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THE JEWISH ADVOCATE



Ron Jones and Larry Jay Tish.

Uniting people through comedy

By Molly Ritvo
Advocate Staff

Have you heard the joke about a Black and Jew who walked into a synagogue? Larry Jay Tish and Ron Jones, co-creators of *The Black Jew Dialogues*, have. Tish and James are the sole marketers, producers, and stars of the show that has been mending a divide between the two communities for two years.

"We wanted to write a show about coming together," Tish told the *Advocate*. "Our hope is that the show will be used as a catalyst to reunite our cultures. The black and Jewish communities share a history of pain, oppression, pride and a deep commitment to civil rights and justice. However, in the past several decades, our communities have slowly drifted apart."

Tish, a veteran comedian, actor and writer teamed up with Jones, a former educator to use humor to show the "stupidity surrounding prejudice," according to Tish. Since the show premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland in August 2006, it has debuted in London, and many high schools, synagogues, and theatres throughout the U.S. *The Black Jew Dialogues* will be performed at Congregation Beth El's first annual fundraiser on June 14.

"In comedy it takes time for certain horrible things to become funny," explained Tish. "Racism and hatred is not funny, but neither is divorce and there is a lot of humor about that. We expose the stupidity of our anger in that light."

Jones added that humor makes people feel more comfortable discussing painful issues.

"There is nothing inherently funny about racism," he said, "But when you add comedy to it, people are more willing to deal with it. People are often afraid to open up to these issues because they are terrified of offending others. This performance shows that everyone is dirty, that everyone is somehow to blame. If you are going to be honest about who your people are in America, you've got to look at all of your history; the good, the bad, and the ugly."

Tish explained the show combines fast-paced sketches, improvisations, and multi-media, along with outrageous costumes to find humor in everything from the Jewish involvement in the Dutch slave trade to two rednecks on a joy ride of hate to octogenarian grandmothers singing and dancing about soul food and Jewish comfort food.

Another key component of the show is the dialogue that follows each performance.

"After each show, there is extensive time for questions and answers," added Tish. "Through dialogue and comedy, our goal is to make people think and come together. From the inception of the N.A.A.C.P to black newspapers being first in decrying the abuse of Jews in Nazi Germany to the civil rights movements here, blacks and Jews have been arm-in-arm in their fight for social justice. Through laughter, honesty, and conversation, *The Black Jew Dia-*

logues is our attempt to revive this all-important union."

To further explore the issues raised in the play, Tish and Jones have developed a classroom curriculum using African-American and Jewish Diaspora as a template for different nationalities' migration to America.

"We use humor and our discussions to take the gun out of hatred," said Jones. "We believe that the blacks and the Jews reflected the greatest of potential. We were two incredible different cultures who shared pain; we shared slavery, oppression and have both been looked down upon in this country. We have a shared past and we took those things and once worked together for social change for everyone. So we ask the question, why have the two groups separated and gone in such different directions?"

And so, through delightful slapstick comedy sketches and a real honest look at the quirks of each culture, the *Black-Jew Dialogues* bring the groups together once again on stage.

Added Jones: "This is not just about Jews dropping the ball, or the blacks dropping the ball; but about the blacks and Jews dropping the ball together. It was carried best when we were together. This show is about bringing that back."

The Black-Jew Dialogues will be performed at Temple Beth El on Saturday, June 14 at 7:30 p.m. To purchase tickets, contact 978-443-9622 or visit www.bethelsudbury.org.