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INSPIRATIONS

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Celebrating inclusive communities
Célébrons nos communautés inclusives

Arts & Leisure



Dancers Laura Dena and Philippe Kieu participate in Luca 'Lazylegz' Patuelli's Urban Dance course at the National Center for Dance Therapy of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. *Read the full story on page 4.* (Photo, Mikaël Theimer)

Making the art of dance more accessible in Montreal

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Dear Readers,

We are all living through a very difficult time with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twice a year we publish Arts & Leisure editions of *Inspirations*. Our focus is on entertainment and lifestyles events and travel ideas, all of which are not accessible as of this writing. We decided to proceed with this edition, given the fact we have a widespread online audience. Life will return to normal – we just do not know when. At that time, we will get back to enjoying concerts and going on trips.

We realize how difficult a time this is for our community of parents and caregivers, and for all who remain quarantined in their homes. So please consider these pages an escape if you will. As always, each story has a special needs component.

Many of the organizations we work with depend upon events of large gatherings to finance their operations. Regrettably anything planned for the spring has been cancelled. We were looking forward to sharing many of the important initiatives with you in this edition. We hope all of these activities can be rescheduled when this pandemic ends.

We have a mission to inform and that will continue through this crisis. Please stay tuned to our website and social media channels to stay up to date.

Mike Cohen, editor & Wendy Singer, managing editor



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INSPIRATIONS



Yellowbug Theatre brings drama and all of its benefits to Galileo

By Lisa Trotto

Milva Franzini, of **Yellowbug Theatre School** recently brought acting to a whole new level at **Galileo Adult Education Centre**. She led multiple dynamic acting workshops that allowed **Galileo's Social Integration Services (SIS)** students - adult learners with special needs - to express themselves, along with academic theatre students.

The Yellowbug Theatre School, located in St. Leonard, was created by Franzini, an accomplished actress, when she recognized that the east end of Montreal lacked a school where children could learn about acting. Franzini now offers acting classes for children and teens of all ages. In its 11 years of service, Yellowbug has witnessed amateur actors turn into professionals.

As an SIS teacher, I have long been an advocate for theatre in the classroom, under-

standing that acting can enhance the verbal and non-verbal expression of ideas. Drama improves articulation, voice projection, language fluency and persuasive speech. Thus, the guidance from Yellowbug Theatre was widely hailed.

Franzini's involvement at Galileo has enriched the school's programs and allowed students to venture deeper into the expressive arts. During her workshops, she encouraged students to infuse their creativity, instill their confidence and build their self-esteem through self-expression and teamwork.

Franzini adapted all of her activities to meet the diverse needs of Galileo's student population. While focusing on the dynamics of acting, they recreated scenes from popular films. Working in groups, they portrayed distinct characters, exploring their moti-

national and emotional state. This in turn helped students develop their social skills.

Students had the opportunity to play, practice, and perform while developing a constant focus of mind, body, and voice, as well as important skills such as eye-contact, stage presence and voice projection.



Galileo SIS students enjoy theatre workshops with Yellowbug Theatre. (Photo, Galileo Adult Education Centre)

Galileo students did a fantastic job working collaboratively and practicing their new skills through their performances of scenes from the likes of *Gone with the Wind*, *Rocky*, *Police Academy*, *The Terminator*, *Star Wars* and *Ghostbusters*.

They acted roles from different social situations, time periods, and cultures, all which promote compassion and tolerance for others. Students also explored singing and expressive dance via epic movies like *Risky Business* and *Flashdance*. Theatre can evoke humour and laughter, which enhances motivation of learning and reduces stress. The social interaction and risk-taking involved in the process allows students to develop trust in oneself and in others.

"In every session with Yellowbug Theatre we continue to enhance our acting skills and we look forward to the next workshop. You will be able to see our creations come to life at our Musical Theatre show in May 2020," said **Martina Schiavone**, principal of Galileo.

Lisa Trotto is a Social Integration Services teacher at Galileo Adult Education Centre.



MP Anthony Housefather with Leonard Baker, president and CEO of March of Dimes Canada.

Even a snowstorm couldn't discourage the large and enthusiastic crowd from attending the annual **March of Dimes Canada (MODC) Opening Doors for Accessibility** seminar on November 13. MODC president and CEO **Leonard Baker** playfully opened the event using the weather as a challenge for participants to "figure out how to make Canada inclusive and accessible all year round."

A national leader in the field of disability, MODC is the largest provider of services and employment opportunities for Canadians living with special needs. Speakers represented various organizations and research initiatives, all committed to raising

March of Dimes Canada opens doors for accessibility at annual seminar

By Randy Pinsky



March of Dimes Canada (MODC) presents Galileo students with assistive technology at their 2019 seminar. With Rick David, assistant director, AEVS, EMSB, Martina Schiavone, principal, Galileo, Galileo students Nancy Leopardi and Sebu Baghdassarian, Leonard Baker, president and CEO, MODC, Galileo students Gérald Nardone and Domenico Condello, and Angela Spagnolo, director, AEVS, EMSB.

awareness about adaptive technologies and accessibility. Liberal Member of Parliament **Anthony Housefather** welcomed seminar attendees with an impactful discussion on the new Accessible Canada Act.

