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\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

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## Jersey City New Play Festival Returns To Love by Going Online

It might be a few weeks later than usual and in a different technological format, but one of the signature series of Jersey City Theater Center (JCTC) – Jersey City New Play Festival – returns in a new online format on May 13: *JCTC New Play Festival Online: Return to Love*.

Now in its fourth year, the play reading series features “new” plays by new and emerging playwrights. Following a public submission process, selected plays are presented in professionally directed staged readings using professional actors.

Held every spring in the black box theater at Merseles Studios, the festival is an annual tradition that showcases new work in a professional setting while inviting JCTC audiences to play an essential role in the theater development process. Several plays that had their stage-reading debut at the Jersey City New Play Festival have gone to full-productions, by both JCTC as well as other theater companies.

The COVID-19 global pandemic may have placed a moratorium on public events, but JCTC has reimagined the festival’s live stage reading experience by presenting the series in an interactive, online format unfolding in real time. *JCTC New Play Festival Online: Return to Love* premieres on May 13 – 700pm-8:30pm EST.

The festival runs on consecutive Wednesdays (5/13, 5/20, 5/27) through May and is free of charge. Audience members can access each episode live via JCTC’s Facebook Page or [www.JCTCenter.org](http://www.JCTCenter.org).

Unlike physical theater, seating is unlimited. However, it’s suggested that audience members reserve tickets via the event page so they can receive a festival reminder prior to each episode. Please [click here](#).

With most of the world under lockdown and theater professionals and audiences stuck at home, JCTC has implemented online program, notably *JCTC Conversations: Voices From Around The World*. Presenting an online production of a staged-reading may have meant surmounting several challenges, but it also resulted in some overseen benefits.

“COVID-19 pushed us to stay at home, but it also opened up different opportunities for us as artists,” said Olga Levina, Artistic Director, JCTC. “We like to look at this as a new opportunity to connect playwrights to new audiences and other artists. This pandemic has proven we can no longer ignore what’s going on in other parts of the world, we’re one global community. By presenting the festival online, we can truly have a global audience, we’re not limited to the number of seats in the theater. JCTC programming explores issues that are global in scope but relevant to the community, and through cultural exchanges we realize we’re all part of the global community.”

*JCTC New Play Festival Online: Return to Love* features a diverse range of playwrights and plays. Levina, along with Mark Cirnigliaro, a seasoned theater director who has directed several JCTC productions. The series is again curated by Catalina Florina Florescu, a Professor of Theater and Comparative Literature at Pace University. Although she chose the *Return to Love* theme for several reasons, it eventually turned out that the love of theater motivated the entire JCTC crew to find a way to make theater during a global pandemic.

“Theater is a labor of unconditional love,” said Florescu. “This year I wanted to curate plays that touched upon the great and universal theme of love. When I first had that theme in mind I knew 2020 would be a very important year since America is voting for president. Even before the pandemic, we were living under a lot of stress and since the arts usually helps us bring balance to our lives, I thought *A Return to Love* was much needed. What I did not know when I sent out the call for plays was that this year we would be put on lockdown globally. Now that we’re in this place, a return to love is probably our best way out of this pandemic.”

Besides greater audience reach, the roster of playwrights has an international flavor as well with writers from Canada and Mexico alongside a diverse array of American writers. Audience feedback and community dialogue – essential components of every New Play Festival – will be part of the online version, with each episode featuring Q & A with the actors, the directors, the playwrights, and the audiences. Although the staged-readings will be an engaging and thought-provoking entertainment, the series is also collaborative as audiences and artists interact, discuss and exchange ideas.

“We will witness together the labor of unconditional love I feel theater is,” said Florescu. “Maybe we will learn how to make art when there is so much loss around us. This is not a time to waste on regrets and what ifs; this is, I believe, a time to return to love.”

### **JCTC NEW PLAY FESTIVAL: A RETURN TO LOVE**

**May 13**

**7:00pm - 8:30pm**

**Ashes of the Revolution by John Patrick Bray  
The Star of David by J.J. Steinfeld**

**May 20**

**7:00pm - 8:30pm**

**Bring Me Back, Berkshires by Amy Oestreicher  
Colombo Calling by Cristina Bejan  
The Other by Megan Moodie**

**May 27**

**7:00pm-8:30 pm**

**This One or That? by Geoff Hargreaves  
Rewrite by Sheila Cowley  
War Dog by James McLindon**

**All festival readings are free and open to the public.  
JCTC requests you RSVP by [clicking here](#).**

Jersey City  
Theater Center

JCTC

Or visit: [www.JCTCenter.org](http://www.JCTCenter.org)

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**Photo Caption:** Catalina Florina Florescu (left), Pace University Theatre professor and curator of *JCTC New Play Festival Online: Return to Love*, with Olga Levina, Artistic Director. The new online format of this beloved annual festival promises to be interactive, entertaining and made with love.

