



Segal Centre scores big with  
reimagined *The Sages of Chelm*

## Description

# Lively musical based on Yiddish folk tales is a highlight of the summer season

By **Byron Toben**

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The **Segal Centre** continues to lead the return to live theatre with a “reimagined” classic from Montreal’s **Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre** (est.1958), namely, ***The Sages Of Chelm***.

This play, written by **Abraham Shulman**, and based on Yiddish folk tales (which had also inspired **Sholom Aleichem** and **Isaac Singer** treatments), had music added by **Eli Rubinstein**.



Enter director **Trevor Barrette** (who doubled as choreographer and stage manager), a lively off-stage band headed by musical director **Nick Burgess** (keyboard) with violin (**Vanessa Marcoux**), bass (**Mike De Masi**) and drums (**Parker Bert**) and 14 actor/singer/dancers, some of whom, like Wasserman stalwart **Sam Stein**, fluent in Yiddish, others coached to accent perfection, all supplemented by easy to read English and French surtitles and, *voilà*, stage magic!

The story is based on the tale of God assigning angels to scatter souls, some wise, some foolish, to various earthly sites when a full bag of foolish souls accidentally fell to land on the small Polish hamlet of Chelm. The residents, though foolish, thought themselves wise, hence the humour. Thus, when outsider wanderer Menakhem (**Jake Cohen**) arrives, they only reluctantly allow him to stay provided he does not marry lest he has foolish children to pollute their wise ways.



However, the town beauty Shoshana (**Jeanne Motulsky**) and he are mutually attracted even though she is engaged, sort of, to Shmerl (**David Peterman**) who she does not fancy despite the preferences of her mother (**Rachel Kohl Finegold**) and father (**Sam Stein**). Throw in two rabbis (**Bruce Lambie** and **Stan Unger**), a town beggar, a baker, a florist, a hunter, mounds of earth, a fire, a fire engine, progress in the form of a train and the propensity to answering a question with a question, all mixed with lively dancing (some comic) resulting in a highlight of the summer season.

***The Sages of Chelm*** runs at the **Segal Centre** until **June 26**.

*Images: Leslie Schachter*

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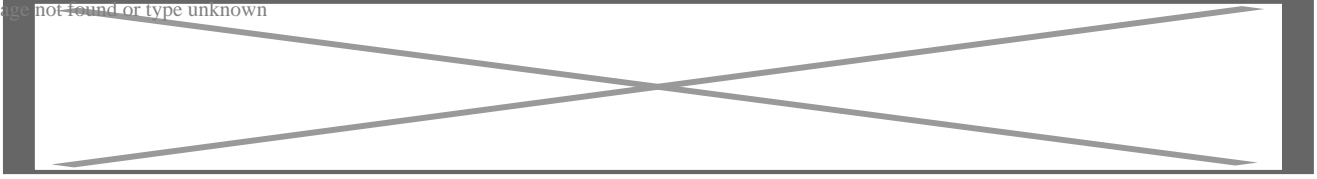
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**Byron Toben**, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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