Popular duo **Bradley Heaven** and **Dan O'Connor** of **All Access Life** were back for a second year to present this year's keynote address. They engaged the audience in evaluating assistive communication de-

vices, comparing how long it took to say a phrase using different methods such as eye tracking. Occupational therapist **Sonia Lebel** from the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) discussed client-centered solutions where small adaptations can greatly impact independent living. **Keith Rashid**, MODC national manager for Recreation, Assistive Travel and Transportation, illustrated how advanced planning and accommodations can make

trips or daily travel possible - even enjoyable. Organizations such as **OnRoute** are at the forefront of inclusion advocacy and spoke about their objective to make Montreal more accessible. As articulated by founder **Catherine Blanchette-Dallaire**, "Accessibility is about human dignity, not just architecture." The link between inclusive societies and well-being was equally echoed by **Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas** from McGill University in her analysis on healthy cities.

The audience was thrilled by a demonstration of the standing **Alinker** bike and **Urban Polling** walking sticks; revolutionary physiotherapy tools for helping individuals regain mobility and confidence. "What if we designed for humans instead of a body with a problem?" challenged Barbara 'BE' Alink, CEO, founder and inventor of The Alinker. Conference vendors had their moment to shine in the speed vending segments. They included **Big Blue Hug**, **Friendship Circle**, **Eureka Solutions**, **The Cummings Centre** and **VISIBILITÉ**.

During the lunch break, MODC awarded four students from **Galileo Adult Education Centre** with tablets fully loaded with apps that will help them learn, communicate and grow. This is courtesy of MODC's annual Assistive Mobile Technology Initiative. Stay tuned for news on next year's Opening Doors for Accessibility seminar on November 13.



Dancing their way to a more inclusive world

By Randy Pinsky

*“When I dance,
I don’t feel I have a disability.”*

Reflections like this accompanied photos of inclusive art initiatives in the “*Bodies and Souls at the Margins of Performing Arts*” exhibit recently featured at Place des Arts. Showcasing the work of renowned photographer **Mikaël Theimer** of Portraits of Montreal fame, the artist shared how photography allows him to “open windows to closed universes.”

Upon entering, visitors were greeted by a life-sized image of break-dancer **Luca ‘Lazylegz’ Patuelli** with his characteristic one-arm handstand and impish grin. Creator of the slogan *No Excuses, No Limits*, Patuelli is known for his passionate speeches and memorable performances.



Luca ‘Lazylegz’ Patuelli
in front of the Olympic Stadium.

Over a dozen organizations were featured, all sharing the belief and understanding that individuals of all abilities can engage in art. They included **Ill-Abilities, Autisme Sans Limites, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens** and **Parkinson en Mouvements**. As the **Opéra de Montréal** effectively shared in the exhibit: “The joy, fascination and excitement that it provokes is proof that everyone can appreciate beauty.”

With a scenographic layout designed by **Philippe Legris**, the exhibit was an immersive experience with photo panels suspended from the ceiling and thought-provoking quotes scrawled on the floor.



Teaching assistant Marie Bourdon dances with her student Arielle Neveu at a workshop for children from Corpuscule Danse. (Photos, Mikaël Theimer)

More than just a form of therapy, art is also critical for self-expression, boosting self-esteem and promoting connectivity. In line with the **Place des Arts Foundation’s** commitment to inclusion, the exhibit demonstrated how art can become an incredible “engine of transformation.” As noted on the introductory panels: “For some, art is a profession, a vocation; for others, it is a hobby, an escape. But for all, it is a means of expression and a tool of integration.”

The exhibit was inspired by Theimer’s partnership with the **Sans Oublier le Sourire** organization, featuring art initiatives with individuals with intellectual or physical challenges at both the amateur and professional level. “By transforming their functional limitations into creative opportunities, the performers are reinventing [art] and deconstructing the very concept of ‘disability,’” he expressed.

Art can also be a powerful form of escapism for marginalized communities. Coordinators of the **Accueil Bonneau** music program for homeless Montrealers shared comments in the exhibit: “Being creative is an opportunity to make their voices heard and find a place in society...lessen the painful emotions and live positive moments in spite of the great vulnerability of their social situation.”

With organizations with clever names like **Atypik Bunch** and **APPROSH**, the performers challenge assumptions about limitations, and demonstrate how they can use their different abilities to their benefit.

Through illustrations of inclusive art in action, the *Bodies and Souls* exhibit proposes a world in which diversity is celebrated. For, as reflected by participant **France Geoffron**: “The best way to demystify difference, is to engage with it.”



Artists Marie-Ève Morissette and Paolo Jean at a dance workshop of the Art-Percussion-Programme-Recherche-Organisation-Socio-Humaine (APPROSH) project, developed and led by Mohamed Ghoul, at the Gang à Rambrou.

INSPIRATIONS



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THE HEALING POWERS OF DUDE

shows challenges of visible and invisible disabilities

By Ishini Fernando

The 2020 Netflix family comedy series *The Healing Powers of Dude*, created by Sam Littenberg-Weisberg and Erica Spates, starts off with 11-year-old Noah (Jace Chapman) getting dropped off at school by his supportive family after two years of homeschooling. Noah struggles with social anxiety disorder and a wildly active imagination that makes him experience average everyday situations a little differently. To him, simple things like being approached by schoolmates equate to being attacked by zombies. Despite his issues with anxiety, he wants to go to public school and has devised a plan with three steps:

1. Get inside the school.
2. Find his homeroom.
3. Survive middle school.

After getting in the way of his sassy classmate Amara (Sophie Kim) who uses a wheelchair, he panics and runs off. Following this unsuccessful first attempt at getting

through the first step, Noah's parents decide to get him an emotional support dog named Dude to help him cope better with his anxiety. Dude, however, turns out to be hyperactive, easily distracted, and a bit of a troublemaker. This leads to comical situations that Noah does not appreciate very much.

