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Contact: Joanna Gallai, joanna@anatgerstein.com, 917-584-4145

Lynsey Billet, lynsey@anatgerstein.com, 718-793-2211

Pulitzer Prize-winning Indecent Playwright Paula Vogel Addresses Life Members of the Workmen's Circle



*From left to right: Workmen's Circle President Peter Pepper, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel, and Workmen's Circle Executive Director Ann Toback
Photo Credit: Erica Rachel Photography*

(New York, N.Y.) – Paula Vogel, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of the triple Tony Award-nominated Broadway play *Indecent*, was the special guest speaker at a private reception honoring Workmen's Circle Life Members on Monday, June 5.

Held at Workmen's Circle headquarters in Midtown Manhattan, the gathering drew more than 75 attendees, who listened as the acclaimed playwright discussed the origin of her masterful play, which is up for three Tony Awards (including one for Best Play) this coming Sunday.

"I wanted to look at Jewish identity and immigration and what happens — in what ways do we censor our identities," Ms. Vogel said. "It's a very complex story to me — how and when do we censor a play.... I wanted to go forward with it because I worried that hate speech and anti-immigration rhetoric was on the rise."

The Workmen's Circle has been at the center of Jewish culture, progressive social and economic justice activism and the preservation of the Yiddish language for more than a century. *Indecent* takes place during the time when the Workmen's Circle formed to help Yiddish-speaking immigrants transition to a new life in America. In *Indecent*, audiences discover the true story of how a tiny Yiddish play, *God of Vengeance*, created a firestorm on Broadway when it featured the first on-stage kiss between two women in the early 20th century.

Ms. Vogel, best known for her work as a playwright and for her intensive playwriting "bootcamps", is a staunch advocate for gender equality, the LGBTQ community, and immigrant rights. Her play, *How I Learned to Drive*, won the Pulitzer Prize and a Drama Desk Award, among other awards, in 1998.

Ms. Vogel described a lifelong fascination with theatre, and particularly Yiddish theatre. "This is my Broadway debut, and I've been in theatre for 40 years," she said. "This is a love affair that can last to your very last breath."

She also stressed the importance of teaching younger generations about history and diversity, particularly during these polarizing times.

"We need to embrace diversity in all of its forms," she said. "It's when our communities are divided, from Jewish or Polish-Jewish, German-Jewish, lesbian, fill-in-the-blank, that we end up with a divided country."

The event also featured welcoming remarks from Workmen's Circle President, Peter Pepper, and a brief presentation by Executive Director, Ann Toback, who introduced a video highlighting the organization's rich history, including its flourishing Yiddish programming (featuring the annual Yiddishland excursion each summer).

"Here at the Workmen's Circle, we take a comprehensive approach to progressive Jewish identity –through Jewish cultural engagement, Yiddish language learning, multigenerational education, and transformational social justice activism. Altogether, creating an amazing organization that has been building communities of activists for over a century." Ann Toback said.

"We have championed human rights and civil liberties through a Jewish lens, across the United States and onto the world stage. From workplace safety to fair wages to financial reforms, our progressive community has fought for a better world. Today we are regularly on the streets, on our phones, and on social media actively engaging in the critical national fight for immigrant rights, religious freedom and social and economic justice."

About the Workmen's Circle

The Workmen's Circle has been cultivating a proudly progressive, diverse, and inclusive community rooted in Jewish culture, tradition and social justice activism for more than a century. Since our founding, the needs and priorities of our community have evolved and today's Workmen's Circle is responding in new and exciting ways. We seed and support a network of eight vibrant Jewish supplementary schools; create opportunities to connect to Jewish culture, including a global Yiddish language program; celebrate our rich heritage; host a summer camp, Camp Kinder Ring; and take action for social and economic justice. Together, as we always have, we are working to build a *shenere un besere velt far ale*—a better and more beautiful world for all. Learn more: www.circle.org

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