

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

A SHIFT OF OPINION

A NEW PLAY
WRITTEN BY VADIM ASTRAKHAN
DIRECTED BY JOE JOHN BATTISTA



THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

Executive Director, Crystal Field, Presents

A SHIFT OF OPINION

A NEW PLAY BY **VADIM ASTRAKHAN**

DIRECTED BY **JOE JOHN BATTISTA**

FEATURING

**JOHN BARILLA* MICHAEL DONATO* ROGER GONZALEZ
SHUHEI KINOSHITA MICHAEL METH* CHRISTIAN NEAL
ALEX NOTKIN ANDREW RYAN PERRY* BRIAN SHEPPARD***

* Actors Appear Courtesy of Actors Equity Association

Assistant Director

MARI TOMPKINS

Stage Manager

SARA GIERC

Set Design

LYTZA COLON & MARK MARCANTE

Scenic Artist

LOLA SAËNTZ

Lighting & Sound Design

BRIAN PARK

Original Music

LJOVA ZHURBIN

Costumes

NATALIA DANILOVA

Makeup & Hair

YELYZAVETA MARUSHCHAK

Publicist

ROGER GONZALEZ

Graphic Design

THEATREARTZ.COM

Executive Producer

VADIM ASTRAKHAN

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Emily Pezzella

CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

Bella Greene.....	Christian Neal
Jacob Schiff.....	Michael Donato
Nathan.....	Alex Notkin
Mark Twain.....	John Barilla
President Teddy Roosevelt.....	Roger Gonzalez
Ambassador Cassini.....	Alex Notkin
O. Henry.....	Brian Sheppard
William Randolph Hearst.....	Michael Meth
Jack London.....	Andrew Ryan Perry
Baron Takahashi.....	Shuhei Kinoshita
Minister Plehve.....	John Barilla
Minister Witte.....	Brian Sheppard
Leo Tolstoy.....	Michael Meth
Congressman Johnson.....	Andrew Ryan Perry

SETTING & SCENES

A one-act play that takes place between 1903 -1917

Scenes 1-3: 1903 • **Scenes 4-10:** 1904 • **Scene 11:** 1905

Scene 12: 1908 • **Scenes 13-15:** 1917

Playwright's Notes

Dear Friends:

I came across Jacob Schiff's story several years ago. It caught my attention, and I remembered it in the aftermath of the 10/07/23 massacre. Then I saw Mark Twain's essay "Concerning the Jews" that circulated on social media. It occurred to me that Jacob Schiff and Mark Twain were contemporaries. I delved deeper into that period. The book "American Voices on Kishinev" that I found online opened my eyes to the effects of the pogroms on the American society. Giants of American history started coming to life, and everything came together: Russia's "little victorious war" that turned into a humiliating defeat, Jewish massacres, American anti-immigration sentiments, and Schiff's drift from the idea of "American Zion" to mainstream Zionism. All of this seemed exceedingly relevant to today's events, as if they had already happened in the past, and we are now re-living their echoes.

The bulk of the play was written in a fury of creativity last April. Then more and more relevant pieces surfaced in my consciousness. Leo Tolstoy's 1905 essay and Bulat Okujava's 1973 song seemed to describe today's events and fit very nicely with Schiff's story. Then I was suggested the character of Bella Greene (based on Belle DaCosta Greene, J. P. Morgan's librarian). The play received a finished look.

Out of 14 characters, 13 (except Nathan) existed in real life. **Many of their remarks are taken from their letters and public statements.** I don't know if any of them actually met in real life but they very well could have. "A Shift of Opinion" is not a true biopic but rather a fantasy that's based on true events: a history lesson that feels like today's newsreel.

- Vadim Astrakhan | December 2024

WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

In Alphabetical Order

JOHN BARILLA (*Mark Twain, Minister Plehve*)

Known as JJBINMAN because of over 100 performances as the Tinman in *The Wizard of Oz*, John is a versatile singer, actor, and voice-over artist based in NYC. He has captivated audiences across various genres, blending his talents. John's passion for theater has led him to participate in numerous stage productions and music venues, showcasing his powerful vocals and engaging stage presence. He's a consummate storyteller who connects with his audiences, often incorporating personal narratives into his performances, making his artistry both relatable and inspiring. John has continued to pursue his acting career for over 50 years and has performed at Theatre for the New City multiple times. Member AEA. SAG-AFTRA.

