

In the play, **The Dybbuk**, there are dozens of popular, maybe celebrity rabbis mentioned, some real, probably some made up. The very famous Rabbi Akiba was involved in early Kabbalah in Roman times after the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. There was a Great Maggid (teacher), Rabbi Dov Baer ben Avraham (1703-1772), a disciple of the Bal Shem Tov, chosen to be his successor. And, as promised – Sabbatai Tzvi (1626 to 1676) – false Messiah – He was from the Ottoman Empire, an ordained rabbi and part of a whole movement (some hundred thousands of folks mainly in Turkey still follow him) – or so Wikipedia says. He was a mystic, kabbalist. He was caught and accused of sedition by Sultan Mehmed IV and had to choose either to face death or convert of Islam. He chose the latter. Disappointment at the debunking of this celebrity messiah of the people, led to such a depressed mood that it strengthened belief in (escapist?) mysticism, mythology and the joys of Hasidism.

I cannot really tell you that in some religious Jewish communities and even less religious communities, some of these Hasidic superstitious practices do not still continue. I know it's dumb to knock on wood – for eg, and say "kennahora" (means no evil eye) – but why take chances? When someone is critically ill, for example, family members change his or her name, so the angel of death can't find them. My grandmother did this. Nice try but it's not so easy to fool the angel of d.

Lots of good info on Wikipedia about Ansky's play, **The Dybbuk**. It was written between 1913 and 1916 originally in Russian and translated into Yiddish by Ansky. First performed by the Vilna Troupe at Warsaw in 1920. A Hebrew version was done by Hayim Nahman Bialik (Hebrew poet) and staged in Moscow at Habima theater in 1922. Ansky based Rabbi Azriel on a local sage the Hasidic rebbe Samuel of Kaminka-Miropol (1778-1843) who was reputed to have been a master exorcist of dybbuk spirits. Stanislavski supported the Habima theater production. Michael Chekhov, cast as Azriel, had a nervous breakdown "due to the use of extreme acting techniques". Stanislavski fell ill with typhus. Ansky himself died on Nov. 8 1920, apparently never having seen his play. In Warsaw, the play was a big success. A Yiddish columnist in Warsaw remarked that "of every five Jews in the city, a dozen watched **The Dybbuk**." (it's a play you see many times). It seems Kushner's play is very close to the original. He seems to bring out the ghostly quality even more and stresses aspects of the Holocaust to come.

Live Oak Theatre and John Hinkel Park will be closed between June 2019 and June 2020 for renovations. We are working on more Staged Reading series, tentatively scheduled for the late Spring and Early Fall – check our website or join our mailing list and stay informed!



Temple Beth Hillel and Actors Ensemble of Berkeley present
A Staged Reading of

A Dybbuk

Or
Between Two Worlds

Adaptation by Tony Kushner

Written by S Ansky

Translated From Yiddish by Joachim Neugroschel



Sunday, February 24, at 2:00PM

Temple Beth Hillel

801 Park Central Richmond, CA 94803

Suggested Donation \$10.00

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Rabbi Dean Kertesz of Temple Beth Hillel inspired this afternoon's reading when he mentioned S. Ansky's play in Adult Ed class on a Sunday morning this Fall. When I explored the possibility of staging a reading, I found Tony Kushner's adaptation and immediately knew that it should happen.

The story, based on Ansky's ethnographic study of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, gives us a glimpse of the stories and superstitions of these communities in both realistic and supernatural veins. Beautifully adapted by Tony Kushner, *A Dybbuk* or *Between Two Worlds* is a complex story that is layered with allusions to Jewish life and sacred texts while keeping at its core a mystical love story.



Michael Cohen (Director) has been active in theater for over 48 years. He is presently board president for **Actors Ensemble of Berkeley (AE)** where he has co-produced and directed several productions including *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Twelfth Night* an Acoustic Rock Musical, *Panhandle*,

The Talking Cure, and *Fortinbras*. As a member of the Ross Valley Players Ross Alternative Works (RAW) committee, he has co-produced and directed numerous previously unproduced works including the world premiere of *Giovanni is Here*, written by his incredibly talented wife, Mercedes Cohen. Before retiring from teaching and moving to the Bay Area, he served for 25 years as Director of Performing Arts at Rosemead High School - a public high school east of Los Angeles. A member of Actors' Equity, he was assistant stage manager for the Barn Theater in Augusta, Michigan, and stage manager for the Ensemble Studio Theater and the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts in Los Angeles. He holds a BA in Theater Arts from UCLA and a MA in directing from San Diego State University.

