

PLAYBILL

BETH TZEDEC ZOOM THEATRE



Motown: Megillat Esther

Wednesday, February 24, 2021/12 Adar 5781

7:00 pm

THE PRE-SHOW SHOW - 7:00 pm

If you login at 7:00 pm, you will not wait for the party to get started. You will meet our cast in character and costume, at Queen Vashti's Banquet, already in progress. To enhance the banquets and their authenticity, we have provided recipes and recipe links below.

The Banquet ends rather abruptly when the Queen is summoned by the King. As Queen Vashti pauses her party to consider her options, our Motown Megillah officially begins.

Before she reaches her decision, Queen Vashti will consider the conflicting advice of her *Ladies in Waiting* and her subjects.

Her Most Serene Majesty therefore requests the advice of you, her most loyal subjects, using the CHAT function, as one does not initiate conversation with the Queen. One waits for the Queen to acknowledge you. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-40668579>)

The Scroll of Esther – Overview

The Scroll of Esther opens in the third year of the reign of Ahasuerus, the King of Persia, who has been hosting a banquet for over 180 days. The wine is served “in abundance” with “no restrictions”.

His Queen, Vashti, is hosting a banquet for the women at the same time.

Ahasuerus is “merry with wine” and summons Vashti to his party to wear the royal tiara and display her beauty. There is some debate over whether the King wants Vashti to wear *only* her tiara, but regardless, Vashti declines the summons.

The King and his advisers are panicked by the idea that Persian wives will imitate Vashti's willful disobedience (their panicked response perhaps heightened by their significant and steady consumption of wine) and thus begins the banishment of Vashti and the search for her replacement; Esther's selection as queen; Mordecai's perceived insolence to Haman; Haman's genocidal response which the King approves; Esther's reluctant invitations to the King and Haman; Esther revealing Haman's plot to slay her and her people - the Jews; at Esther's request, the King authorizing the Persian Jewish community to save itself, which it does; and Mordecai's rise to great power and powerful benevolence.

A Deeper Dive into the Megillah

As we perform the Scroll of Esther tonight, you may wish to consider the following

1. The appropriateness of Vashti's response to being summoned.
2. The reaction of the King's advisors to Vashti.
3. Did Mordecai consciously provoke Haman?
4. Comparing our personal notion of Haman with the malevolence described in the Megillah.
5. The status of Jews in the Persian empire.
6. The role reversal in Mordecai and Esther's relationship and *her* rise to power.
7. The King's furious reaction to Haman's plan, given it was the King who authorized it.
8. Peter Pan syndrome and did the King ever really grow up?

WHY SO MUCH MUSIC?

Megillat Esther opens with a party, has a second party when Esther is named Queen and ends with a party as the Jewish community saves itself. It's not a party without music, but tonight isn't just about party music but also using music to better understand Megillat Esther.

Jewish learning has always relied on commentators and commentary to understand the complexities of the Bible and Jewish law, even in passages that seem fairly straightforward.

Tonight we use music for the Megillah's commentary, for four reasons:

- i. Music is a shortcut to understanding.

If the King is thinking *It's A Man's Man's Man's World (James Brown)* and Vashti is thinking *Respect (Aretha Franklin)*, you probably know someone is thinking *Hit the Road, Jack (Ray Charles)*.

- ii. Music makes us *feel* what we read.

When Haman and his plot is finally exposed, you can feel every ounce of Esther's long suppressed anger boil over in *Nowhere to Run (Martha Reeves and the Vandellas)*.

- iii. Sometimes music better conveys the beauty and emotional complexity of stories sometimes hampered by awkward and antiquated translations.

Consider Megillat Ruth and Naomi's instruction to her daughters in-laws to return home, culminating in Ruth's oft translated response, "Wither Thou Goest, I will go". Now listen to *I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)* and then *I Am Telling You I'm Not Going (Dream Girls)* back to back. Let me know which makes you want to cry.

- iv. Music exposes nuance and subtleties.

When the King sobers up and realizes that by banishing Vashti he is alone and lonely, you can feel his pain in *Solomon Burke's Cry to Me*.

Intellectually, we all know Haman is evil. But *Coolio* makes him scary in *Gangsta Paradise*.

Juke Box Musicals and Motown Music

A jukebox musical is a stage musical in which a majority of the songs are well-known popular songs, rather than original music. *Mamma Mia*, *Jersey Boys* and most recently *Moulin Rouge* are some well known examples.

Motown: Megillat Esther was conceived as a (reverse) Juke Box Musical using the Megillah text as the foundation and then picking the most powerful music from a playlist of about 100 curated songs. It's music that not only makes us want to get up and dance but also makes us want to sit up and think.

Motown music took its name from Detroit's nickname – *Motor City*, and founder Berry Gordy and his artists created their own unique sound of rhythm and blues. But it's not all Motown music. We've thrown in disco, rhythm and blues and black artists who are beyond categories, like the great *Aretha Franklin*, the amazing *Ray Charles* and tonight, the hardest working man in shul business, *James Brown*, all of whom sing tonight.

If you are a child of the 60's and 70's, you were probably listening to the WMCA Good Guys or Cousin Brucie on WABC in NYC, John Major on CHUM-AM in Toronto or Doug Pringle on CHOM-FM in Montreal. Their playlists were dominated by the Beatles, the Beach Boys, the Four Seasons and then a Motown artist, like The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Jacksons, Diana Ross and The Supremes, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and Michael Jackson, to name just a few. Tonight they narrate our Megillah.

The Soundtrack to *Motown: Megillat Esther* ® is available to **Spotify**® and **Amazon Music**® subscribers (along with bonus material). For music links, please contact Larry Wallach at LFW@wallach.ca

Persian Parties and Dress

It's Purim. It's a party. More specifically, we want to party like its +/-400 BCE in Shushan, Persia. Feel free to dress up. Persian attire was colourful and flamboyant. Coming in Persian-inspired costumes is encouraged!