MICHAEL DONATO (*Jacob Schiff*)

Michael is a New York City theatre, film, and voice actor. This is Michael's fourth play with the 13th Street Repertory Company, with prior principal roles in *The Unamerican*, *The Jerry Duncan Show*, and *The Greatest Lawyer of All Time*. Other theatre credits include appearances as *Shylock*, *Macbeth*, *Petruchio*, *Prospero*, *King Henry IV*, *King Hamlet*, and *Sir Toby Belch* in regional theaters; and in modern original plays. Film credits include leads in *Easy Beethoven*, *Nugget*, *Perfect Family*, and other independent films. He thanks the Barrow Group and the Lee Strasberg Institute for excellent theatre training, and his wife for everything. Member of AEA.

ROGER GONZALEZ (*Pres. Teddy Roosevelt*)

Roger is delighted to be a part of this amazing new play, working as an actor for the 1st time with long time friend, Joe Battista (director), and with multi-talented Playwright, Vadim Astrakhan. Roger is also the production publicist, and runs a theatre development company and website, TheatreArtz.com. Past acting roles include *Honeymoon In Vegas*, *9-5 The Musical*, *Anna In The Tropics*, *Of Mice and Men*, *My Wife In a Chador*, and many more. He is a producer and currently is working on several projects for Off Broadway. He is delighted to work with such a talented and professional cast. Special thanks to TNC, to Mari and Sara, and to his loving and supporting family: Sheila, Dan, Ella, Harry, and Emma. You can find out more about Roger here: <https://www.theatreartz.com/linktree-for-indieartz>

SHUHEI KINOSHITA (*Baron Takahashi*)

Shuhei is a NYC-based actor and filmmaker. He's excited to be working again with the crew from *The Ahab Inside Me*. With his bilingual knack, Shuhei gets to do cool stuff like voice-over, commercials, TV, and movies in recent years. The creative process, being on stage/set, and coffee are just a few things he appreciates in life.

MICHAEL METH (*William Randolph Hearst, Leo Tolstoy*)

Mike caught the theatre bug as a pre-teen in the Chicago area and has been involved as an actor, writer and director ever since. After a long career as an award-winning Creative Director in the world of Industrial Musicals and Experiential marketing, he returned to the theatre and expanded to TV and films. He credits include, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Billions*, *Mr. Robot*, HBO's *The Jinx*, and a number of Indie films. On-stage, he played a leading role in the NYC premiere of Arthur Miller's, *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and recently took on the role of King Lear for the Hamlet Isn't Dead Shakespeare company. He is also a playwright and lyricist and his latest musical, *Last Night at the Rue Bayou* is in development for production by the MTTM Theatricals producing company. (ruebayoumusical.com) Mike is represented by Resolute Artists Agency and is online at www.mikemethactor.com. Member of AEA.

CHRISTIAN NEAL (*Bella Greene*)

Christian Neal is a proud New Orleans-born Las Vegas-raised, London-educated multi-faceted creative and 2024 Audelco Nominee for best leading actress. After years in London, she has returned to America to make her New York Theatrical debut. Her previous training consists of working with The National Youth Theatre of Great Britain and The British American Drama Academy. Her previous credits include, Ella the Ungovernable (as Ella Fitzgerald) at Theatre for the New City, The White Card at Soho Theatre in London, and Perpetual at Camden People's Theatre in London which she wrote, starred in, and directed.

WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

In Alphabetical Order

ALEX NOTKIN (*Nathan, Ambassador Cassini*) Alex Notkin is a Russian born, New York based actor, stage & film director, producer, singer and acting coach with over 20 years of experience in the industry. He graduated from The Saint Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy as well as The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute.

