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1000 SW Broadway  
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Portland, OR 97205

Phone: 503-222-2190  
Fax: 503-222-4130  
nwcts.org

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

**Release Date**

July 28, 2026

**End Date**

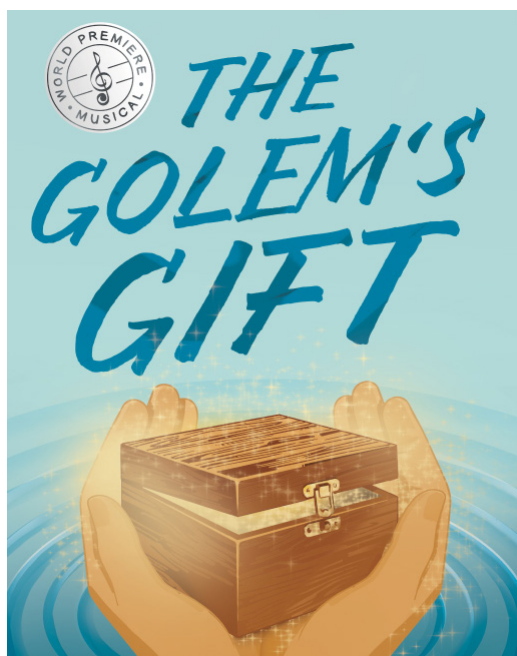
October 11, 2026

**Media Contact**

To set up interviews  
or discuss other  
possibilities for  
stories,  
please contact:

**Ashley Coates**  
NWCT Marketing  
Support  
[ashley@nwcts.org](mailto:ashley@nwcts.org)

Press Release: July 28, 2026



**Portland Community  
Steps Up to Fund  
World Premiere of  
The Golem's Gift**

Original musical,  
inspired by Jewish folklore,  
funded almost entirely through  
grassroots community support  
after federal grant funding  
was withdrawn

**Playing October 3–11, 2026 at  
The Judy in Portland, Oregon**

**PORTLAND, Ore.** — Northwest Children's Theater (NWCT) announces the world premiere of *The Golem's Gift*, an original musical years in the making and now brought to the stage by the support of the community. The production runs October 3–11, 2026 on The Schnitzer Stage at The Judy Kafoury Center for Youth Arts, opening NWCT's 2026/27 season.

With book and lyrics by **Benny Zelkowitz** and an original score by Portland-based composer **Ezra Weiss**, *The Golem's Gift* is an original fable inspired by Jewish folklore about a man made of clay determined to repair the world. Overwhelmed by this impossible task, the Golem cannot imagine how his optimism and imagination will affect everyone he meets. In a world that feels increasingly divided, this new musical speaks to young people who feel a responsibility to make things better. Through acts of kindness and the ripple effect of small change, *The Golem's Gift* transforms the idea of healing the world into something inspiring rather than overwhelming, achievable rather than impossible. But, as the story reminds us, it will take everyone.

**A Community-Funded  
World Premiere**

NWCT has spent years developing *The Golem's Gift* with Zelkowitz and Weiss, with the initial commission in 2020 and the first staged reading in 2022. The project was NWCT's first play to ever

receive a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant when it was awarded in January 2025. The NEA withdrew that funding a couple months later as part of the agency's widespread grant cancellations. Rather than let the production stall, community members stepped in. Tens of thousands of dollars have since been raised through individual contributions, bringing NWCT close to replacing the original grant. A \$5,000 matching gift has been pledged to help close the remaining gap.

"This musical is finally getting its world premiere because our community stepped up to make it happen," said NWCT Managing Director Nick Fenster. "When our NEA funding was pulled, we knew we didn't want to cancel, but were unsure of the path forward. It was an unexpected delight to see our community line up behind the show, one gift at a time, and turn this into something bigger than the NEA grant ever could have made it. *The Golem's Gift* is proof of what's possible in this community when we choose to directly invest in art together."