The rest of the first episode takes viewers through Noah's continued attempts to get to his homeroom. Fortunately, he ends up befriending Amara, who drops her sassy front once she finds out about Noah's troubles with social anxiety, and his quirky friendly classmate Simon (Mauricio Lara), who immediately takes a liking to him. With these two and Dude by his side, Noah is a little more prepared for the adventure that is middle school.

The characters are interesting and diverse, and each have their own set of challenges to face. Often, television characters with

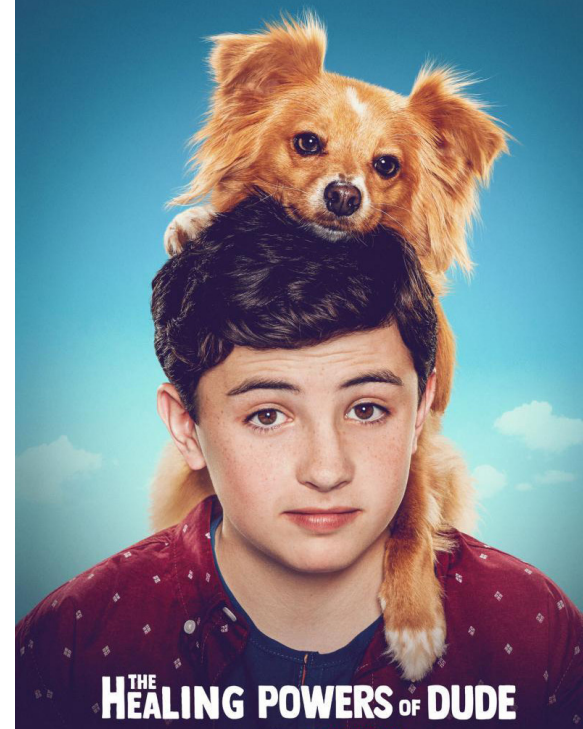
special needs are played by actors without special needs in real life. However, Sophie Kim, the actress who plays Noah's intelligent friend with a disability, actually has Ullrich congenital muscular dystrophy and has used a wheelchair since she was four years old. The production team insisted on casting an actress that uses a wheelchair and adapting the character of Amara to her real-life experiences.

Although it is a children's show, *The Healing Powers of Dude* does a good job at discussing difficult topics, including dealing with mental illness, in order to encourage kids to talk about their struggles and challenges to parents and adults they trust.



NETFLIX REVIEW

THE BEST DOG FOR THE JOB
(WASN'T AVAILABLE)



Let's Get Going! teams up with INSPIRATIONS

By Wendy Singer

Marcie Balaban, founder of Let's Get Going!, is an expert sales consultant and business matchmaker. For the past 18 years, she has been coordinating pairings of entrepreneurs and corporate executives by arranging small boardroom meetings with owners or upper management of between companies, and VIP lunches that provide invaluable opportunities to make new contacts. The idea is to make good matches and create direct meetings between organizations that have a common purpose. Balaban is committed to "seeking out the best that Montreal has to offer in the way of business people and business opportunities," as explained on the Let's Get Going! website.

Each year, Balaban supports organizations that she believes in and highlights



Mike Cohen, editor of *Inspirations* and Marcie Balaban, founder of Let's Get Going! a business matchmaking VIP lunch where corporate executives and entrepreneurs have the opportunity to meet. Balaban presented *Inspirations* with a cheque to support our work.

them on the website's **Making a Difference** page. She provides a platform for these organizations at her business matchmaking events. Balaban has chosen *Inspirations* as one of this year's Let's Get Going! 'making a difference' organizations, and we are thrilled to partner with her.

We thank Marcie Balaban for her insight and vision and are honoured to have this opportunity to work with her and connect with Let's Get Going! members. A part of the *Inspirations*' mission is to inform the public-at-large, especially corporations, of the successes of the special needs community, the challenges and the needs, including the push for inclusion in all areas of life. We thank Balaban for this platform to educate and match up with like-minded executives.



JDAIM founder moves inclusion forward forward in Montreal and beyond

By Wendy Singer

Shelly Christensen is the co-founder of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM). She is a professional, innovator, keynote speaker, founder and executive director of **Inclusion Innovations** and an author. But in order to really get to know her, you'll have to throw away all of the labels and preconceptions that go with them. "While these labels tell you something about me, they don't tell the whole story. And each one of us has a story," writes Christensen on her website.

This 'change leader' addressed some 115 community leaders at the **Gelber Centre** on February 13 in an engaging three-hour workshop titled "From Longing to Belonging: The Keys to Inclusion in Jewish Community Life." The workshop consisted of interactive exercises, round table discussions, and a panel made up of community members sharing their perspectives on disability, all with the mission of sharing information and promoting change towards inclusion.

The author of *Longing to Belong: A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith Community*, Christensen explains that a sense of belonging is the heartbeat of inclusion. Christensen discovered that she has ADHD as an adult, and was grateful for the diagnosis as it helped her understand herself. Her son has Asperger's



Shelly Christensen and Carly Goodman at the Gelber Centre on February 13. (Photo, Federation CJA)

syndrome. She and her family found the greatest sense of acceptance and belonging at their synagogue and religious school.

Christensen explained that community leaders must work together to move inclusion from a discussion to action, citing her experience as program manager of the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities at Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis as her working model, and the launchpad for JDAIM.