He has over 50 credits in theatre, film and TV series in Europe and the US. His roles include Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime and FX TV series such as: *The Americans, Madam Secretary, The Punisher, Gravesend*. Off Broadway projects: *The Singing Windmills, Greengard-The new musical, Raskolnikov and the Pawnbroker, Chekhov, Williams and Devil knows What*. In addition to his theatre and film works Alex is a renowned voice talent in feature and animated films produced by Disney, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros, and other Hollywood studios. He is the Russian voice behind Jake Sully in James Cameron's *AVATAR 1, Avatar 2-the Way of Water*. As well as dubbing voice behind characters played by Sam Worthington, Christian Bale, Colin Farrell, Benedict Cumberbatch and many more. Alex Notkin's credits as stage director and filmmaker include European and New York productions such as *The Letters of Verivinsky, ART, Defendant Maurice Chevalier, The Green Carriage, Faust, Talk to me Kiddo!, and Mom is That You?* Alex also teaches Method Acting and Stage Directing at the Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute.

ANDREW RYAN PERRY (*Jack London, Congressman Johnson*) From the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Coeburn, VA, Andrew Ryan Perry is a New York based actor. Regional appearances include *Antony & Cleopatra* (Ithaca Shakespeare Company) and *Ahab/Ray* in *The Ahab Inside of Me* (Forty Hour Club). New York credits include Arthur Miller in *The UnAmerican and Sinclair* in *Twisted* - both with The 13th Story Repertory. Andrew holds a B.S. in Theatre from East Tennessee State University and an M.F.A in Acting from Northern Illinois University. AEA/SAG-AFTRA.

BRIAN SHEPPARD (*O.Henry, Minister Witte*) Hailing from Churubusco, IN, Brian is a New York City based actor. Regional appearances include *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Palm Beach Frameworks), *Hamlet* (Tennessee Shakespeare Co.), & *Twelfth Night* (Plimoth Pautuxet). Television credits include *The Walking Dead, FBI, Law & Order: SVU, The Blacklist, Marvel's The Falcon & The Winter Soldier, To Catch a Killer* (I.D.), & *BULL* (CBS). Brian holds a B.A. in Theatre from Butler University as well as an

BRIAN SHEPPARD (*Continued*) M.F.A. in Performance from Northern Illinois University. When not on stage or screen, Brian can be found guiding fly fishing anglers and students throughout the rivers of the Catskills. AEA / SAG-AFTRA.

CREATIVE TEAM

SARA GIERC (*Stage Manager*) Sara is a writer and aspiring director. She studied creative writing and dramatic literature at NYU and is currently studying with Lyle Kessler's Master Class. Previous credits include Barry Primus's *Soup in the Second Act* (TNC) and Crystal Field's Street Theater production *Socialization of a Social Worker: Or, Justice in a Time of Need* (TNC). Special thanks to all in the theater community. It's an honor and privilege to be here.

MARI TOMPKINS (*Assistant Director*) Mari is a theatre practitioner focused on directing, developing, and adapting works for the stage. She has served as assistant director on Equity productions: *Twisted; Cracked Open*. As a recent graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Mari has directed her own work and conducted scene workshops. She is excited to be working with Joe Battista again.

JOE JOHN BATTISTA (*Director*) Joe is a seasoned Director, Producer, Actor, Photographer, Musician, and the Artistic Director of the Historic 13th Street Repertory Theater. He is a member of Actor's Equity and the Dramatist Guild, Graduate of The American Academy of Dramatic Arts who studied with William Hickey, Stephen Strimpbell, Uta Hagen, Eve Collier, Hugh Whitfield, Jack Melanos, Paul J. Curtis of the American Mime Theater, and Gates McFadden. Joe is presently working on several projects, including directing *The Moby Dick Blues Opera* at the Ellen Stewart Theater at La MaMa in June 2025, and *The Cry of the Butterfly* written by Nicca Ray, daughter of legendary film director Nicholas Ray, in 2025.

