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Our mission—
to educate, entertain
and enrich the lives
of young audiences

**Founding Executive
Director**
Judy Kafoury

Managing Director
Nick Fenster

Artistic Director
Sarah Jane Hardy

Press Release: January 16, 2025

**Northwest Children’s Theater (NWCT)
Awarded \$40,000 Grant by the**

**NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT for the ARTS**



arts.gov

NWCT Receives First Ever NEA Grant for *The Golem’s Gift*

Portland, OR—Northwest Children’s Theater (NWCT) is pleased to announce it has been awarded a \$40,000 Arts Projects Grant by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to support the creation of an original musical, *The Golem’s Gift*, written by **Benny Zekowicz** and **Ezra Weiss**. The NEA will award 1,127 Grants for Arts Projects awards nationwide totaling more than \$31.8 million as part of the recent announcement of fiscal year 2025 grants.

“The NEA is proud to continue our nearly 60 years of supporting the efforts of organizations and artists that help to shape our country’s vibrant arts sector and communities of all types across our nation,” said NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson, PhD. “It is inspiring to see the wide

range of creative projects taking place, including Northwest Children’s Theater.”

Inspired by Jewish folklore, *The Golem’s Gift* is an original fable about a man made of clay who is determined to repair the world. Overwhelmed by this impossible task, the Golem cannot imagine how his optimism and imagination will affect everyone he meets. Composer Ezra Weiss is a long-time collaborator with NWCT, having written and composed several original productions debuted by NWCT, including *Alice in Wonderland: a Jazz Musical* and the glittery song-and-dance spectacle, *Cinderella*.

“I am so thrilled and grateful for this grant, and for this opportunity to continue collaborating

BENNY ZELKOWICZ • ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



Playwright/lyricist Benny Zekowicz is an animator (*The LEGO Movie*, *Robot Chicken*), voice actor (Lunar Jim on BBC/CBC), and novelist (*The Books of Ore Trilogy* published by Disney-Hyperion). His award-winning sand-animated film *The ErlKing* showed at festivals around the world, including the New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center and Sundance. In addition to writing and illustrating the picture book, *The Golem’s Gift* (on which this musical is based), he has also published two neuroscience papers in a major international journal and once parallel parked a 22-foot lime green fire truck. He currently lives in Columbus, Ohio, where he teaches animation at Ohio State. His animated documentary about Jewish burial rituals, *The Sacred Society*, is currently screening at film festivals.

Release Date
January 16, 2025

End Date
December 31, 2025

Media Contact
To set up interviews or discuss other possibilities for stories, please contact:
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with NWCT," says Weiss. "In this moment when we are craving theater to give us a sense of connection and hope, Benny's beautiful story still gets me all choked up. *The Golem's Gift* is about our potential to make the world a better place, and I can't wait to share it with you."

NWCT Artistic Director **Sarah Jane Hardy** has been dedicated to presenting powerful, thought-provoking work to young audiences, and she is eager for them to experience this latest play in development.

"Our young audiences continue to amaze me with their ability to connect deeply with stories that tackle real-world issues," says Hardy. "I'm excited for them to experience this new musical,

which I believe will resonate with them in meaningful ways."

NWCT is a 32-year-old nonprofit arts organization that produces everything from Mainstage productions to immersive family arts festivals. NWCT also offers year-round theater classes and camps for budding artists ages 4-14. In April 2023, NWCT opened its new home, THE JUDY, in downtown Portland. THE JUDY has become a central hub for youth arts, serving thousands of families in and around the Portland area.

For more information on other projects included in the NEA's grant announcement, visit: [arts.gov/news](https://www.arts.gov/news).

EZRA WEISS • ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



Composer Ezra Weiss has written music and lyrics to *Alice in Wonderland: a Jazz Musical*, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, and *Cinderella: the New Tap Musical*. *Alice* and *Cinderella* were each named in the "Top 10 Cast Albums of the Year" by TalkinBroadway.com. Ezra also created and produced *Is Everybody Here?*, an online musical revue. Further, Ezra is established in the world of jazz, having released eight albums as a bandleader to international acclaim. Ezra composes and arranges music for numerous performers throughout the U.S. and leads his own big band and sextet. He has performed at major festivals and clubs, including Dizzy's in NYC, the Triple Door in Seattle, and Catalina's in Los Angeles. Ezra has won the ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Award three times and has been listed in DownBeat Critics Polls.

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