In addition to the necessary funding and support needed to implement change, stakeholders must be involved in any inclusion plan. "Walk beside someone to understand their needs in order to feel included and have a sense of belonging," she encouraged.

Tools for assessment when creating an inclusion plan are available in her book. Recommendations include: Create an inclusion committee and a mission statement; assess the organizational procedures and attitudes; have community conversations; create an inclusion plan and measure growth. She recommends following the structure that the organization already has in place.

"Shelly helped the professionals to augment the conversation around inclusion,

Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) takes place every February and is celebrated across the world. This year, Montrealers had over 30 JDAIM events to choose from. Read the Inspirations team's coverage of events here!

and gave them tools to translate learning into concrete action within their various organizations", said **Carly Goodman**, coordinator of Community Inclusion for **Federation CJA**. "Inclusion is a mindset, and it is not the end but rather the start of belonging. I'm proud that Federation CJA is helping create inclusion ripples in the community."

Christensen never expected JDAIM to grow internationally and open minds, hearts and doors to people with disabilities and mental health conditions across the world. "This speaks to the needs of people with disabilities and wanting to belong," she said. "I'm doing happy dances!"

The philosophy of JDAIM is spreading beyond the Jewish community. This year, an interfaith group in Norfolk, Virginia, is bringing the model of JDAIM to their organizations. JDAIM has launched the discussion. It can grow and spread to all communities from here.

'Let's Keep It Real!'

By Randy Pinsky

'Let's Keep it Real,' coordinated by **Federation CJA** and **GenMTL** brought people with special needs together to respond to questions they always wondered about but never felt comfortable asking.

The iconic **Atwater Club** was packed on February 21 where articulate and self-aware individuals spoke candidly about their experiences. The hope was that this valuable peek into their world would help break stereotypes and promote greater understanding.

The first panel featured individuals on the autism spectrum, including musician **Steven Atme** whose film *The Power of One* was scheduled to premiere at Vanier College March 13, comedian **Samuel Lewis**, a nominee for the *Just for Laughs* award at the 2017 Montreal Fringe Festival, and **Lindsay Oksenberg**, who has been featured on the CBC Gem show *You Can't Ask That*.

Each individual shared their experiences and challenges, and noted how they have managed, and even thrived, with their con-

dition. For instance, Oksenberg explained how important routine is to her: "As long as I follow my schedule, I'm usually alright. I now work at **Physio Verdun** and I'm really proud of the person I've become." Atme reflected how he used to be non-verbal and now speaks on behalf of others.

Amanda Cape and **Jack Rudski** stole the show in the second panel with their candid

comments about being visually impaired, addressing assumptions with grace and humour. An advocate for inclusion, Cape has a degree in social work, while Rudski is a second-year medical student at McGill University. The two speakers easily chatted about how they know if their outfit 'works', if appearance is important in a partner, and assumptions about their other senses.

When Rudski was questioned about people's perceptions of him, he shrugged and said: "They don't realize I have developed strategies to do everything. The only thing I can't do is drive."

The final panel was on the topic of mental health. Speakers shared their struggles with anxiety, coming to terms with their condition, and getting others to understand it. "It's hard to accept that in order to protect your mental health, you can't do everything, but without good mental health, you have nothing," shared personal trainer **Matt Golt**. **Paige Crystal** concurred: "When you work on yourself, everything gets better."

The speakers discussed finding the balance between work and recovery, asking for help and taking time for self-care. "It's okay to not be okay," reinforced Crystal.

Rudski effectively summed up the panelists' common experience, saying: "There will be tough days when you feel nothing is going right. Then there will be others when you do more than you thought you could, navigating the world in a slightly different way." He concluded: "It may take us some time, but we'll sure as hell find a way."



Participants at Let's Keep it Real at the Atwater Club. Back row: Panelists Matt Golt, Haley Caplan, Amanda Cape, event co-chair. Paige Crystal, Samuel Lewis, Steven Atme, and Jesse Heffring, moderator. Front row: Event co-chairs Emily Arnovitz, Shari Palus, and Laurie Blumer (GenMTL Community Engagement associate).



Hors Normes, un film engagé sur l'autisme

MOVIE NIGHT



Dans le cadre du mois juif de sensibilisation, d'acceptation et d'intégration des personnes handicapées (JDAIM), une projection spéciale du film *Hors Normes* a été organisée par la Fédération CJA le 12 février dernier.

Avec *Hors Normes*, les cinéastes **Nakache** et **Tolédano** (qui nous ont donné les merveilleux films *Intouchables* et *Samba*) se sont attaqués à un sujet de calibre. Inspirés de faits véridiques, les réalisateurs, toujours avec ce tact et cette sensibilité qu'on leur connaît si bien, nous font découvrir l'univers caché des autistes sévères, ces abandonnés du système.

Très vite, ce film au rythme haletant nous projette dans un monde dur où les personnages sont confrontés à des difficultés immenses au quotidien. Manque de ressources et de financement, manque de personnel qualifié, manque de connaissances sur l'autisme et j'en passe... Tout au long du film, on suit des « encadrants », pas toujours formés, prenant en charge des cas très lourds. Dans le rôle d'éducateurs très passionnés, dont la vie ne tourne qu'autour

de ce travail, **Vincent Cassel** et **Reda Kateb** sont très crédibles. Par ailleurs, le film dénonce les anciennes pratiques utilisées en France pour faire face à l'autisme sévère : institutionnalisation, psychiatrie, enfermement, isolation, médication pour « tranquilliser les patients »... Un monde sans espoir.

