

# Fiddler

A MUSICAL



Ariel Efraim Ashbel

AND FRIENDS

# Ariel Efraim Ashbel and friends



## Fiddler! A Musical

13.+14., 16.+17.12., 19:00 / HAU1  
14.12: Artist Talk with Henrike Kohpeiß  
after the performance

English / Further languages / With translation  
approx. 180 mins. (incl. intermission)

“Fiddler! A Musical” presents musical theater as an experimental tradition. Paying a loose homage to “Fiddler on the Roof”, a Broadway smash that brought Yiddish art to the masses and reshaped Jewish representation in popular culture, the show explores the traditions of 20th-century Jewish performative crafts – from Russia, through Berlin to New York – and their relations to exile, expulsion, and state violence. The show, which has been two years in the making, indulges in the underworlds of Jewish mysticism and its kaleidoscopes of demons, witches and ghosts, while cabaret, vaudeville, expressionist dance, stand-up, and ultimately, the Broadway musical animate the scene. On the occasion of 10 years of Ariel Efraim Ashbel and friends, the show is an intoxicating and disorienting ride where the music of composer Ethan Braun, light and objects take center stage. They are joined by the group’s rotating roster of performers, with special guests like the musician Peaches and Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop.

# Interview with Ariel Efraim Ashbel, Artistic Director



## How did the idea for “Fiddler! A Musical” come about?

It started as a joke. We were writing a funding application, and we thought “Fiddler on the Roof” was funny because most of our shows have titles of existing pieces. And I’ve been increasingly incorporating Jewish thinking and culture into my work. So, it started as a joke but got serious when, for the 10th anniversary of Ariel Efraim Ashbel and friends, we had the opportunity to combine two strands of our work which did not intertwine so far: stage shows and spectacles, on the one hand, which were more abstract content-wise, and salons and rituals, which relate to the Jewish calendar and traditions, on the other. A musical was an opportunity to combine the two under one umbrella.

## Once you decide on the title, what does the work process look like?

In this case, we started with watching the movie, “Fiddler on the Roof” (1971), and Ethan Braun (the show’s composer and musical director) and I studied the film and abstracted it. We deconstructed and distilled the dramaturgical structure that underlies the narrative content. That naked structure then became the base to build new content, through a mix of improvising and a patchwork of references to performative crafts of the Jewish diaspora, from Russia through Germany and Central Europe to the United States. Before the rehearsals we had a seminar with all of the participants where we introduced the most important references, research questions and started exploring everyone’s associations.

**You're approaching the musical as both an experimental tradition and a Jewish tradition.**

**How do you see the musical in relation to both experimental theater and the diasporic Jewish experience?**

It's actually the perfect intersection of these two trajectories. Jews were traditionally ostracized from the mainstream cultural establishment. Eastern European Jews, when they arrived in Berlin at the turn of the century, were frowned upon even by assimilated Jews in the big theater houses. So without access to institutions, the musical, being a hybrid of forms, allowed for unorthodox mixes, something more haphazard, more improvised, and that was very Jewish at that moment. Being culturally marginalized, Shtetl and Yiddish speaking Jews had to invent and experiment with different performative forms. That's how vaudeville, stand-up comedy, and nonsense, these new, different, and weird forms became integrated into Jewish culture. The musical has a strong emphasis on entertaining and the immediate response of the audience. You want to make people feel and laugh. There's an urge for immediacy, puncturing the facade of high art. And that's the meeting point of the Jewish and experimental trajectories.

**Music, both experimental and popular, is prevalent in your work. How is "Fiddler!" similar and different from past shows?**

I think it's similar in that it brings in different references. That's a thread that runs through all the shows. What is different is that we built the whole thing on the music, it's the main dramaturgical marker. Ethan would compose stuff, I would bring in ideas, he would add his ideas, and the performers and creative crew would add on to that. Ethan

created a musical map based on the "Fiddler on the Roof" score. This piece also has a big orchestra with the Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop, so music is the heart of the show, and it is taking center stage, literally.