It in order to make tonight feel like a party, we will supply the music, some recipes and some recipe links, so you can make your own refreshments based on Persian agricultural ingredients, circa 400 BCE.

Persian Agriculture

1. The most commonly grown crops were barley and wheat, peas, lentils mustard, garlic, onions, cucumbers, dates, apples, pomegranates, pears and apricots.
2. Rice was a staple.
3. Apricots, artichokes, eggplants, lemons, lime, oranges, pistachios, spinach, saffron and tarragon all came to Europe through Persia.
4. Other condiments and spices used in Persian recipes include cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, coriander, dill, basil nutmeg, paprika, pomegranates, saffron, sumac, turmeric, orange-flower water, rose water and dried fruits,

While it is customary to drink on Purim, we urge drinking responsibly and in moderation. And of course, no drinking if you intend to drive.

Recommendations from the Web:

- i. **18 of the best Persian dishes and recipes:**

<https://www.saveur.com/best-persian-recipes/>

Five of the most easily prepared recipes at home:

Steamed Saffron Rice with Tahdig

Iranian Noodle Soup (Ash-e Reshteh)

Yogurt Cucumber Sauce with Rose Petals (*Maast-o Khiar*)

Persian Cantaloupe Drink

Stuffed Grape Leaves (*Dolmeh*)

ii. **31 Persian Recipes for Nowruz and Beyond**

<https://www.epicurious.com/holidays-events/persian-recipes-for-nowruz-and-beyond-gallery/amp>

iii. Instagram: **MyGhostHost**

Our Cast Recommends

Mixed Drinks:

Pomegranate Rose Gin Fizz

4 Tbsp gin
4 Tbsp pomegranate juice
1 tsp rose water
8 oz club soda
Ice cubes
Combine all the liquids and stir.
Pour over ice.
Serves 2.

Pomegranate Cosmo

2 cups (16 oz) good vodka
1 cup (8 oz) orange liqueur
1 cup (8 oz) pomegranate juice
1/2 c freshly squeezed lime juice (3 limes)

Combine the vodka, orange liqueur, pomegranate juice and lime juice in a pitcher and refrigerate until ready to use.
Pour the mixture into frozen martini glasses with a twist of lime peel and serve immediately.
Serves 6

Dinners:

Chicken/Tofu Marbella

INGREDIENTS

- 2 chickens, 2 1/2 lbs each, quartered, bone-in, skin-on*
- Cloves from 1/2 head of garlic, peeled and finely puréed
- 2 tbsp dried oregano
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

- 1/4 c red wine vinegar
- 1/4 c extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 c pitted prunes
- 1/2 c apricots
- 1/2 c pitted green olives
- 1/4 c capers with a bit of juice

*For vegans and vegetarians, you can either substitute firm tofu for chicken or isolate 1/2 of the above mixture for tofu Marbella and cook it to your desired texture.

INSTRUCTIONS

- **Marinate the chicken or Tofu (separately):** In a large bowl combine garlic, oregano, salt and pepper to taste, vinegar, olive oil, prunes, apricots, olives, capers with caper juice, and bay leaves. Add the chicken pieces or tofu and coat completely with the marinade. Cover and let marinate, refrigerated, several hours or overnight.
- **Place chicken and/or tofu in baking pan, top with marinade and wine:** Preheat oven to 350°F. Arrange chicken and/or tofu in a single layer in one or two large, shallow baking pans and spoon marinade over it evenly. Pour white wine around them (optional).
- **Bake chicken until done:** Bake for 50 minutes to 1 hour, basting frequently with the pan juices. Chicken is done when a sharp knife inserted into the thigh pieces, at their thickest point, runs with clear yellow juices (not pink). Bake tofu to desired texture.
- **Serve with pan juices:** With a slotted spoon, move the chicken, prunes, apricots, olives, and capers to a serving platter. Pour some of the pan juices over the chicken or tofu.

Pistachio and Basil Pesto Pasta

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 c pistachios roasted, shelled
- Fresh basil leaves – adjust amount to taste
- Parmesan cheese, grated or shredded – adjust amount to taste*
- *For vegans, cheese is optional
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1/2 c olive oil - more if needed
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 lb. rigatoni or your favorite pasta

Instructions

1. Combine the basil leaves, pistachios, parmesan cheese, 3 cloves garlic, in a blender or food processor. Blend or pulse until you have a rough chop. Gradually add in olive oil and continue to blend until a smooth paste is formed.
2. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the lemon juice. Stir in salt and pepper to taste.
3. Add to pasta in small increments, until mixture lightly covers pasta.

Dessert:

Fresh Fruit

The cast of Motown: Megillat Esther consists of Canadians and Americans, united in using their love of music to celebrate Jewish moments in engaging, innovative, unconventional and unique ways during the pandemic and sharing that passion with others.



CAST

Arnie Ursaner
Darcy Dalton
Karen Frankel
Patti Rotman
Sheldon Rotman

Barry Frankel
Debbie Rothstein
Lorraine Gangbar
Rabbi Robyn Fryer Bodzin

Cantor Sidney Ezer
Gary Elman
Nina Wallach
Sharon Yale
Larry Wallach

Special Thank you to Arya Marvazy for Persian Food assistance.

Feedback is always welcome at LFW@wallach.ca

Soundtracks to *Maccabees: The Musical Featuring the Book of Judith*®, and *Megillat Ruth: The Musical*® are also available to **Spotify**® and **Amazon Music**® subscribers. For music links, please contact Larry Wallach at LFW@wallach.ca.

HAG PURIM SAMEACH