Funding for *JCTC New Play Festival Online: Return to Love* was made possible by generous support from the Hudson County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs/Tourism Development, Thomas A. DeGise, Hudson County Executive and the Hudson County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

*Jersey City New Play Festival* was also made possible through the generosity of Ben LoPiccolo Development Group, JCTC's Board of Directors, private donors and local Jersey City businesses.

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*Jersey City Theater Center, Inc. (JCTC) is a nonprofit, 501c3 arts organization committed to inspiring conversations about important issues of our times through the arts.*

**JCTC NEW PLAY FESTIVAL: A RETURN TO LOVE**

*Playwrights In Their Own Words*

**Creators of the new plays  
featured in the festival  
comment on their work.**

**May 13**

“*Ashes of the Revolution* was inspired by a conversation my children had late one evening. My son has autism, and for awhile it was tough for him to process the difference between an expression/idiom and a fact. In the play, DeeDee and Amelia will fend off Russians and Aliens from their backyard; someone has to do it while Mom and Dad are asleep. I dedicate this play to my kids, and all kids who struggle with communication.” (John Bray)

“*The Star of David* is based on [my] short story from [the collection] *Dancing at the Club Holocaust: Stories New & Selected*. During the spring of 1997, a 43-year-old university English professor, who is strongly attracted to the 50-year-old English department’s secretary, uses a sonnet-style invitation to arrange what he hopes will be a romantic date with her at a restaurant near the university campus. During the course of the evening they learn things about each other and themselves, especially in regards to being Jewish and she a daughter of Holocaust survivors, that dramatically change their relationship.  
(J.J. Steinfeld)

**May 20**

“*Bring Me Back, Berkshires* is inspired by one of my favorite fairytales, Jack & the Beanstalk. I love the idea of seeing our Earth from another viewpoint and perhaps noticing things that we take for granted, having lived on this planet all of our lives. I also love exploring the viewpoints of women whose stories may not be fully told. What do they truly long for? What does she see in the world of nature that surrounds us every day? Sometimes we don't really appreciate the simple things as extraordinary until we are estranged from them - a message that is resonating now, more than ever.” (Amy Oestreicher)

“*Colombo Calling - a play from Sri Lanka*: Victims of the recent genocide caused by the 25 year civil war, the Tamil people continue to suffer persecution on the South Asian island of Sri Lanka. *Colombo Calling* is about a Tamil Sri Lankan family that stretches to the U.K. and the U.S.; it is a play about diaspora, natural disaster (the 2004 Tsunami), international humanitarian intervention, forbidden love, racism, family and home.” (Cristina Bejan)

“*The Other*, inspired by Jorge Luis Borges' short story of the same name, is a semi-autobiographical play in which a woman in her forties, Kathleen, encounters her younger self sitting on a park bench. Young Kathleen, an aspiring dancer, insists the year is 1994; knowing that she is unlikely to remember anything, Older Kathleen still uses the opportunity to warn Young Kathleen that she will find herself increasingly

disabled over time, and eventually be diagnosed with a genetic connective tissue disorder that will end her dance career.” (**Megan Moodie**)

**May 27**

***This One or That?*** “In order to save the family fortune the nerdy son must marry one of two willing women. He would prefer to marry his computer, but his father insists that he choose one of the real-life women. But which?” (**Geoff Hargreaves**)

“In ***Rewrite***, a screenwriter has spent her career killing the same actor over and over. Now that actor is asking her to rewrite his wife's very recent - and very real - death. This comedy comes from witnessing my mother's painful death and watching my father completely rewrite it into a peaceful and beautiful moment.” (**Sheila Cowley**)

“In ***War Dog***, an ex-military dog stops by a bar off base to have a beer, to confront what he did during the war ... and to ponder who is to blame. *War Dog* is a somewhat absurdist consideration of the cost of war and the long road home.” (**James McLindon**)