**How did the events in Israel and Gaza affect the work process?**

The war started in the middle of the rehearsal period, and it obviously changed everything. We all felt that the bigger question became, 'What exactly are we doing now?' Should we even be doing this or cancel or postpone? And if we are doing this, what do we need, and what can we propose to the audience? Everything was uprooted, like the ground was literally pulled from under our feet. And then what started to happen, on the level of the process, was that the studio became the place where we could support each other and be together. We made the decision to not think too much about the show. We were so emotionally destroyed, and the studio became a sanctuary of support, tears, laughter, and hugs. Gradually, the content started to change, too. In earlier moments in my career, I would be excited, for example, to see very intense imagery, or play with the borderlines of acceptability and offensiveness. But I realized that I cannot do this right now, not because of an intellectual or political decision, but because of an emotional need. I literally needed to see people hugging each other, and being kind to each other, and holding each other in different ways. As soon as we realized we wanted to go on with the show, we started thinking about how it could be a container for our grief and allow the people who come to see it to be part of that, too. Beyond pure entertainment, my wish, and I know it sounds very pompous, is to offer a kind of a healing ritual.

With Ethan Braun, Composer and Musical  
Director of “Fiddler! A Musical”



# Riffs On Score

“Ariel’s shows play with samples relative to a topic. I tried to do something similar with the score. I understood the compositional work to be figuring out how – with electronics, 9 string players, a piano, and voices – to frame 100 years of diasporic Jewish musicality while giving musical. Fiddler principally draws on 1960s Broadway and its discontents

downtown, but there’s loads of referenced musics, mostly Jewish: Drake and Doja Cat are in there, Stephen Sondheim, Bebe Barron, Tricky, Meredith Monk, Terry Riley, Arnold Schoenberg, Steve Reich, György Ligeti, my own music, the Looney Tunes... Mahler didn’t make it poor guy.

I was drawn to Minimalist music for how it caricatures itself. It works for Broadway because the Broadway musical is all about loving the kitsch, right? The nasal voices, the gestures... Minimalist music has been received as an American anti-intellectual response to Neue Musik because it’s big and kitschy and trying to sell you something. I say “kitsch” with love by the way – I really love this music. What I sampled from it were the senses of pulses, the (almost) repetitions, the additive and subtractive processes, and the predilection for quartal and quintal harmonies familiar too from Sondheim.

I’m interested not so much in samples but rather in the form and shape and the feelings they can leave. In the first act, the score doesn’t really build up. It’s just a plateau, and then a plateau, and then another plateau, each at a different height. Big numbers like “If I Were a Rich Man” and “Don’t Rain on my Parade,” and my riffs on the theme song of Fiddler. Dramaturgically, the end of our Act I corresponds to the pogrom scene that ends the wedding in “Fiddler on the Roof”, so here too is this violent cut ending a celebration. Act II begins in the disarray that remains from the pogrom. It departs from there and unlike the pillars of the first act here everything is in a kind of exilic flux. It’s a necessary sense of departure, and there’s a beauty to it. It finds some renewed sense of movement that’s rather different than the first act’s pillars. The second act melts and seduces towards an uncertain futurity like Antarctica.”

Molly Picon, American Yiddish Performer, in a poster for "Oy Iz Dos a Meydl" (Some Girl), Teatro Excelsior, Buenos Aires. 1932.



Inbal Dance Company. Israel's first and oldest modern dance company.



The Yiddish Kaftan Cabaret at Jägerstrasse 18, Berlin. ca. 1930/31.



Baruch Agadati. Dancer, choreographer and painter. Mandatory Palestine, circa 1925.



Marc Chagall,  
"The Green Violinist."  
1923-24.

Wedding scene from *Der dibek* (The Dybbuk) by S. Ansky. Performed by Asro and Alomis's Vilna Troupe in Paris, 1923.



Rehearsals for the 1964 Broadway debut of "Fiddler on the Roof," with actor Zero Mostel pulling the cart. Standing to left: Jerome Robbins, the show's director and choreographer.

Rehearsal still from "Sunday in the Park" with George, a Broadway musical. 1983. From left: Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics), Mandy Patinkin, Bernadette Peters, and James Lapine.





Sholem Aleichem, Yiddish author and playwright. Warsaw. 1905.



Pepi Litman, a cross-dressing Yiddish vaudeville singer. Lemberg/Lviv. 1910s.

Peaches. Transnational Icon.



# and friends



## Ariel Efraim Ashbel

Think Kermit the frog meets Groucho Marx.



