



# INDECENT

BY PAULA VOGEL



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



INDECENT  
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**Original Broadway Production Conceived and Directed by  
Rebecca Taichman**

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**NOTE ON SONGS**

Lyrics to the following songs in the play have been reprinted by permission of the music publisher(s): "Oklahoma," music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II; "Wiegala," by Ilse Weber; "Bei mir bist du schön," by Sholom Secunda, Jacob Jacobs, Saul Chaplin, and Sammy Cahn; "Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin," German text by Aldo Von Pinelli, music by Erich M. Siegel.

For more information regarding crediting requirements for the above songs, as well as information regarding the required original music composed and arranged by Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva, please see the notes at the back of this volume.

The original Broadway production of INDECENT was conceived and directed by Rebecca Taichman.

The original Broadway production was produced by Daryl Roth, Elizabeth I. McCann, and Cody Lassen.

INDECENT opened on Broadway at the Cort Theatre on April 18, 2017. It was directed by Rebecca Taichman. It was choreographed by David Dorfman; produced by Daryl Roth, Elizabeth I. McCann, Cody Lassen, Jerry Meyer, Jay Alix & Una Jackman, Elizabeth Armstrong, Julie Boardman, CoGro Partners, Nicole Eisenberg, Four Star Productions, GLS Productions, The John Gore Organization, Kathleen K. Johnson, Dana M. Lerner, Jenn Maley, Mano-Horn Productions, Marc Platt and Storyboard Entertainment, in association with Yale Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, and Vineyard Theatre; associate produced by the National Yiddish Theatre, Adam Hess, and Sharon Fallon. The set design was by Riccardo Hernandez; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Christopher Akerlind; the sound design was by Matt Hubbs; the projection design was by Tal Yarden; hair and wig design was by J. Jared Janas & Dave Bova; the music was composed and directed by Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva; casting by Tara Rubin Casting; general management by DR Theatrical Management, Grant A. Rice; the company manager was Lisa M. Poyer, the production stage manager was James Latus; the stage manager was Amanda Spooner. The cast was as follows:

ASCH .....	Max Gordon Moore
LEMML .....	Richard Topol
MANKE .....	Katrina Lenk
NAKHMEN .....	Steven Rattazzi
RIFKELE .....	Adina Verson
ESTHER .....	Mimi Lieber
OLDER ASCH .....	Tom Nelis

INDECENT was produced by the Vineyard Theatre (Douglas Aibel and Sarah Stern, Artistic Directors; Jennifer Garvey-Blackwell, Executive Director), New York City, in spring 2016.

INDECENT was originally produced by Yale Repertory Theatre (James Bundy, Artistic Director; Victoria Nolan, Managing Director), New Haven, Connecticut, and La Jolla Playhouse (Christopher Ashley, Artistic Director; Michael S. Rosenberg, Managing Director), La Jolla, California. It opened at Yale Repertory Theatre on October 2, 2015, and at La Jolla Playhouse on November 13, 2015. The production was conceived and directed by Rebecca Taichman. The scenic design was by Riccardo Hernandez; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Christopher Akerlind; the original music was by Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva; the sound design was by Matt Hubbs; the projection design was by Tal Yarden; the choreography was by David Dorfman; the production stage manager was Amanda Spooner. The cast was as follows:

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INDECENT under the then-title of *The Vengeance Project* was developed, in part, at the 2013 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab at the Sundance Resort.



INDECENT was commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre (James Bundy, Artistic Director; Victoria Nolan, Managing Director), New Haven, Connecticut, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Bill Rauch, Artistic Director; Paul Nicholson, Executive Director), Ashland, Oregon.

## CHARACTERS: THE DEAD TROUPE

*The troupe plays everyone.*

*The Stage Manager*, LEMML

*The Ingénue*, CHANA, *also:*

Rifkele

Madje

Elsa

Immigrant

Ruth/Reina

Virginia McFadden

Bagelman Sister

*The Ingénue*, AVRAM, *also:*

Asch

Immigrant

Morris Carnovsky

Eugene O'Neill

John Rosen

*The Middle*, HALINA, *also:*

Manke

Immigrant

Freida

Dorothee Nelson/Dine

Dr. Hornig

Bagelman Sister

*The Middle*, MENDEL, *also:*

Nakhmen

Immigrant

Harry Weinberger

Officer Benjamin Bailie

Rabbi Joseph Silverman

*The Elder*, VERA, *also*:

Sarah  
Mrs. Peretz  
Immigrant  
Esther Stockton  
Madje

*The Elder*, OTTO, *also*:

Yekel  
Peretz  
Schildkraut  
Immigrant  
Bartender  
Judge McIntyre  
Asch

*And*

MAYER BALSAM, Clarinet  
(Isaac)

NELLY FRIEDMAN, Violin

MORIZ GODOWSKY, Accordion  
(Lazar)

## **PLACES**

Warsaw, Poland, 1906, to Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1950s,  
and everywhere in between.

