



JFest Entertains & Educates San Diego

by Makayla Hoppe

The Lipinsky Family San Diego Jewish Arts Festival — JFest — has been celebrating “unapologetically Jewish music, theatre, dance and fine arts” for 33 years. Now a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the festival will bring new plays, immersive productions and more to San Diego this summer. JFest runs from May 12 through July 14, and the lineup of live performances is sure to inspire and educate art lovers from all over the county.

“We’re on a really exciting new journey as we become our own independent organization,” said Founding Artistic Director Todd Salovey. “There’s a certain Jewish arts festival experience

that’s uplifting, and it makes you proud to be Jewish. It makes you excited about how art can touch you and bring people together.”

Comedian Alex Edelman is kicking off the event with a mix of brand-new content and returning bits from some of his most beloved specials. In addition to his standup, there will be a Q&A for the audience. “It’s just an amazing combination of Jewish identity, storytelling, theatricality, and stand-up, and he’s just one of my favorite contemporary performers,” Todd said.

Taking place in June is “Women of Valor,” which will honor six women from around San Diego who have

impacted the Jewish community with their wisdom, philanthropy, kindness and inspiration. Now in its 17th year, the show is written by Ali Viterbi, Sarah Price Keating, Rebecca Myers, Todd and his daughter, Leah Salovey. The production features stories, songs, and images.

“What are the guides? What are the inspirations? What are the challenges? What is the fire behind six women each year who have accomplished so much and made such an impact on many aspects of the Jewish community and the San Diego community?” Todd said. “Each of the women is so special and has made such amazing

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2026 artists, from left:

Jeremy Gimbel, “Nusach San Diego”; Elizabeth Schwartz, “And the Angels Swing.”

Photos courtesy JFest.



Todd Salovey with comedian Alex Edelman (at right), “An Evening with Alex Edelman.”



contributions that I think the audience will just be dazzled, inspired and even educated.”

This year’s honorees are Ruth Broudy, Rhona Fink, Kira Finkenberg, Sharyn Goodson, Karen Parry and Debby Stauber. Karen has served as CEO of Hillel San Diego during difficult and dangerous times on college campuses, while Ruth is the principal for Torah High School of San Diego, encouraging girls and young women to reach their full potential during a time of transition.

“It’s almost like my life has been shaped by the wisdom of the more than 100 women that we’ve honored over the 17 years that we’ve done ‘Women of Valor,’” Todd said.

The headlining presentation of JFest

is a special performance of “Looking For Leonard,” a tribute to the music of Leonard Cohen, featuring Broadway performer Patrick Page and Perla Batalla, a composer and former vocalist for Cohen himself.

Todd and Patrick have known each other for many years, having attended theater school together. When Todd read about Patrick and Perla’s early work on the project in New York, he reached out to ask whether the show could be developed into a full production for JFest. “Looking for Leonard” will premiere in San Diego before going on tour.

“This is the first time that JFest is performing in The Conrad, and it has amazing, beautiful acoustics,” Todd said. “I thought to do these extraordinary, legendary performers with great music, in a venue where the acoustics are so beautiful, would just be a magical evening.”

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Ali Viterbi served as the festival's associate artistic director for many years. She is a playwright, television writer and educator. For this year's production of *The Whole Megillah*, JFest's new play development program, Ali's recent work, "Budapest, Budapest," will allow audiences to be a part of the workshop process. The story follows two Jewish figures in 1940s Budapest, Hannah Senesh and Rudolf Kastner. One rose to prominence as a hero, and the other as a villain. The play asks, "When we look back into the dark, what story will we tell?" The show features original music and lyrics by Toby Singer.

"Ali just writes characters and scenes that are so relatable and so human," Todd said. "I think people will really, really be excited to see Ali's newest play and her first musical."

Another returning favorite production is "Regenerate!" Described as an eco-performance fest, the show partners with Coastal Roots Farm to educate audiences on the reality of climate change through a Jewish lens. The four immersive shows include "At Rise" by Dan Schiffrin; "Back to the Garden" by Livya Howard-Yashar; a new, interpretive work by Michelle Shofet;



and improvised Earth songs by Heavy Meadow.

"Coastal Roots Farm got a really big national grant to create a program called the Jewish Climate Artists for California Incubator," Todd said. "They commissioned five different artists to work all year... And these are the pieces that have been developed in collaboration. It's an immersive experience of theater and dance that's on a beautiful farm in the outdoors, where the audience will go to different locations to see these original pieces that have been created."

Throughout its 33-year history, JFest has looked to inspire and educate San Diego by highlighting Jewish voices, stories, songs and more. Todd believes the festival's future will only grow stronger.

"We're thinking about how we can contribute to the San Diego community and to the arts community year-round," he said. "This festival, to me, is a place of uplifting, of healing and of joy, and we all we really look forward to being able to offer those experiences in more places." ☆

For tickets and a full list of festival events, visit sdjfest.org.

Self-Improvement continued

that we were also spiritually present at that momentous time, and furthermore, each year a new element of that colossal manifestation of G-dliness is lovingly gifted to us.

Consider for a moment the dramatic change undergone by our ancestors. Following generations of back-breaking slave labor, an entire nation received the Torah, the wisdom of the Almighty, and immediately immersed themselves in its divine wisdom. Their minds shifted from how to make bricks into how to transform the mundane, physical world into an abode for the Creator!

They were able to achieve this unequalled transformation because they

chose to do so. They embarked on the ultimate self-improvement project in all recorded history. Attribute by attribute, character trait by character trait, they worked on themselves.

They meditated on G-d's presence in their lives and the world around them. They contemplated the Holy One's blessings and nurtured love for Him as well as awe of His greatness. These emotions informed their thinking processes, as well as how they spoke and, of course, how they acted.

They climbed the ladder reaching the highest pinnacles of human spiritual achievement, and then they understood that they had readied

themselves to receive the Torah inwardly with sincerity and with unmitigated joy!

The successful formula is in front of all of us, available to us. We just have to decide to follow the plan!

May we be blessed with the internally generated motivation to reach our true potential. ☆

Rabbi Yeruchem Eilfort co-directs, with his wife Rebbetzin Nechama Eilfort, Coastal Chabads, Chabad at La Costa, Encinitas, and Carlsbad North where everyone, regardless of level of knowledge or observance, feels cherished and loved. Rabbi Eilfort welcomes and encourages comments and questions: rabbie@chabadatlacosta.com.