

# The musical is alive and well in Montreal – thanks to The Segal

## Enter Stage Left

SHARMAN YARNELL



Just a few years ago, the American Musical, that has thrived in London and New York for years, was hard to find in our city. But the past couple of years has seen a resurgence, not just the light hearted fluff that the genre is known mostly for, but of productions such as *Wicked*, that have revolutionized the ‘musical’ and taken it a step beyond the norm into drama.

Recognizing its obvious popularity, *The Segal Theatre* is starting off its season with a musical from 1950, a show you’ll love a ‘bushel and a peck’. You know that song - it’s from *Guys and Dolls*. And *Guys and Dolls* it is. The show is based on two short stories, *The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown* and *Blood Pressure*, by Damon Runyon. The story takes place in a city of sin and corruption, hustle and bustle, dirt and grit - that would be New York. It juxtaposes gamblers (rascal ‘Nathan Detroit’ and notorious high-roller ‘Sky Masterson’) against the ethics of those who would clean up the city of these immoral sinners. The musical won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1951, but, because of writer Abe Burrows’ troubles with the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the Trustees of Columbia University vetoed against its selection for The Pulitzer Prize for Drama. None was awarded that year. Nevertheless, there are some who consider *Guys and Dolls* “the perfect musical”. The Segal production is directed by Diana Leblanc. The 24 person cast includes Scott Wentworth as the slick ‘Sky Masterson’, Tracy Michailidis as ‘Sarah Brown’, Frank Moore as ‘Nathan Detroit’ and Susan Henley as ‘Adelaide’, comedian Mike Paterson as ‘Nicely Nicely’, and Glen Bowser as ‘Lieutenant Brannigan’. September 30 to October 28.

From the art of the musical to the art of the painter: “There is only one thing I fear in life, my friend... One day the black will swallow the red.” That is a line from the Tony Award winning play *Red*, by playwright John Logan, based on two years of the life



Photo: Brian Bowen Smith  
**Jay Baruchel**

of abstract expressionist artist Mark Rothko. Set in his New York studio in the Bowery, ‘Rothko’ has accepted a commission from the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram building to paint some murals. His assistant, ‘Ken’, however, questions his accepting the work because it is such a commercial project. This is a two hander play that won the Drama League Award for a Distinguished Production and six of the seven Tonys for which it was nominated in 2010. The show plays out as a war of words between the two characters, a battle between teacher and student. *Red* is directed by Martha Henry starring Randy Hughson and Jesse Aaron Dwyre. November 25 to December 16.

Third in the 2012-13 season is *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a political thriller based on the novel that was one of Penguins Great Books of the 20th Century. It opens in a small, peaceful town known only as “The Empire” run by a Magistrate. Enter the Third Bureau to spread rumours through this otherwise idyllic town, rumours that the ‘barbarians’ are planning to attack The Empire. Murder, imprisonment and torture ensue. The play touches on our own modern realities, politics and begs the question of what barbarism really is to us today. Adapted and directed by Alexandre Marine. January 27 to February 13.

Two musicals are being presented by The Segal this season! And this one is a Montreal-written and-performed production. Hallelujah!

*Mahalia the Musical*, based on the life of Mahalia Jackson, is written by Montreal playwright, Roger Peace and stars Montreal jazz icon, Raneé Lee, best known for her role as ‘Billie Holiday’ in *Lady Day*, also written by Peace. Peace has an uncanny gift of getting to the heart and soul of women in the entertainment business. His *Piaf: Love Conquers All*, won Outstanding Musical in the 2007 Fringe NYC. *Mahalia the Musical* promises no less. It was written specifically for Lee and has a full gospel choir on stage. It covers Jackson’s life as she grew from poverty into one of the most respected, and loved singers and civil rights activists of all time. Indeed, she not only sang at Martin Luther King’s defining march on Washington, but she played an integral part in his “I Had a Dream” speech. The musical is historical, dramatic and poignant...and most uplifting! Directed by Roger Peace. March 3 to March 24.



Photo: Michael Slobodian

## Raneé Lee will star in *Mahalia the Musical* – about Mahalia Jackson

And now to sleuthing. With probably the greatest sleuth of all time; *Sherlock Holmes*. Adapted by Greg Kramer, it is based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous works. Full of adventure and crimes to be solved through analytical deduction, this is another look into the stories of the man who gave us such delightful and sometimes frightening mysteries taking place in England at the turn of the century. Donning the Deerstalker hat and Meerschaum Calabash pipe is Montrealer Jay Baruchel - I can see him now: morphing into the Victorian Brain who knew no limits to grand sweeping deductions of diabolical crimes. Directed by Andrew Shafer. May 5 to May 26.

The final production is the Segal’s annual Yiddish show (started by the irrepressible Dora Wasserman). This year it’s *Tales from Odessa*. As with all shows done in Yiddish at The Segal, there are English and French subtitles; so no need to worry about not being able to understand the text. *Tales from Odessa* is based on the stories of Russian writer Isaak Babel and focuses on the last days of the Russian Empire during the Russian Revolution. Published individually in magazines throughout 1923 and 1924 and collected into a book in 1931, the tales deal primarily with a group of Jewish thugs that live in the

Moldavanka, a ghetto of Odessa. Their leader is Benya Krik, known as the King. This is an exhilarating musical, including the music and lyrics of Renaissance man Josh Dolgin, aka Socalled, with book by Alexandre Marine. Directed by Audrey Finklestein. June 16 to July 7.

For more information: [www.segalcentre.org](http://www.segalcentre.org)



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