À bout de souffle, les intervenants du milieu font appel à l'équipe extraordinaire du *Silence des Justes*, une véritable association fondée en 1996, qui prend en charge les exclus d'un système défaillant. Des gens ayant la vocation, des personnes qui comprennent qu'un autiste peut se cogner la tête, partir en courant et aimer quand même. Qu'il faut persister dans le lien pour arriver à quelque chose. Que la seule voie est celle de la douceur, de l'empathie. Qu'ensemble, on peut arriver à de petites mais grandes victoires. Que l'insertion des autistes dans la société est possible voire nécessaire. On est loin de *Rain Man* et des versions romantisées de Hollywood mettant en scène des autistes hyperfonctionnels de type Asperger! Malgré un sujet difficile à aborder, ce film est

plein de lumière. Les acteurs y livrent tous des performances complexes, parfois drôles et toujours touchantes. Fait intéressant : plusieurs autistes non-comédiens ont appris à jouer sur scène pour ce film. On rit même de certaines scènes stéréotypées comme celles où le personnage de Benjamin répète souvent, hors contexte et sur un ton monocorde : « On ne tape pas sa mère ». Ou celle où l'un des autistes met son doigt dans toutes les crèmes brûlées du restaurant quand personne ne le surveille, ce qui cause un énervement collectif risible.

Selon moi, le coup de force de *Hors Normes* est d'avoir su montrer comment dans le monde de l'autisme, le chaos et le calme s'alternent, de la même façon que la souffrance et la bonté se côtoient. Ce film coup-de-poing est une ode à l'acceptation et à l'amour inconditionnel. Une leçon d'humanité à portée de tous.

Hors Normes sera à l'affiche à Montréal ce printemps.

Par Emmanuelle Assor

The Cummings Centre hosts disability inclusion exhibition

On a snowy February 27, the **Cummings Centre** hosted two events in support of **JDAIM**. The first was a day-long *Disability Inclusion Exhibition of Community Programs & Accessories* geared specifically for adults over the age of 50 living with disabilities. Exhibitors showcased adapted products and services catering to this group and included a variety of vendors such as **Wil+Aide Medical**, **Clinique de l'Audition Décarie**, **ErgoVie**, **Les Centres Masliah Audioprothésistes**, services provided by the **Cummings Centre**, and of course, *Inspirations*. That same afternoon, the Cummings Centre hosted a singalong, led by its collaborative Glee Club with **Agence Ometz**. The crowd was invited to sing along in celebration of diversity in the Montreal Jewish Community. It was a fabulous day and a wonderful way to wind down **JDAIM**.



Cummings Centre intake supervisor and exhibit co-organizer **Sandy Neim** visits **Cindy Davis** at the *Inspirations* booth at the Disability Inclusion Exhibition of Community Programs & Accessories.

JEM's Gems pop-up at Federation CJA

By Cindy Davis

On February 28, **JEM Workshop** held a pop-up shop in the lobby of **Federation CJA**. The pop-up, touted as '**JEM's Gems**,' sold a variety of beaded jewelry, pins and greeting cards which were hand-crafted and packaged by the **JEM Workers** themselves. The pop-up was staffed by **JEM** employees and volunteers, and offered **Federation CJA** employees and passersby the opportunity to meet and greet with **JEM Workers** and learn more about the Workshop. **JEM Workers** were also given the opportunity to continue their sales pitches upstairs, as **Carly Goodman**, coordinator of Community Inclusion at **Federation CJA**, led them through some offices to mingle with **Federation CJA** staff. The event raised over \$600 for **JEM Workshop** - a socially supported and adapted workplace that provides a variety of packaging and labeling services to local businesses.



JEM Workers **Debbie Klamp** and **Adena Schnarch** show off some of the items for sale at **JEM Workshop's** pop-up shop at **Federation CJA**.



Travel

BROADWAY REVIEW



Ain't Too Proud - *The Life and Times of the Temptations*

By Mike Cohen

NEW YORK - Last year I saw *Motown the Musical* at Place des Arts, the American dream story of Motown founder Berry Gordy's journey from featherweight boxer to the heavyweight music mogul who launched the careers of Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Smokey Robinson and many more. I loved every minute of it. So, when I visited New York City recently, I was naturally drawn to *Ain't Too Proud - The Life and Times of the Temptations*. It won a 2019 Tony Award for Best Choreography and had 12 nominations.

The Temptations is an American vocal group who released a series of successful singles and albums with **Motown** during the 1960s and 70s. Featuring five male vocalists and dancers, the group formed in 1960 in Detroit, Michigan, under the name **The Elgins** and gave us such memorable hits as *My Girl*, *Ain't Too Proud to Beg*, *I Wish It Would Rain*, *Treat Her Like a Lady*, *Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)* and *For Once In My Life*, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted* and more. They earned three Grammy Awards.

Otis Williams is the last living member of the Temptations. His book about the group is the basis for the Broadway show. Williams in fact continues to perform, using the Temptations name.

Ain't Too Proud, currently playing at the Imperial Theatre on West 45th Street until at least US Thanksgiving Weekend 2020, is the electrifying new musical that follows The Temptations' extraordinary journey from the streets of Detroit to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. With their signature dance moves and unmistakable harmonies, they rose to the top of the charts creating an amazing 42 Top 10 hits with 14 reaching number one. The rest is history — how they met, the groundbreaking heights they hit and how personal and political conflicts threatened to tear the group apart as the United States fell into civil unrest. This thrilling story of brotherhood, family, loyalty and betrayal is a beautiful production.

