

REVIEWS

Winnipeg Jewish Theatre tackles difficult debate

By **Rebecca Kuropatwa**
Tribune Western Correspondent

WINNIPEG – The Winnipeg Jewish Theatre (WJT) opened its 2007-08 season with the world premier of *Talk*, an original two-person play, to a 150-person audience at the Berney Theatre at the Asper JCC.

Talk begins with two old friends who have known each other for 12 years reconnecting in Winnipeg for drinks. The stage is bare except for two chairs where the two friends sit and talk.

The play focuses on friends: Josh, a Jew (Michael Rubinfeld), and Gord, a non-Jew (Matthew TenBruggencate); their friendship plummets downhill when the topic of the Middle East conflict comes up.

Gord asks Josh what he thinks of his girlfriend, Klatit, who he just met for the first time. Josh begins *Talk* by saying, "the question is simple: So, what do you think of her?"

This cheerful talk soon turns into a heated debate, fuelled by

Josh's anger over a word Gord's girlfriend used when talking about where she picked up the kafia scarf she was wearing – "Palestine."

When the friends began arguing, Gord too refers to what his friend calls "Israel" as "Palestine." Josh says, "Folks, I am a Jew. I am looking for peace in the Middle East, but as of yet, there is no Palestine.... I didn't realize I was having martinis with Arafat."

Gord tries to be the voice of reason: "We are just two friends exchanging political ideas. If we can't do that – despite our differences – what good is the friendship?"

The friends continue to try to dialogue to reach an understanding, as the debate gets increasingly heated and personal.

Near the middle of the play, Josh begins to question whether true friends should be able to tell each other anything. Then, taking the play in a new direction, showing what might have happened if he had just told Gord he liked Klatit, leaving out



Josh (Michael Rubinfeld) and Gord (Matthew TenBruggencate) on opening night of *Talk*.

his feelings about the word "Palestine."

But, as the friends continue along these lines, the hiding of the truth slowly seeps to the surface, with even worse results.

"If I am attacked as a Jew, I will defend myself as a Jew.... I want my old friend back," said Josh. "The one who lived his life. But he is gone now.... And I get assailed for being oversensitive...because I find people who kill Jews as a form of protest unconscionable."

Gord thinks Josh has blown things way out of proportion, saying "you chose self-righteousness over my need for having a nice evening."

With each word the friends say, they entrench themselves further into their positions. Each friend tells the audience, "I'm left to wonder what sort of friend would attack your beliefs."

This provocative production, by Winnipeg playwright Michael Nathanson is a drama, with elements of humour, complexity,

and tenderness.

Nathanson is the artistic producer of *Talk*, as well as the general manager of WJT. He has been producer since June of this year, and manager since late 2006.

Talk is the first play on the company's slate this year, and Nathanson said he is "dedicated to producing one local and original play each year."

The show is "written directly from personal experience," said the playwright. "It mirrors what

happens when people take an extreme position on anything – things break down – like those in power in the Middle East, who are at the dialogue table. We need more moderates."

Ross McMillan directed *Talk*. Abigail Myers did the set and costume design. Randy Harder did the lighting design and Sylvia Fisher was the stage manager.

Talk will mark the launch of WJT's agreement to work with the University of Winnipeg's department of theatre and film. The university's honours production dramaturgy class will be providing the creative team with articles concerning conflicts that arise in the script. The students had a Talk Back session last Saturday.

In January, the WJT will be participating in MametFest with David Mamet's *Speed-the-Plow* about the *Dreams and Schemes* of Hollywood producers. In April, the WJT will present Israel Horowitz's *Lebensraum*, examining the issues of tolerance and intolerance.

Entrepreneur, mentor guides others in following their artistic dreams

By **Shlomit Kriger**
Tribune Correspondent

'Love what you do' isn't just a motto that this artist, author, entrepreneur and mentor has on her business card, it's what she lives and breathes.

Thanks to her latest endeavours, including a recently released book, *Start & Run An Art Teaching Business*, Richmond Hill resident Tanya Freedman now continues to guide other creative souls to follow their dreams.

"My grandfather in-law said to me, 'Don't ever hide your talents; share them,'" said Freedman. "I believe God gives us guiding messages through people and other things around us, and I realized I had some role to play in helping others through my talents thanks to God."

The inspiration for Freedman's book came from her own experiences running the successful Jolly Good Art School out of her home studio for about six years. She shared her passion for art with children and adults, as well as children with special needs.

While her book is geared towards those interested in teaching art, the majority of the content is transferable to any type of creative business. She covers every aspect of running a business, including networking, organizing classes, business plans, marketing, legal issues and becoming an entrepreneur.

There are also numerous sample forms, exercises, and resources throughout the book, as well as an included CD-ROM. The CD also features more than 50 images of paintings and other works of art produced by some of Freedman's former students, as well as her own paintings.