A Dybbuk Dramaturgy

Compiled by Vicki Siegel, edited for space by Jerome Solberg

Life in Eastern Europe was impoverished – the overcrowded, dingy, shtetls mired in poverty probably made *Fiddler on the Roof's* Anatevka look like Mar El Lago. Hasidism and mysticism emerged from these shtetls and took hold. (C)Hasidism was created by the Bal Shem Tov (owner of the good name), aka Israel Ben Eliezer (1700-1760). In the constant drudge and oppression of 18th century Russia, people wanted to worship through feeling and intuition without having to go through rigid Talmudic study. Rabbis like the Bal Shem Tov were perceived as able to perform miracles and were loved and worshipped as major celebrities. There was another stricter branch out of Lithuania, run by the Gaon of Vilna. These Litvaks followed a serious regimen of Talmudic study and strict religious practice. Theirs was a rational rather than a feeling and intuitive form of worship and study.

Talmud – Once Jews were taken into Babylonia after the first destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC, it was no longer possible to sacrifice and pray in the Temple. So synagogues and academies were set up to argue the practical and religious points in the Five Books of Moses. (Torah) The books of the Talmud, debated by famous rabbis, were guidebooks for living, clarification of laws, etc. Once the 2 main branches of the Talmud (Mishna and Gemara) were effectively completed, others contributed commentaries and interpretations -among them Maimonides (1135-1204) a physician to the court in Cairo, born in Spain; and Rashi, a French rabbi, born in Troyes, France in 1040

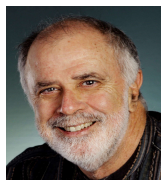
The Kabbalah developed parallel to the Torah and Talmud. Early on it comprised Zoroastrian resurrection mythology, Greek science, numerology, Gnosticism and other aspects of the occult. It was under the radar until it grew in prominence in the 15th and 16th centuries, even among Christian society (and nowadays Madonna). The Kabbalah had a scientific and rational branch which led to the work of Spinoza, for e.g. and a mystical branch. Some Kabbalah terms: Sitra Achra – realm of evil; Sefirot, the 10 emanations or spiritual aspects such as wisdom, understanding, kindness, discipline, beauty.

The Lamed Vovniks (36) or the "Just" is a notion that comes from the Talmud. It says that at all times there are 36 special people in the world, and that were it not for them, all of them, if even one of them was missing, the world would come to an end. In every generation, 36 righteous persons "greet the Shechinah" or the Divine Presence. Book of Razi'el is a "grimoire" of practical Kabbalah in Hebrew and Aramaic. A tzaddik is a righteous person. A mitzvah is a good deed, often a good deed which one is commanded to do.

Wives of Windsor (being produced again this summer) and other roles. She works part time as a speech therapist at Oakland School for the Arts and is very happy to continue to support **AE** in a variety of capacities. Cheers to our great staged reading cast and director.



Jerome Solberg (Stage Directions, Producer/Program) has been in and around AE since 2005, sometimes acting, sometimes (once) directing, mostly just figuring out how to move things forward. You might see him driving around Berkeley in his 1953 Packard, possibly on his way to Target to get more cat food.



David Weiner (2nd Batlon, Scribe, Ensemble) is excited to be back at AEB and to be in his first Staged Reading. He was last seen in **AE's** production of *Enemy of the People*. He rediscovered theatre in 2001. Some of his favorite roles have been *Grandfather* in *Ragtime* and Lt. Brannigan in *Guys and Dolls*, both at Alameda Civic Light Opera. He also was seen at Masquers as Paul in *The*

Marriage of Bette & Boo, and Dorante in *The Gamester*. He retired from a myriad of jobs and spends his free time walking Rex the Wonder Dog.



Peter Weiss (Rabbi Mendl, Rabbi Shimshin, 3rd Batlon) appeared as Venturewell and Barbaroso in AE's production of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, as the Preacher in *Panhandle*, as Angelo in *Giovanni is Here*, and as Jerry in *Relatively Speaking*. He spent 37 years in Los Angeles where he appeared in films, television shows, and theatre. His stage roles included everything from Atahualpa in Peter

Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* to John Laroquette's sidekick in the original comedy farce, *Tarboosh*.



Susannah Wood (Mayer, Ensemble) loves working with AE, as an actor, Board member and director. A long-time local performer, she recently premiered her first solo show about the fun of aging, titled *FIT!* She is excited to be part of this talented cast and deeply meaningful play.

A Dybbuk, or Between Two Worlds

By S. Ansky

Translated from the Yiddish by Joachim

Neugroschel

Adapted by Tony Kushner

Cast

Gitl, Michl, Ensemble.....Janelle Aguiree
Henech, Menashe, Judge, Ensemble.....Ted V. Birgonia
Leah.....Zoe Curzi
Batlon, Rabbi Azriel.....Johnny DeBernard
The Messenger.....Laszlo Horner
Ensemble.....Martha Luehrmann
Bessye, Judge, Ensemble.....Sarah Hadassah Negrón
Chonen, The Dybbuk.....Gabriel Ross
Sender.....Dan Schwager
Fradde.....Vicki Siegel
Stage Directions.....Jerome Solberg
2nd Batlon, Scribe, Ensemble.....David Weiner
Rabbi Mendl, Rabbi Shimshin, 3rd Batlon.....Peter Weiss
Mayer, Ensemble.....Susannah Wood

Staff

DirectorMichael R. Cohen
Producer & Publicity & Program.....Jerome Solberg
Dramaturgy.....Vicki Siegel

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

This production is performed by arrangement with Samuel French. Made possible by a TBA Cash Grant and with the cooperation of Temple Beth Hillel.