WHO'S WHO

CREATIVE TEAM

VADIM ASTRAKHAN (*Playwright, Executive Producer*) Vadim was born in Leningrad, USSR (presently St. Petersburg, Russia) and immigrated to the United States in 1991 as a teenager. He grew up in Michigan, graduated from the University of Michigan, and later moved to New York and received a Master's degree from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He is a poetry translator and a performer. He released four albums of translations (2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017) as part of his Vysotsky in English project (www.vvinenglish.com), where he translated, performed, and recorded songs by the greatest Russian singer-songwriter, Vladimir Vysotsky. He also has played many shows worldwide and recorded numerous music videos. In recent years, he expanded his interests to film and theater. He made a short bilingual film *Cloud in Pants* (2019), based on his own translation of a famous eponymous Russian poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky. He also produced a TV play *Faust and Helena* (2022) based on his translation of *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *A Shift of Opinion* is his first original play. He also is a lead singer in a rock'n'roll band Sentinel Soto. His main profession is forensic chemistry. He also organized and participated in several fundraising events for Ukraine.

BRIAN PARK (*Lighting & Sound*) Brian Park (Lighting & Sound Design) has worked on lighting and sound for stage plays and musical performances in NYC since 2018, when he started learning the craft from Alexander Bartenieff at Theater for the New City. Brian currently freelances on technical aspects for productions around the city including fashion and dance shows, video projects, and company events, along with a half-dozen Off-Off-Broadway shows this past year. He loves the thrill and singular nature of being there live, and is tremendously excited to rejoin this group at Theater for the New City for "A Shift of Opinion". Brian would like to extend many thanks and much gratitude to the production team, cast and crew, and everyone in the community for the shared time together in a joyous and hopeful season.



Grand Prix Motors is one of the fastest growing company offering car leasing deals in NYC and Tri-State area.

Since 1997, our multifaceted service includes auto leasing, sales, as well as trade-ins of new and used vehicles. With operating principles of low inventory costs and dealer fleet program access, we are able to pass substantial savings to our customers so you can lease a car at best price



ABOUT

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

Theater for the New City was founded in 1971 by Crystal Field, George Bartenieff, Larry Kornfeld and Theo Barnes.

Now in its 53rd year, Theater for The New City is dedicated to producing established and emerging playwrights and to presenting the work of small developmental theater companies, all of whom experiment with new forms; and to expand theater accessibility and enhance the cultural dialogue through our Community Programs.

Our core values guide us to:

- Embody the vision of a center for innovative theater arts that is truly accessible to the community and its artists.
- Discover relevant new writing and to nurture new playwrights.
- Facilitate a bridge between playwright, experimental theater artist, and community.
- Create spaces where new vision can breathe and be nourished by a working process not subject to commercial constraints.
- Design systems which bring theater into the community and bring the community into the theater.
- Engage under served youth in theater arts in order to focus their energies on creativity and empowerment.

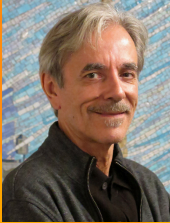


RUSSIAN RESTAURANT & PIANO BAR

1986

256 W.52nd Street, New York, NY 10019

212 757 0168 | russiansamovar.com



John Barilla*
Mark Twain, Minister Plehve



Michael Donato*
Jacob Schiff



Roger Gonzalez
Teddy Roosevelt



Michael Meth*
*William Randolph Hearst,
Leo Tolstoy*

A SHIFT OF OPINION



Shuhei Kinoshita
Baron Takahashi



Alex Notkin
Nathan, Cassini

TELL A FRIEND!

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

DECEMBER 19, 2024 - JANUARY 5, 2025

TH | FR | SAT 8PM & SUN 3PM MATINEE

THE JOHNSON THEATER.

155 FIRST AVENUE (9TH & 10TH ST) NEW YORK, NY 10003

BOX OFFICE: 212-254-1109



Brian Sheppard*
O. Henry, Minister Witte



Christian Neal
Bella Greene



Andrew Ryan Perry*
*Jack London,
Congressman Johnson*

*Actor appearing through the courtesy
of The Actors Equity Association