## **SET**

A space that will be filled with planks and suitcases.  
All props come from the suitcases.

## **NOTES ON TEXT**

When a character speaks her/his native language, they speak in perfect English. When they speak a second or third language, they speak English with an accent.

All titles should be projected in both English and Yiddish except where indicated.

All songs in Yiddish should have English translations projected in English, with the exception of “Bei mir bis du schön.”

## **NOTE ON MUSIC**

Vocal and instrumental arrangements to the five songs in the script, along with the rest of the celebrated music of INDECENT’s 2017 Broadway run (composed and arranged by Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva) is required for production. For more information on the arrangements and original music, please see the Note on Original Music on page 68.

# INDECENT

TITLE: INDECENT

**the true story of a little Jewish play**

*Lights up. Soft, muffled music.*

*Slowly, in a dim light, a body stirs onstage. The light grows; we see a dusty figure in an old suit. He stretches his limbs that haven't moved in decades. He lifts one arm; dust pours from his sleeve. He lifts the other arm; more dust. He shakes his legs vigorously; more outpouring of dust.*

TITLE: **from ashes they rise**

*The troupe rises and shakes off their dust.*

*As Lemml steps on the platform:*

TITLE: **LEMML INTRODUCES THE TROUPE**

LEMML. Ladies and gentlemen. Our actors who play many, many, roles tonight! First, the founding members of our troupe. Vera Parnicki and Otto Godowsky. They play all of the fathers, all of the mothers, the sagest of our characters, or the ones who remain fools at any age.

*Otto and Vera acknowledge the audience.*

And our members of the troupe who are in their prime! Halina Cygansky and Mendel Schultzl! They play all of the vamps and all of the vice, the scarred, and the schemers.

And our ingénues! Chana Mandelbaum and Avram Zederbaum. All the brides, all the grooms, the writers, the socialists. So ardent in their beliefs, so passionate in their lovemaking.

On violin:

*Nelly Friedman!*

On clarinet:



*Mayer Balsam!*

And on accordion:

*Moriz Godowsky.*

My name is Lemml; You can also call me Lou. I'm the stage manager tonight—usually you can find me backstage. We have a story we want to tell you... About a play. A play that changed my life. Every night we tell this story—but somehow I can never remember the end.

*Lemml indicates his mind is failing. He turns to the others for help. No one can.*

No matter. I can remember how it begins. It all starts with this moment—remember this:

*Lemml gestures to two women of the troupe holding each other. And then the troupe explodes in a joyous klezmer song and dance.*

*Song: "Ale Brider."*

ALL. ("Day" is pronounced "die.")

AY DAY DAY DAY DAY DAY...

OTTO, MENDEL, and AVRAM.

UN MIR ZAYNEN ALE BRIDER,

*(We are all brothers,)*

ALL.

OY, OY ALE BRIDER

OTTO, MENDEL, and AVRAM.

UN MIR ZINGEN FREYLEKHE LIDER

*(And sing happy songs.)*

ALL.

OY OY OY.

VERA, HALINA, and CHANA.

UN MIR HALTN ZIKH IN EYNEM, OY OY ZIKH IN EYNEM

*(We stick together,)*

ALL.

OY OY ZIK IN EYNEM

VERA, HALINA, and CHANA.

AZELKHES IZ NISHTU BAY KEYNEM

*(Like nobody does!)*

ALL.

OY OY OY!

AY DAY DAY DAY DAY DAY...

*Band solo.*

AY DAY DAY DAY DAY DAY...

*Members of the troupe form a bed from suitcases and planks. A young woman gets into the bed and waits. The troupe now brings a young man to the bed to join his young bride. Lemml takes a script from a suitcase and puts it in the bride's hands. The troupe gathers round the bed, and watches the young woman read.*

TITLE: 1906 / WARSAW  
MADJE ASCH READS *THE GOD OF*  
VENGEANCE IN BED WITH SHOLEM ASCH

TITLE: in Yiddish

*Sholem Asch, a twenty-three-year-old playwright, waits as his wife reads the last page of The God of Vengeance.*

MADJE. OH!!

*Madje reads a little further.*

ASCH. Oh???

MADJE. Ohhh...

ASCH. Ohhh as in it's awful???

Oh as in how do I tell him? Oh as in whom did I marry?

*Madje reads. End of play.*

*Madje puts the manuscript down on her breasts. She closes her eyes.*

*Madje opens her eyes. She inhales. She weeps.*

MADJE. Ohhh!

ASCH. Are you crying?