## Marquet Lee

From the runway to the stage, the stylist and costume designer serves us strong silhouettes, consistent concepts and solid punchlines.



## Joseph Wegmann

As Berlin's most wanted light designer and Ariel's secret boss, Joseph is notorious in technical departments all over Europe for his elaborate designs.



### Ethan Braun

Baruch Hashem for giving us this gem!  
Composer, musical director, pianist, performer – what DOESN'T he do?



### Alona Rodeh

Fiddler's head of visuals and Ariel's not so secret boss (this production marks 20 years of them working together, congratulations! #old).



### Liz Rosenfeld

Making up for their grandfather's choice to not invest in the Broadway debut of "Fiddler on the Roof" back in the 1960s, Liz takes center stage and exposes their masterful showmanship.



### mma Kgos

Longterm friend, first time collaborator: We are honored to have this performance-powerhouse and their many hats (figuratively AND literally) on stage with us.



### Tatiana Saphir

Putting the "con" in "iconic", she's the comical genius you've been waiting for.



### Tamara Saphir

From Buenos Aires to Berlin this dancer turned philosopher turned performer and OG Ashbela's friend moves like no other through different styles, skills and disciplines.



### Jessica Sadani

The elusive chanteuse, Miss Piggy to Ariel's Kermit, the muse, the mother of this house of clowns.



### Leah Katz

She can dance, she can sing –the twist? She's funny too!



### Peaches

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peaches\\_\(musician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peaches_(musician))



### Perel

Attention audience, you might catch yourself laughing and crying from the jokes of this queer, Jewish, disabled artist extraordinaire. Let us assure you that it's ok – we might hold it against you later though!



### Sarah Thom

We're proud to inform you that we are the only performance group besides Gob Squad that has had the honor of Sarah's presence on stage – she really brings the magic!



### Efrat Aviv

Taking the stage with only 5 days of rehearsals we can say with confidence that Efrat is the most professional and dazzling of us all.



## Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop

With over 15 years of blurring the lines between new music and performance, this ensemble of soloists sure still knows how to fiddle.



## Rachel Libeskind

A special thanks goes out to this unhinged diva who's been by our side through this whole process – can you spot her little cameo?



## Katharina Joy Book

Assistant director, dramaturg, stage manager, Ariel's bully: She might look innocent but don't judge this BOOK by its cover!



## Anna von Glasenapp

The hot Virgo producer of everyone's dreams. Secretly working on her career as a stand-up comedian so she can finally get rid of us and fulfill her true potential.



## Romm Lewkowicz

What would we do without this exceptional wordsmith, bookworm, archivist and skinny legend? He's the one giving our shenanigans some legitimacy.

**Artistic Direction**  
Ariel Efraim Ashbel

**Graphic Design**  
Avi Bohbot

**Musical Direction & Composition**  
Ethan Braun

**Dramaturgy & Assistance Direction**  
Katharina Joy Book

**Stage Design**  
Alona Rodeh

**Stage Assistance**  
Pitt Kunath

**Light Design**  
Joseph Wegman

**PR & Marketing**  
Lilly Schofield

**Costume Design**  
Marquet K. Lee

**Social Media**  
Dan Kanin

**Research & Concept**  
Romm Lewkowicz

**Artistic Collaboration Accessibility**  
Noa Winter  
Miles Wendt

**By and with**  
Efrat Aviv  
Jessica Gadani  
Leah Katz  
mma Kgosi  
Peaches  
Perel  
Liz Rosenfeld  
Tamara Saphir  
Tatiana Saphir  
Sarah Thom

**Special thanks**  
Rachel Libeskind  
Heiki Riipinen  
Jordan Schnee

**Production**  
Ariel Efraim Ashbel and friends

**Co-production**  
HAU Hebbel am Ufer  
FFT Düsseldorf  
Kampnagel Hamburg

**Orchestra**  
Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop

**Artistic Production**  
Anna von Glasenapp / high expectations

**Funded by**  
Kulturstiftung des Bundes  
Berlin Senate Department for  
Culture and Social Cohesion

**Administration**  
Gregor Zoch / high expectations

**Technical Direction**  
Hendrik Borowski

**Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop**  
is funded by the Berlin Senate  
Department for Culture and  
Social Cohesion

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DES  
BUNDES



Ashbel & friends  
Efraim  
Ariel  
10  
Years