

# 'Black Jew Dialogues' bring humor to race relations

## Around Cape Ann

Gail McCarthy

Two men, one black and one Jewish, will share some similarities in their heritage from the times of the ancient Egyptians to modern-day America in the local debut of "The Black Jew Dialogues" this weekend.

Larry Jay Tish and Ron Jones, Boston area improv actors and teachers, created this work to take the audience on a "hysterical and poignant ride through three days they spent together in a cheap hotel room discussing their own experiences, the history of their people, and why there has been a growing gap between the two groups since the early '70s."

"The Black Jew Dialogues" combines theater, comedy, improv and video as the performers present their take on the history and absurdity of prejudice and racism within the context of the Ameri-

can Black-Jew experience, said Tish.

The show, which premiered just weeks ago in Boston, has been selected for a top-level venue at Scotland's Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where the two actors will put on 26 shows in the month of August. Tish won a "Best of Festival" award for a previous work "The Anger Box," which he also performed in Gloucester.

"This is exciting because this event is the largest theater music festival in the world, and it has about 1,800 shows from around the world and 40,000 performers and a half a million of people who attend to scope talent or just be part of the energy," said Tish.

After a recent show at The Tribe Theater in Boston, a rabbi approached the pair because he wanted to bring the show to his synagogue with the idea of inviting the nearby congregation of a black church.

"The feedback was really gratifying just from the point of view that people really liked it and ultimately they got a lot out of it," said Jones. "There is a great and grand history that we both share."

Tish said they find playfulness in a potpourri of scenarios including: the Jewish involvement in the Dutch slave trade; two red-necks on a joy ride of hate; a bar mitzvah boy explaining the cash kick-start his manhood receives; and octogenarian grandmothers singing the praises of soul food and Jewish comfort food.

"It's meant to be humorous," said Tish, who was raised in Brooklyn. "We try to show the ab-

surdity of prejudice and racism, and how stupid it is to hate something. We also show the commonalties."

He said part of the impetus for this work came from his desire to work together with Jones on a project that can help promote tolerance.

"I know, based on our wonderful world, that bringing people together is something I like to do. I know there is growing rift between the blacks and Jews in the past generation. They were closer during the civil rights movement. So I wanted to do something as an artist, writer and performer to mend some of that," he said

Jones, who moved here from Washington, D.C., was eager to partner with Tish on this idea.