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1000 SW Broadway
T-100
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

September 22, 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

Press Release: September 22, 2026



**Susannah Mars Headlines the Cast of
Northwest Children's Theater's World Premiere of
The Golem's Gift**

Adam B. Shapiro and Eric Little also lead the cast of the new musical
six years in the making, inspired by Jewish folklore

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

PORTLAND, Ore. — Northwest Children's Theater (NWCT) has announced the cast of *The Golem's Gift*, an original musical six years in the making that will receive its long-awaited world premiere October 3–11, 2026, on The Schnitzer Stage at The Judy Kafoury Center for Youth Arts. Featuring an accomplished cast of theater veterans alongside talented young performers, *The Golem's Gift* is a multigenerational story about kindness, community and the ripple effect of small acts of change.

Leading the cast as The Storyteller is **Susannah Mars**, one of Portland's most beloved and accomplished theater artists. A lifelong performer with more than 50 years in the arts, Mars has appeared on stages across the country and internationally, with local credits at Portland Center Stage, Artists Repertory Theatre, Portland Playhouse, Portland Opera and more. Her celebrated Portland performances include Mrs. Lovett in *Sweeney Todd*, Golde in *Fiddler on the Roof* and Diana in *Next to Normal*. She has received six Portland Drama Critics awards and has also appeared on NBC's *Grimm*. Mars is featured as The Storyteller in the original demo

recordings of *The Golem's Gift*. This production marks her first appearance as a part of NWCT's Mainstage season.

Adam B. Shapiro joins the cast as The Rabbi. Shapiro has been seen Off-Broadway in *Death of a Salesman*, *The Mikado*, *Bastard Jones* and *Wikimusal*. Since 2008, he has been a fixture of the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, appearing in *The Golden Bride*, *The Megille of Itsik Manger* and *Gimpel the Fool*, among others. Most notably, he played The Rabbi and understudied Tevye and Lazer Wolf in the *Drama Desk* and *Outer Critics Award*-winning *Fiddler on the Roof* in Yiddish.

Eric Little plays The Golem. An actor and musician currently living in Berlin, Germany, Little has appeared with Portland Center Stage, Broadway Rose Theatre Company, and Artists Repertory Theatre. His performance credits include Tobias in *Sweeney Todd*, Snail in *A Year with Frog and Toad*, Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and Hot Blades Harry in *Urinetown*. He is also an accomplished

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continued from previous page

music director, conductor and pianist, with credits including *The Music Man*, *Fun Home*, *Rent* and *A Christmas Carol*.

Rounding out the principal cast are youth performers **Olive Baity**, making her NWCT debut as Ruth, and **Yuyoun Choi**, a long-time member of Catalyst: NWCT's Youth Company, as Velvel.

Featured performers include **Brandy Schnaars** as the Baker and **Christiane Herrmann** as Mrs. Moskowitz, both veterans of NWCT's Mainstage productions.

Ensemble performers include Graham Buyagawan, Elijah Sims, Teague Shattuck, Luke Stewart, Claudio Vasquez Santiago, Linda James, Nadine Luker and Tilly Mansfield.

Six Years in the Making

The Golem's Gift is the result of an extraordinary six-year journey. NWCT first commissioned the musical in 2020 from playwright and lyricist Benny Zelkowitz and Portland-based composer Ezra Weiss, followed by a staged reading in 2022. The project was later awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant in January 2025, only to have that funding withdrawn several months later as part of widespread federal grant cancellations.

Rather than abandon the production, the Portland community stepped up. Tens of thousands of dollars have since been raised through individual contributions, bringing the

organization close to replacing the lost grant and making the world premiere possible.

Inspired by Jewish folklore, *The Golem's Gift* follows a man made of clay who sets out to repair a broken world. Overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, the Golem discovers that even the smallest acts of kindness can create a ripple effect far beyond what he imagined.

With a soaring original score, humor, heart and a story designed to resonate across generations, *The Golem's Gift* offers audiences a rare chance to experience a brand-new musical at the very beginning of its life.

"Premiering a brand-new musical is a rare opportunity," said NWCT Artistic Director Sarah Jane Hardy. "After six years of development, we are thrilled to finally bring *The Golem's Gift* to the stage. This is a story about the power we all have to make a difference, and we're especially excited to share it with audiences of all ages."

Support the Production

The community can help support *The Golem's Gift* and NWCT's mission to make live theater accessible to young people throughout the region. Every gift made to the production will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$5,000, thanks to a generous matching pledge.

Learn more and contribute at nwcts.org/the-golems-gift.

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continued from previous page

Tickets

Tickets to *The Golem's Gift* are on sale now at nwcts.org

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.

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
BOX OFFICE VOICE MAIL: 503-222-2190

SCHOOL MATINEES INFO:
NWCTS.ORG/FIELD-TRIP

\$5 Arts for All tickets are available for
Oregon Trail/SNAP card holders.
More Info: nwcts.org/faqs

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