Tony Award nominee **Derrick Baskin** portrays Otis Williams and is the glue to the show. He narrates the entire history of the Temptations from the opening number until the conclusion. Before walking into the theatre, I simply knew the songs which made the Temptations so successful, but this is a



A scene from Ain't Too Proud. (Photo, Matthew Murphy)

true history lesson and it pulls no punches. There have been 24 members of the Temptations since this group was first established. Williams had to continually make the hard decisions and drop members who were not comporting themselves properly. At one point two of the singers who were let go returned for a reunion tour, but they could not turn over a new leaf. Williams himself was an absentee father and husband, focused exclusively on the business. I loved the show so much that the greatest hits of The Temptations are now loaded on my iPhone.

After breaking house records at both Berkeley Rep and The Kennedy Center, this musical is written by three-time Obie Award winner Dominique Morisseau, directed by two-time Tony Award winner Des McAnuff (*Jersey Boys*), and featuring choreography by Tony nominee Sergio Trujillo (*Jersey Boys*, *On Your Feet*).

Leading the current cast of *Ain't Too Proud* as *The Temptations* is Tony Award nominee **Derrick Baskin as Otis Williams**, **James Harkness as Paul Williams**, **Jawan M. Jackson as Melvin Franklin**, **Jelani Remy as Eddie Kendricks**, and Tony Award nominee **Ephraim Sykes as David Ruffin**. *Ain't Too Proud* also features *Saint Aubyn*, *Shawn Bowers*, *E. Clayton Cornelious*, *Taylor Symone Jackson*, *Jahi Kearse*, *Jarvis B. Manning, Jr.*, *Joshua Morgan*, *Rashidra Scott*, *Nasia Thomas*, *Christian Thompson*, *Candice Marie Woods*, *Esther Antoine*, *Marcus Paul James*, *Correy West*, *Drew Wildman Foster*, *Curtis Wiley* and *Jamari Johnson Williams*.


The Imperial Theatre provides accommodations for patrons who are blind, deaf, partially sighted, and/or have hearing loss. The

al mobile devices free of charge. If you have questions, contact Shubert Audience Services at (212) 944-3700 or audience-services@shubertorg.com. There is also a representative at the Shubert Audience Services kiosk at every performance to assist any patron with any of their devices, software, or technology.

Seating is accessible to all parts of the orchestra without steps. There are no steps to the designated wheelchair seating location. Handrails are available at the end of every stepped seat row in the Mezzanine. There are no elevators, but a wheelchair accessible restroom (unisex) is located on the main level. Tickets for *Ain't Too Proud* are available by visiting www.Telecharge.com, by calling (800) 447-7400, or by visiting the Imperial Theatre Box Office (249 West 45th Street). For groups of 10 or more, visit www.BroadwayInbound.com or call (866) 302-0995. The show runs two and a half hours. Due to COVID-19, theatres are closed until at least April 12.

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As **Oklahoma!** moves into tour mode Ali Stroker's performance on **Broadway** stands out

Travel

BROADWAY
REVIEW

By Alexandra Cohen



Ali Stroker in a scene from Oklahoma! (Photo, Little Fang Photo)

The exceptional Tony Award winning revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* may have closed its run on January 19, 2020, at Broadway's Circle in the Square Theatre, but a tour will fittingly be opening starting in Oklahoma next fall, ultimately visiting other places in the United States and hopefully Canada.

The first collaboration between iconic Broadway duo **Richard Rodgers** and **Oscar Hammerstein II**, *Oklahoma!* premiered for the first time on Broadway in 1943. The musical is credited with being the first of its kind, integrating its book, score, and choreography with the goal of advancing the plot.

This revival serves as the Broadway debut of visionary director **Daniel Fish**, who has created a vivid re-imagining of this country-set classic. While he left the original text and score intact, he has managed to explore the plot through a 21st century lens, making an old story feel new and relevant again.

The cast of this darker *Oklahoma!* was led by **Rebecca Naomi Jones** as Laurey and 2019 Tony Award nominee **Damon Daunno** as Curly – both are in exceptional voice and have completely re-invented the roles. They were joined by 2019 Tony nominees **Mary Testa** (Aunt Eller) and Tony Award winner **Ali Stroker** (Ado Annie), as well as many other exceptionally talented company members.

The production was hailed as Best of the Year and received a Critic's Pick from the

New York Times. Set in Oklahoma just after the turn of the century, the musical explores the complicated love story of Curly, an idealist of a cowboy, and Laurey, a stubborn farm girl, as they fall in love.

Those familiar with the original production will remember the 15-minute Dream Ballet sequence which once closed the show's first act, a method of exploring Laurey's romantic feelings and fears. In this revival, the sequence has been re-developed as an awe-inspiring modern dance sequence performed with dim lighting and frantic music. The room watched in a hushed silence as dancer **Gabrielle Hamilton** made her way across the floor.