MADJE. I can't breathe.

Oh as in it's wonderful. It's so sad. I love it.

ASCH. Really?

MADJE. Really.

ASCH. What did you love?

MADJE. My God, Sholem. It's all in there. The roots of all evil: the money, the subjugation of women, the false piety...the terrifying violence of that father...and then Oh Sholem, the two girls in the rain scene! My god, the poetry in it—what is it about your writing that makes me hold my breath? You make me feel the desire between these two women is the purest, most chaste, most spiritual—

ASCH. —It is!... Madje, are you angry? That I stole your words for the virgin daughter?

MADJE. If Papa had come downstairs and discovered his little Madje in flagrante...!

ASCH. I would never have made it to the huppah alive.

MADJE. It's interesting to hear your words the night you seduced me...in the mouth of a prostitute.

ASCH. I feel like a prostitute every time I have to pander to Mr. Peretz to get a reading in his salon.

MADJE. This play will cause a sensation tomorrow night! All the writers will be green with envy.

ASCH. Don't bring down the evil eye! Mr. Peretz could hate it.

MADJE. Oh, Mr. Peretz is a lovely man...but he's so nineteenth century. Acchh! Warsaw is a provincial little town! This play will be done all over the world, Moscow, Berlin, Paris—wait, wait!—I know who would be perfect for the father! Rudolph Schildkraut!

ASCH. Who?

MADJE. Rudolph Schildkraut is a sensation in Berlin right now with his *Merchant of Venice*. I'll ask Papa for money to send you. We must get this play to him!

ASCH. It's my first play!

MADJE. Our play will catch fire in Berlin! All the German intelligentsia can talk about right now is Dr. Freud! It's the twentieth century! We are all attracted to both sexes. I promise I'll understand if you get attracted to a man—

ASCH. —Huh.

MADJE. But I'll kill you if it's another woman.

ASCH. I promise you I'll understand if you get attracted to a woman—as long as I can watch.

MADJE. My God, I am now married to a Playwright! You're my warrior! My suffragette!

ASCH. (*Hopefully.*) Your lesbian?

MADJE. "Teach me. Take me. I want to taste you."

*Madje dives beneath the covers.*

**TITLE: A SALON AT THE PERETZ HOME**

**TITLE: in Yiddish**

ASCH. First of all I want to say what a great honor it is to have this opportunity...to be—to be under Mr. Peretz's roof, to be standing here in front of all of these writers whose work has been such an inspiration...

*Asch wipes the sweat from his brow, passes out the scripts, and Peretz looks at his:*

PERETZ. (*Reading.*) *The God of Vengeance!*

NAKHMEN. It's a one-hundred-and-thirty-page three-act play. What a prodigy! Does anyone mind if Lemml sits in? He's my third cousin from Łódź.

LEMML. Well, a little shtetl outside Balut actually...

NAKHMEN. He's a tailor from Balut—He's never seen a play!

PERETZ. (*Eager to welcome a working man.*) Lemml! Take a seat, take a seat!

*Peretz goes to shake Lemml's hand. Lemml wipes his hands on his jacket before he will touch Peretz.*

LEMML. Sir. It's a real honor, sir.

PERETZ. Welcome.

*Nakhmen quickly thumbs through the script.*

NAKHMEN. Oy. Another play set in a brothel.

PERETZ. Why are so many men writing brothel stories?

NAKHMEN. (*In a low voice to Peretz.*) Research.

*The men laugh.*

ASCH. Mr. Peretz would you read Yekel?

# INDECENT

by Paula Vogel

4 men, 3 women (doubling)

INDECENT, by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel, is a deeply moving play inspired by the true events surrounding the controversial 1923 Broadway debut of Sholem Asch's *God of Vengeance*—a play seen by some as a seminal work of Jewish culture, and by others as an act of traitorous libel. INDECENT charts the history of an incendiary drama and the path of the artists who risked their careers and lives to perform it.

*“This powerful drama by Paula Vogel sheds light on a time when history, Jewish culture and the depiction of lesbian love explosively intersected.”*  
—The New York Times

*“...[a] riveting backstage drama...”*  
—The New Yorker

*“...marvelous...more than just the re-telling of a long forgotten gem, INDECENT melds fact and fiction with the kind of insight and emotional depth that comes from theatre at its most poetic.”*  
—NY1

*“INDECENT ranks as a must-see for anyone who cares about the important legacy of Yiddish theater, or of theater in general. ...we are indebted to Vogel...for reminding us of a brave play that fearlessly told the world there's nothing indecent about love.”*  
—TheaterMania.com

**Also by Paula Vogel**  
THE BALTIMORE WALTZ  
HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE  
THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME  
and others

**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.**

ISBN 978-0-8222-3600-9