Actors Ensemble Board of Directors

Crystal Brown, Michael R. Cohen, Robert Estes, Norah Foster, Jane Goodwin, Bob Gudmundsson, Martha Luehrmann, Meryn MacDougall, Meira Perelstein, Vicki Siegel, Jerome Solberg, Jeff Trescott, Ian Wilcox, Susannah Wood.

<http://www.aeofberkeley.org>, P.O. Box 663, Berkeley 94701

Biographies



Janelle Aguirre (Gitl, Michl, Ensemble) recently was featured as Sabina in **AE's** *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and now is excited to be part of this show. She recently closed *Mixtape : Fury Road*, at PianoFight in SF this past December. Some of Janelle's past credits include playing Dorine in the B8 Theatre's production of *Tartuffe* and Ana in the Douglass Morrison Theater's production of *Real Women Have Curves*.



Ted V. Bigornia (Henech, Menashe, Rabbinical Judge, Ensemble) previously appeared in numerous productions over the years here in the bay area. Recent appearances include *SPAMALOT* as Sir Lancelot/French Taunter/Knight of Ni with Pittsburg Community Theatre, *REEFER MADNESS* as Lecturer with Left Hand Theatre Company and *THE SONG OF THE NIGHTINGALE* as Bing Wen at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette.



Zoe Curzi (Leah) has recently arrived in the Bay Area from New York. A graduate of NYU, she appeared as the lead actress in numerous productions by Insomnium Theatre Company, Highland Park Theatre, and Joust Theatre Company, and numerous films and commercials.



Johnny DeBernard (Rabbi Azriel, 1st Batlon) is very happy to be here, and hopes that you enjoy the show!



AE regulars will know **Laszlo Horner** (The Messenger) from last year's series of Ibsen readings, as Rosmer in *Rosmersholm* and Arnholm in *The Lady from the Sea*. More recently he reprised his numerous roles from private to Pope in an encore run of CCCT's *All Is Calm*. He also juggled several parts (onstage and voice) in ATSF's production of *Talk Radio*. Look for him in upcoming productions at CCCT and Altarena Playhouse.



Martha Luehrmann (Ensemble) **AE** audiences may remember Martha as the nanny in *Relatively Speaking*, the nanny in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and the murderess in Agatha Christie's *A Murder Is Announced*. Other local roles include Martha in James Keller's *Good Housekeeping*, the Nazi sympathizer Marguerite Paulus in Roland David de Valayre's *BookKeepers*, Abby Brewster in *Arsenic & Old Lace*, and Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*. This past fall Martha directed **AE's** staged reading of James Keller's *A Fox and His Hens*.



Sarah Hadassah Negrón (Bessye, Rabbinical Judge, Ensemble) loves performing more than she loves most people, places, or things! A newcomer to the Bay Area, Negrón has acted for the Exit Theatre's SF Olympians Festival and Custom Made Theatre Company's Undiscovered Works Series. When she's not acting, she's either taking dance classes or nerding-out to horror films and true crime podcasts.



Gabriel Ross (Chonen, The Dybbuk), last appeared with **AE** as Guildenstern in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Some recent performances include: George in *All My Sons* (Role Players Ensemble), Torrey/Boris in *Translations* (The Rhino), Flute/Thisby in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (African American Shakespeare), Clyde in *The Speakeasy*, Brightbee/Yvonne/Donny in *Book of Liz* (CMTC) and Isaac in *Isaac's Eye* (CMTC). He has an MFA in Classical Acting from George Washington University.



Dan Schwager (Sender): With a lengthy professional career in healthcare administration, Dan is delighted to perform with **AE** once again as Sender. In just this past year, Dan has performed in *The Lady from the Sea* and *Rosmersholm* (**AE**), with The Pacifica Spindrift Players in *The Crucible* as Reverend Parris and at the Ross Valley Players in *Ricochet*. Previous musical roles include *My Fair Lady* ("Doolittle") and *Guys and Dolls* ("Benny Southstreet"), and dramatic roles in *Moliere's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ("Master of Philosophy") and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* ("The Prince").



Vicki Siegel (Fradde) is a board member of **AE** and very grateful to **AE** for producing her two original musicals, *A Hot Day in Ephesus*, based on *A Comedy of Errors*, and *What Do Women Want/The Marriage of Sir Gawain*. She is also a member of Curtain Theatre in Mill Valley, where she has played Juliet's Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Mistress Quickly in *Merry*