Born in Russia and later raised in England, Freedman grew up watching her parents run a clothing business. Having been surrounded by entrepreneurs, she knew one day she'd become one, too.

Her love for painting and art surfaced at age 10 and has blossomed since. Having also had a passion for creative writing, she enjoyed penning poetry and romance novels.

Later, she created, exhibited, and sold her own art, including paintings and greeting cards.

After moving to Canada with her husband Austin, an industrial pharmacist, in 1999, Freedman managed a business importing English antiques.

About a year later, her career direction took another turn following a Shabbat dinner she attended at a rabbi's home. The rabbi's wife admired one of Freedman's greeting cards that she gave her and asked whether she would teach art at a local community centre.

Although she didn't have teaching experience, Freedman agreed to try it.

"My attitude is always I can do," said Freedman.

She soon founded the Jolly Good Art School. As a result of word of mouth and customer requests, she also ended up giving art demonstrations and classes at local birthday parties, summer camps and schools.

Some of her students went on to win awards and showcase their work at local art exhibits. "Writing and art feed my soul," said Freedman. "It's like a spiritual reenergizing. I'm able to express how I feel and how I see nature and things around me."

"And when I'm teaching, I like that I can bring that out in my students. I can draw from them their own creativity and their own talents. It was a very rewarding experience for me."

Freedman's daughter, Natalia, now 11, had assisted her a bit with the classes. Inspired by the experience, Natalia had created a local crafts-for-charity event to raise money for programs for children with autism and childhood cancers.

Little did Freedman know her life would soon take an unexpected turn when cancer hit her own family.

In 2003, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. She came to Canada to be with her daughter and recuperate.

"When I watched my mother go through the cancer and depression as a cause of the illness," reminisced Freedman, "I said to myself that if I don't pursue my other dream of writing and getting published now, when will I?"

As a result, Freedman stopped running the art school near the end of 2005 and began working on her writing full-time. She found a publisher and set out to complete her book.

But on Mother's Day Weekend last year, just before her 43rd birthday, Freedman received the same diagnosis. Despite the treatments she had to undergo, she was determined to maintain her goals and continued working on the book.

By her birthday this year, Freedman had completely recovered from the cancer. Looking back, she said she realized the illness actually served as a "wake up call" to set her on her next path.

Freedman now devotes most of her time to writing and mentoring others pursuing creative endeavours. She also tries to balance her busy schedule with activities such as yoga and meditation and she is an active member of Toastmasters, a non-profit organization aimed at helping individuals hone their public-speaking and leadership skills.

Throughout this year and the next, Freedman will be providing workshops and presentations based on what she has learned through her own experiences as an entrepreneur and mentor at various locations, including Seneca College and the University of Toronto, where her book will be part of the course material. She said she is very open to sharing what she knows and assisting others on their paths.

"People really don't know how much help there is around them – if they would only ask," said Freedman. "People come to me and are shocked at how much I share. Some people think maybe because someone is successful or famous he would be too busy to talk to them."

"But if you don't ask, you don't get. Networking has been everything for me. Even mentors have good mentors."

While being an entrepreneur comes with various challenges, Freedman encourages those considering going that route to explore their options.

"If it's a creative business – or anything that has nagged them for ages – they owe it to themselves to at least do a little research. Even if you don't think you've got what it takes, or the money or time, look around you for resources."

"If you're passionate about something, you will excel in that."

For more information visit www.tanyafreedman.com.



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Passionate memoir combines social message, search for belonging

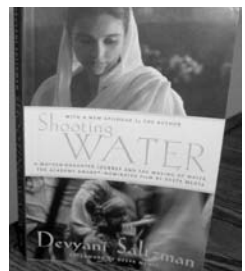
Shooting Water
By **Devyani Saltzman**
Key Porter Books
Softcover, \$21.95

By **Atara Beck**
Tribune Staff Writer

TORONTO – Author Devyani Saltzman, raised by a Jewish father and Hindu mother, cleverly identifies herself as a 'Hinjew.'

Her famous mother, award-winning filmmaker Deepa Mehta, had invited Devyani to join the crew while shooting *Water*, an Academy Award nominated film that brilliantly exposes the tragic plight of millions of widows in India who languish in poverty and abstinence. Many of the widows – whose heads are shaven before being sent away from their families to live in wretched compounds – are mere children, as is the adorable eight-year-old portrayed in the film.

Devyani's fascinating, yet emotionally painful, experience – first in India, where production was halted because of the threat of violence by religious extremists, and later in Sri Lanka – resulted in her widely acclaimed and highly personal narrative, *Shooting Water*, published in 2005 and newly released in paperback. The memoir is remarkable not only in its recounting of the politics and way of life in India. Devyani had been somewhat estranged from her mother ever since choosing to live with her father at the age of 11, following her



See *Water*, page 15.