

GRAPEVINE

• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ ZIONIST VISIONARY Theodor Herzl is credited with coining the phrase: "If you will it, it is no dream." But it doesn't just apply to the return of the Jewish people to its ancestral homeland. It applies to just about anything that a group of people want to achieve.

For instance, in the Orthodox Jewish community, there are highly talented women who grew up in secular environments, and are talented musicians, dancers and singers who worked in the entertainment industry before they became religiously observant. This created a gender problem in that it meant that they would no longer perform with or in front of men, but it certainly didn't mean that their talents were going to waste. Many joined the Raise Your Spirits theater ensemble, an all women's group of thespians whose members run the gamut from ultra-Orthodox to secular, with everything between.

Among their very successful shows is *Mikva the Musical: Music and Monologues from the Deep*.

Like so many other events that were canceled or postponed, *Mikva*, after a successful and well-received performance at the Beit Shemesh Cultural Center in March, *Mikva* went into hibernation.

Following a COVID-hiatus, *Mikva* will be back on stage on October 18 at the OU Israel Center, on Keren Hayesod Street in Jerusalem, in a performance hosted by L'Ayla, and on October 27 the performance will be at the somewhat larger auditorium of the Shalva National Center, 1 Shalva Road, Jerusalem. The ensemble has previously performed in various locations in Israel and in New York, including at the National Opera Center in Manhattan. The stories that make up the script are all authentic, and relate to both heavy and light topics, including abuse, hydrophobia and infertility, and on the lighter side a newly religious bride and a happy convert to Judaism. The songs are likewise a mix of light and serious. There is also a fun monologue of a woman with the BRCA gene who dips for the last time in the ocean, accompanied by her husband after a prophylactic risk-reducing mastectomy. The costumes worn by the cast include robes donated by the Missoni fashion house, which once had a close relationship with the late Lea Gottlieb, founder of Gottex.

This show is especially timely as media attention has been given to the lack of accessibility of many mikvaot in Israel. One of the performers in the show, Michele Thaler, is paralyzed from the waist down, and she both moves and regales the audience with her own stories

of what happens to a woman with physical disabilities when using the ritual bath.

Adina Feldman is the production's musical director, choreographer and key composer; and the legendary Tofaah women's band, led by Yona Yakobovitz, plays some of its classics.

This updated version of *Mikva* includes a story in English contributed by Rabbanit Hani Lifshitz of the Chabad House in Kathmandu, Nepal, who takes a woman to the top of a mountain to dunk in a frozen lake. An Israeli television series under the title of *Kathmandu* features the lives of Hani and Rabbi Chezky Lifshitz, who are renowned worldwide for their hospitality to backpackers and the mega Seders that they host each year. Hani Lifshitz has her own show in Hebrew, which she performs when she is visiting Israel.

Co-creators of *Mikva* are Myra Gutterman and Toby Klein Greenwald, who is also the director. Tickets are available at www.MikvatheMusical.com.