In particular, the show received quite a bit of buzz for the casting of Ali Stroker in the role of Ado Annie, the comedic foil to Laurey and Curly's love story. Stroker, originally discovered on **Ryan Murphy's** reality TV competition "**The Glee Project**," made history in 2015 as the first actress in a wheelchair to appear on a Broadway stage. Once again, she made history last year as the first performer in a wheelchair to receive a Tony Award. During her acceptance speech, she dedicated the award to "every kid who is watching tonight who has a disability, who has a limitation or a challenge, who has been waiting to see themselves represented in this arena." No doubt about it, she truly is an inspiration. In addition to Stroker, blind casting in this production includes people of colour in roles which were traditionally

given to white people. Stroker's wheelchair is given its own set of choreography but is in no way integral to the character. In fact, Stroker performed five shows weekly, with her fantastic understudy, **Sasha Hutchings**, playing the role for the three other shows. Hutchings did not use a wheelchair during the performance.

The 31-year-old Stroker has been paralyzed since the age of two following a car crash. After her Tony win, she was asked by a reporter how to make Broadway and theatre more accessible.

"The theatres for the house, where all the audience comes in, that is all made accessible to patrons," Stroker said. "But the back stages are not. So, I would ask theatre owners and producers to really look into how they can begin to make the backstage accessible, so performers with disabilities can get around."

What sort of challenges does she face each day in terms of performing? "I leave home an hour and 45 minutes before curtain," she explained. "The show has been so supportive of my needs, providing a car for me to get to and from the theatre and helping me inside the theatre. Because there are a lot of stairs at the theatre's main entrance, I go in through the office building next door, and then Circle in the Square put in a stair lift for me to get down to the dressing rooms and stage level. They also put in a ramp backstage so I can get around."

I could not have been more impressed by Daniel Fish's production of *Oklahoma!* It is truly a brilliant feat worthy of celebration, and I felt grateful to have been in the presence of such talent and creativity.

Stay tuned for information on the tour, I hope it comes to Montreal.

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Travel

BROADWAY REVIEW CAROLINES on Broadway

By Mike Cohen



Carolines will assist patrons with special needs to enter and leave the premises.

For years I have walked by **CAROLINES** on **BROADWAY**, promising myself that I would one day check out this world-famous comedy club.

www.carolines.com

I finally did book a dinner and show package on a Saturday evening. I arrived at 5:45 p.m., checked in and was shown to a nice table in the club where veteran server Alfred took my order – some crispy fresh-cut zucchini chips to start and a main course of grilled salmon and roasted potatoes. I sat beside a nice couple from New Jersey. Christina shared her culinary insights with me and before the lights closed, I was following this mom of four on Instagram (Christina.Katers). The menu has a nice variety of choices; appetizers such as calamari, nachos, shrimp cocktail and onion rings to a selection of salads and sandwiches, pastas, chicken and steaks. For dessert you can choose from strawberry shortcake, apple tart and chocolate cake, all served with ice cream. Of course, there is a full liquor and cocktail menu.

Carolines first opened as a small cabaret club in New York's Chelsea neighborhood in 1982. Owner **Caroline Hirsch**, a lifelong comedy fan, soon began booking comedians. The comedy acts – which included now legendary performers like **Jerry Seinfeld**, **Tim Allen**, **Billy Crystal**, **Rosie O'Donnell** and **Jay Leno** – were a tremendous success. As the popularity of stand-up surged

throughout the 1980s, so did the popularity of **Carolines**, which was becoming **THE** place to see live comedy in New York City.

Located in the heart of Times Square, **Carolines on Broadway** presents the very best live comedy entertainment seven nights a week. Just steps from many of Broadway's most well-known theatres, **Carolines on Broadway** provides the same quality entertainment that is customary on New York's legendary Great White Way. On the night I went the headliner was the star of TV and motion pictures **Sinbad**.

For dinner and show packages, food is à la carte. You do receive priority seating in the showroom when you have dinner before the show in the supper lounge. Just arrive at the time of your reservation and you will receive your tickets to the show. If, however, you miss your dinner reservation before the show, they will not be able to hold the reserved seats for you in the showroom. It's first come, first placed.

Carolines on Broadway is a wheelchair accessible venue. Just contact the box office prior to the show at (212) 757-4100 for instructions. They will lead

you to a specific entrance with an elevator and staff will escort you to your seat. It is located at 1626 Broadway, between 49th and 50th Streets in Times Square.

WHERE TO STAY: When planning our trips to New York City, only one place to stay appears on our list and that is the historic **Algonquin Hotel** (www.algonquin-hotel.com). Located on 44th Street near 6th Avenue, it is a mere block and a half from Times Square. In 2020 a series of renovations will commence. There is another reason why I love this hotel. When we travel, we board our cat and miss her every second. The **Algonquin** is home to **Hamlet VIII**, a three-and-a-half year-old orange cat. **Hamlet** has his own Twitter and Instagram accounts, as well as an email account. Based on the timeline of a book written by the hotel's first general manager, the lineage of The **Algonquin Cat** dates back to the early 1920s.

The **Algonquin** first opened its doors in 1902. Today, it is part of the Marriott chain's Autograph Collection, an evolving ensemble of strikingly independent hotels. Each destination has been selected for its quality, bold originality, rich character, and uncommon details. The result is an array of proper-

ties that is nothing less than unique. The **Algonquin Hotel** was the first New York City property to become a part of the collection.

Each of the 181 rooms and 25 suites features a comfortable well-lit work desk, as well as complimentary Wi-Fi. We stayed in a very comfortable one-bedroom Playbill Suite. The layout was ideally suited for us. There is a nice sized entrance, with the master bedroom to the left featuring a nice-sized bathroom. The spacious living room has a pullout couch, a large desk which was perfect for me to write my stories and good drawer and cupboard space. You can get a fridge and a microwave, depending upon availability and on request.

