Podcast)*
Kyle Gould *(On Staging Podcast)*

THANK- YOU

Be Seen Street Team
Bracko Home
Calgary Fringe Festival
Dewdney Players
Morpheus Theatre
Pumphouse Theatre
Ravenhill Systems
Southwood United Church
St. Andrews Presbyterian Church
Temple B'nai Tikvah
Sean Anderson
Peter Brodsky
Sara Brodsky
Jim Gardner
Jackie Gelfand
Annette Hanson
Candice Hanson
Ian Pond
Ed Sands
Sheldon Schnaar
Carey Smith
Matt Sonntag
Cole Taylor

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES

Congratulations on your 2nd production! Wishing you great success and many more shows to come!

- Proudly, Stan and Carey Smith and Family

Break a leg on your 2nd production! Here's to a bright future for Chai Life!

- Debbie and Melissa

Mazel tov to all for maintaining Jewish culture in Calgary. Wishing you all the best and looking forward to the production.

- Naida and Nate Feldman

Congratulations on your 2nd production! Wishing you great success and many more shows to come!

- Hadassah and Nate Ksienski

Congratulations on adding Chai Life Productions to Calgary's cultural scene. Break a leg with this new presentation.

- Myrna and Ron Ghitter

Congratulations on your 2nd production! Wishing you great success and many more shows to come!

- Dorothy Hanson & Sheldon Shagal

Congratulations on your 2nd production! Wishing you great success and many more shows to come!

- Eva and Gordy Hoffman

Yasher Koach! Heartfelt thanks for the joy you add to our community!

- Michele Doctoroff and Ted Switzer

Congratulations on your 2nd production! Wishing you great success and many more shows to come

- Herky Cutler

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RIMON NEEDLEWORK GUILD

Rimon Calgary is a vibrant Guild of Judaic Needlework. Rimon celebrates Jewish culture, fosters creativity, community, and connection through shared tradition.

JOIN US!

Meetings are on the 2nd Tuesday of the Month

To join, contact:

Elka 403-604-7116

Polina 403-809-3617

NOVEMBER 21 - 29, 2026

Book by Isobel Lennart
Music by Jule Styne
Lyrics by Bob Merrill

FUNNY GIRL

Chai Life Productions'
2026 - 2027
Season Announcement

MAY 2027

About
A Comedy For the Entire Family

BEAU JEST

By James Sherman