"When we first commissioned *The Golem's Gift*, we knew there was something truly special about this story," said Artistic Director Sarah Jane Hardy. "Premiering a brand-new musical is a rare opportunity, and we're honored to be the first theater to share this beautiful work with audiences. The timeless story, paired with a soaring original score, makes this the kind of

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## Press Release: July 28, 2026

*continued from previous page*

production audiences will remember for years to come."

### Support the Production

NWCT invites the community to help close the final gap in funding for *The Golem's Gift*. Every gift made will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$5,000, thanks to a generous matching pledge. To contribute, visit [nwcts.org/the-golems-gift](http://nwcts.org/the-golems-gift).

### Tickets

Tickets to *The Golem's Gift* are on sale now at [nwcts.org](http://nwcts.org). Use the code SUMMERSALE to save 20% on tickets when you purchase by August 31.

**Playwright/Lyricist Benny Zelkowitz** 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, OH, where he teaches animation at Ohio State. His newest film, *The Sacred Society*, a sand-animated documentary about Jewish burial rituals, is currently screening at film festivals world-wide.

**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.

### About Northwest Children's Theater

The mission of Northwest Children's Theater and School is to educate, entertain, and enrich the lives of young audiences. Founded in 1993, NWCT is the largest children's theater and theater school in Oregon, producing year-round Mainstage productions and offering training and performance opportunities for young artists. To date, NWCT has provided high-quality theater arts and education experiences to more than one million children, families, and students, earning regional and national recognition as one of Portland's most respected arts institutions.

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#### VENUE: NWCT'S Home:



**The Judy Kafoury Center for Youth Arts**  
1000 SW Broadway, T-100  
Portland, OR 97205

**October 3-11, 2026**  
**at 2 pm & 7 pm**

 **ASL INTERPRETED SHOW**  
**Sun. Oct. 4 at 2 pm**

**SCHOOL MATINEES:**  
**Tue. Oct. 6 & 8 at 10 am**  
Most enjoyed by ages 8 and up

### TICKET INFORMATION

**TICKET PRICING \$25-\$35**

**PURCHASE ONLINE: [NWCTS.ORG](http://NWCTS.ORG)**

**BOX OFFICE VOICE MAIL: 503-222-2190**

**SCHOOL MATINEES INFO:**

**[NWCTS.ORG/FIELD-TRIP](http://NWCTS.ORG/FIELD-TRIP)**

**\$5 Arts for All tickets are available for  
Oregon Trail/SNAP card holders.**

**More Info: [nwcts.org/faqs](http://nwcts.org/faqs)**

**SEE NEXT PAGE FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE FOR  
THE GOLEM'S GIFT**



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## The Golem's Gift Development Timeline

### February 2020

NWCT commissions Ez and Benny to write a short children's musical based on Benny's book *The Golem's Gift*.

### March 2020

NWCT announces *The Golem's Gift* as part of their 2020/21 Season.

### April 2020

Due to the pandemic, the 2020/21 Season is cancelled. Benny and Ez decide to use the extra time not only to write the show, but to expand on the scope of the musical.

### October 2021

Ez records demo tracks with performers in his home studio. All performers recorded individually due to COVID-19 restrictions. Recording made possible through grants from RACC and OAC.

### June 2022

NWCT presents a staged reading/workshop of *The Golem's Gift* funded by the Dwight Richard Odle Foundation.

### November 2022

*The Golem's Gift* is named a semifinalist for the National Music Theater Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center.

### February 2023

Benny and Ez begin working on rewrites with dramaturg Ken Cerniglia (*Hadestown*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*) made possible through a RACC grant.

### January 2025

NWCT is awarded a \$40,000 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Arts Project Grant for the creation of *The Golem's Gift*. This is the first ever NEA grant for NWCT.

### May 2025

The NEA terminates most arts grants, including *The Golem's Gift*. Production is postponed.

### January 2026

*The Golem's Gift* is named a semifinalist for the Pipeline Arts Foundation Awards.

### July 2026

NWCT announces *The Golem's Gift* as part of their 2026/27 Season.