The **Algonquin**, its bar and restaurant, have easy access for wheelchairs from the street. There is valet parking. The hotel has six ADA rooms and one ADA suite. There are two elevators. Staff are very helpful and friendly.

The **Algonquin Hotel** is located at 59 W 44th Street, New York, New York 10036. www.algonquinhotel.com. Info: 212-840-6800.

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Travel

THREE PERFECT DAYS IN KIEV

By Daniel Smajovits

Towering over Kiev, the Motherland Monument weighs in at 560 tons and stands 102 meters tall. Sword and shield in hand, upon first glance from the plane or car, this monument all but confirms every stereotype you have about the city: you're visiting a place still shrouded by the iron curtain.

Or so you think.

If there is any city in the world that is in the midst of a renaissance, it's Ukraine's bustling capital. Less than five years removed from the *Maidan Revolution*, the third such upheaval since the fall of the Soviet Union, the aura in the city is that it has finally turned a corner.

First time visitors to Kiev should opt to stay near **Khreschatyk Street**, which like Broadway, runs through the heart of the city. The street itself is lined with hundreds of stores, restaurants and bars and even becomes a pedestrian thoroughfare on weekends, where families gather well into the evening to enjoy Kiev's lively and family friendly nightlife.

Kiev is served by two international airports: Boryspil (KBP) located about an hour outside the city and Zhuliany (IEV) located about 15 minutes outside of the city. I recommend using Uber as a cheap, safe and reliable way to navigate long distances. Other than to and from the airport, the city is very accessible to all needs and is pedestrian friendly. Ensure to take at least one trip on the famous city's metro system, the deepest such system in the world.

With so much to see and experience, begin your first full day in Kiev with a walking tour with **Your Kiev Tours** (yourkyiv@gmail.com). Started as a passion project by Eva Vik and her three friends, the blossoming walking tour has become the #1 rated tour on Trip Advisor. Spending a morning with Eva will introduce you to all the major and even some hidden sights of the Ukrainian capital. Her engaging and fun style, which makes you feel like you're walking with a long-lost friend, will serve as the perfect foundation for the rest of tour trip.

While Eva will introduce you to some Ukrainian food and drink, ensure to save some room that afternoon, and continue your



Khreschatyk Street is the main thoroughfare in Kiev. It becomes a pedestrian mall during the summer.

introduction to Kiev with **Kyiv Tasty Tours** (www.tasty-kyiv.com). Going beyond the traditional fare, this food tour turns the tables on both local cuisine and restaurants. From the city's vibrant market to a hidden restaurant in the heart of Independence Square, this tour will make you long for Ukrainian food well after you've landed at home.

After a filling first day, set your alarm for an early wake and join a day-trip to Chernobyl with **ChernobylWel** (www.chernobylwel.com). Located approximately two hours north of Kiev, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is perhaps one of the world's most fascinating destinations, where visitors can step foot in a place where time has stood still since 1986. All trips begin at 7:00 am to ensure that visitors have the chance to see all the unique sites in the area, which include the Chernobyl Power Plant, the abandoned town of Pripyat as well as one of two Duga Radar Stations in the world, a key component of the Soviet missile defense system during the Cold War. The government limits the number of daily visitors, so reserve your tour well in advance.

Your day trip to Chernobyl will bring you back to Kiev in the early evening, so after a

quick rest, book a table at **100 Rokiv Tomu Vpered** for dinner. Located steps away from Independence Square, the restaurant offers a modern spin on Ukrainian classics. If you're looking for a quicker meal and a wide array of local cuisine, check out **Puzata Hata** (multiple locations). The fast-casual restaurant is popular among locals for its cheap prices, vast selection and fresh food. It's a fantastic way to try anything and everything without breaking the bank.

On your third and final day in Kyiv, begin your day north of the city at the **Museum of Corruption**, appropriately located in Mezhyhirya Residence, the former home of President **Victor Yanukovich** before he fled the country following the *Maidan Revolution*. On your way back to the city, take a moment to pay your respects at the **Babi Yar Memorial** (www.babi-yar.org). Babi Yar was the site of one of the greatest massacres of World War II where the Nazis murdered 33,771 Jews over the course of two days in 1941.

After lunch, spend your afternoon at the **National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War** (www.warmuseum.kiev.ua), home to the Motherland Monument, where you take a step into the tumultuous history of the country, life behind the Iron Curtain and more. Once the museum closes at 6 p.m. (last admission at 5 p.m.), enjoy a beautiful hour-long walk back to the heart of the city through Kiev's network of greenery and parks.

Before you begin your night out on the town, walk over to **Kanapa** for dinner at one of Kiev's most renowned restaurants. While this spot is also visited by **Kyiv Tasty Tours** for its out-of-this-world borscht, enjoy the full experience before the beginning of a great night. Located next to the vibrant **Podil** district, try to squeeze in a walk through its streets before or after you dine.

No trip to Kiev will be complete without sampling some of the city's famous nightlife and whether you're solo, with friends or with your significant other, **Kate from Sights of Kiev** (www.sightsofkiev.com) is your perfect guide. Beginning at 9 pm, Kate's nightlife tour goes well beyond the traditional bars to a number of exclusive – and sometimes hidden – spots known only to locals. From the best local spirits and beers with some fantastic live music in between, an evening with Kate will seem like you're back in college with your roommate, enjoying a night on the town, making this tour the ideal way to wrap up your fantastic trip.



Bullet holes from 2004 Maidan Revolution.

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