



JFEST 2024

Bringing Jewish Arts to San Diego

by Makayla Hoppe

For 31 years, JFEST has been bringing Jewish art, culture and history to the greater San Diego community. Artistic Director Todd Salovey and Producing Director Becca Myers have helped create a lineup for 2024 that will entertain, inform and enlighten audiences throughout the month of June.

“I think [JFEST] distinguishes itself because we develop a lot of original work in the Jewish festival and you can see by our programming this year that we love to be an incubator of new work,” Todd said.

“We also love to encourage artists and arts organizations to explore Jewish content and Jewish themes in our work, and so, over the 31 years, we’ve developed a lot of plays, particularly plays and works in the theater that have started in the festival and been performed at venues around the country, and in Israel,” he added.

Events include the 15th annual “Women of Valor,” a production honoring the Jewish women of San Diego who have made a difference and given back to their communities. This year, the production will honor Sara Brown, Debbie Kornberg, Vered Libstein, Rabbi Devorah Marcus, Bev Pamensky and Dr. Barbara Parker.

Todd and Becca both contribute to the script for “Women of Valor,” along with Sarah Price Keating and local playwright Ali Viterbi.

“We’re honoring the women by creating an original play about them,” Todd said, “and we’ll gather six of San Diego’s top actresses to play the women. Year by year, it just sort of grows as being an important part of San Diego’s cultural landscape.”

This year’s festival headliner is Broadway veteran Mandy Patinkin in “Being Alive,” a concert filled with Mandy’s favorite Broadway and

American tunes. Mandy had been a sought-after performer for JFEST since the 90s, and Todd felt that 2024 was finally the year to make it happen.

“I always had this dream that the festival would help bring major Jewish headliners to San Diego, and at the end of last year, I was like, ‘Let’s do it,’” Todd said.

JFEST originated as a festival and program through San Diego Repertory Theatre. Although San Diego Rep suspended operations in 2022, the festival continued on as an independent organization.

“It was on a performance of ‘Women of Valor’ that I found out that the rep was ceasing operations,” Todd said. “I just announced to the crowd, ‘This is going to continue — I don’t know how, but it’s going to continue.’

We talked to a lot of community leaders in San Diego, and we were *continues on next page >>*

welcomed really generously into the family of the JCC."

The Lawrence Family JCC now serves as a fiscal sponsor for the festival, as well as a venue for many different performances throughout the month. Events at the JCC include a performance by Nissim Black and "Comedy for Koby," an evening with standup comedians.

Coastal Roots Farm will also serve as a venue for "REGENERATE! An Eco-Performance Fest" on June 30. The organization has taken ancient Jewish agriculture and wisdom and turned it into a community-based education center and working farm.

"We've commissioned four playwrights, a composer, and a choreographer to create new, original pieces...that have to do with ecology, the environment and with how Judaism views those things," Becca said.

"REGENERATE!" started as a 24-hour play festival and has since been reworked into a single evening performance.

"We're going to create this evening of original work that's being performed by local actors being directed by amazing local directors that will focus on Judaism and the environment," Becca added.

Becca feels that this year's festival comes at a critical time and should be celebrated for what it brings to the community.

"The payoff of being at the shows and seeing the audience response feels so powerful, especially at a time that the Jewish community feels really important. It feels really important to be around Jewish joy right now," she said.

JFEST has been at the center of Jewish art and culture in San Diego for decades. The festival continues to grow, with Todd reporting that its budget has tripled since becoming an independent organization. Every year brings new, talented performers, playwrights and directors to stages all over the county.

"It's a labor of love," Todd said. "We've been amazed how enthusiastic everyone is about continuing it, and it's been a joy ride. It seems to happen in a very magical way." ☀

JFEST 2024 JUNE LINEUP

04

Mandy Patinkin in Concert: Being Alive

7:30 p.m. | Balboa Theatre

The acclaimed singer and performer will cover his favorite Broadway and classic American songs, including work from Irving Berlin, Stephen Sondheim and Cole Porter.

**10**

La Obra (in Spanish)

7:30 p.m. | The Old Globe's Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre

Presented by Ken Jewish Community and performed by the Teatro Punto Y Coma Acting Ensemble.

An original story that highlights everything that goes into putting on a show, from the directors to ushers and actors to technical personnel. The production will be sure to delight audiences with its surprises and twists.

13

La Obra

**Second performance
8:45 p.m.**

18

15th Annual Women of Valor

7:30 p.m. | Lawrence Family JCC

A festival mainstay that looks at six San Diego Jewish women who have influenced their local community and the Jewish community at large. The production will honor Sara Brown, Debbie Kornberg, Vered Libstein, Rabbi Devorah Marcus, Bev Pamensky and Dr. Barbara Parker this year.



20

Italian Jews Through the Generations

6:00 p.m. | Beverly and Joseph Glickman Hillel Center, UCSD

Playwright Ali Viterbi examines the Italian Jewish experience. Enjoy a delicious Italian meal prepared by award-winning Chef Benedetta Jasmine Guetta.



23 Women of Valor

**Second performance
2:00 p.m.**

24

Comedy for Koby

7:30 p.m. | Lawrence Family JCC

Standup comics Bob Zany and Kira Soltanovich will perform a hilarious show to benefit The Koby Mandell Foundation. Avi Liberman, a CBS and Comedy Central performer, will emcee the evening.

25

“Refuah” — Music and Performances of Healing

7:30 p.m. | Lawrence Family JCC

An evening of music, dance and poetry from some of San Diego's finest performers. The production is a community-wide musical concert that strives to uplift the soul.

27

23rd Klezmer Summit: From the Shtetl to the Shuk

7:30 p.m. | First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

A deep dive into klezmer music, drawing from Middle-Eastern melodies in shucks (marketplaces). It features Jamie Papish (percussion) and Amos Hoffman (oud), joining Hot Pstromi and featuring Yale Strom, Elizabeth Schwartz, Gunnar Biggs, Fred Benedetti, and Tripp Sprague.

30

REGENERATE! An Eco-Performance Fest

5:00 p.m. | Coastal Roots Farm

Hosted by Coastal Roots Farm, an organization that takes ancient Jewish agriculture to heart. The evening will feature eco-theater, dance and music and end with a farm after-party.