



Jewish culture for a just world

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Workmen's Circle Honors Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-Winning Playwright and Screenwriter Tony Kushner at its Winter Benefit on December 10, 2018**

**-- Benefit Committee Members included: Adam Driver, Oskar Eustis, Andrew Garfield, Marcia Gay Harden, Nathan Lane, Debra Messing, Keith Mestrich, Mary-Louise Parker, Ben Shenkman, Stephen Spinella, Dame Emma Thompson, and Jeffrey Wright --**

(New York, N.Y.)—The Workmen's Circle presented activist and playwright Tony Kushner, best known for his play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, with its Activism and Jewish Culture Award at the organization's annual Winter Benefit—Setting the Stage for Change—on Monday, December 10, 2018.

“For over a century, Workmen's Circle members have been standing up and speaking out against injustice, and today, our community continues our tradition of taking our activism to the streets,” said Ann Toback, Executive Director of the Workmen's Circle. Our amazing honoree, Tony Kushner, and our Jewish tradition of resistance, charge us to never be afraid to stand up for what is right. Tony's work speaks to activists of all ages. For decades, he has courageously tackled issues that are at the forefront of our national debate. His views inspire others to think about critical issues in new ways and not accept the status quo.”

More than 225 people attended at the benefit at The Prince George Ballroom, and enjoyed a special performance by Frank London and Lorin Sklamberg of The Klezmatics. Host committee members included: Zeev Dagan, Mimi Lieber, Dan Opatoshu, Jay Sackman, Michael Shamalov, and Eva Zasloff. Honorary Benefit Committee members to date are: Adam Driver, Oskar Eustis, Andrew Garfield, Marcia Gay Harden, Nathan Lane, Debra Messing, Keith Mestrich, Mary-Louise Parker, Ben Shenkman, Stephen Spinella, Dame Emma Thompson, and Jeffrey Wright.

Tony- and Emmy-winner Jeffrey Wright, who has starred in both the Broadway show and HBO miniseries of *Angels in America*, introduced Mr. Kushner, reflecting on the civil war in Russia to overthrow President Boris Yeltsin, the same day that tech rehearsals began on the Broadway production of *Angels in America - Perestroika*. “I sat there, transfixed as I had been just hours earlier watching history play out on my TV,” he said, calling Kushner an “oracle,” and “I am precisely in the world, where I want to be and where I am intended to be.

He segued, “so explain to us gathered here tonight what exactly is going on in the country and elsewhere right now.”

Wright also read an accolade from Al Pacino, who said, “Not only is Tony Kushner a great playwright and screenwriter, he is ‘*The Menschkeit*. If I could see Tony every day, I know I’d have a better life.”

Kushner was humbled by the honor, remarking to laughter and applause, “If I am what passes these days as an award-winning activist, well, that would go a long way to explaining why we’re in the state we’re currently in... I wake up most mornings worrying, that maybe if I’d written better plays, Donald Trump wouldn’t be in the white house. This goes a long way to explaining why I find it so difficult to write.”

He added, “I wish good plays could change the world. There are lots of good plays. The theater, it has to be said, is in better shape than the world right now, which tells us how dire the shape of the world must be. But good plays, good poems, don’t change the world. Plays and art isn’t the same thing as activism.”

He concluded, again expressing humility to a round of laughter and applause, “I am deeply grateful to you, to all of you, for inviting me here tonight and for this beautifully mortifying award.”

The event also was an opportunity to toast Ann Toback, who recently marked her 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary leading the organization. “Ann is the first woman to direct our staff and, along with my predecessor Peter Pepper, has led us through a renewal process instituting a new social-justice focused mission rooted in intergenerational learning, cultural celebration, community organizing and applying a Jewish lens to progressive activism,” said Richard Rumelt, President of the Workmen’s Circle. “Under Ann’s direction Workmen’s Circle has reclaimed its leadership role in the Jewish community in the fights for union rights, for immigrant rights, and for a living wage.”

Tony Kushner's plays include *A Bright Room Called Day*; *Angels in America, Parts One and Two*; *Slavs!*; *Homebody/Kabul*; the musical *Caroline, or Change* and the opera *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck*, both with composer Jeanine Tesori; and *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide To Capitalism And Socialism With A Key To The Scriptures*. He has adapted and translated Pierre Corneille's *The Illusion*, S.Y. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*; and the English-language libretto for the opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krasa.

Mr. Kushner wrote the screenplays for Mike Nichols' film of *Angels In America*, and for Steven Spielberg's *Munich* and *Lincoln*. His books include *Brundibar*, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak; *The Art of Maurice Sendak, 1980 to the Present*; and *Wrestling With Zion: Progressive Jewish-American*

*Responses to the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict*, co-edited with Alisa Solomon. Kushner is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, two Tony Awards, three Obie Awards, two Evening Standard Awards, an Olivier Award, an Emmy Award, two Oscar nominations, and the Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, among other honors.

In 2012, he was awarded a National Medal of Arts by President Barack Obama. He lives in Manhattan with his husband, and fellow writer, Mark Harris.

### **About The Workmen's Circle**

The Workmen's Circle is a social justice organization that powers progressive Jewish identity through Jewish cultural engagement, Yiddish language learning, multigenerational education, and social justice activism. For over a century we have provided this 360-degree approach to Jewish identity-building. Through contemporary cultural programs, strategic social justice campaigns, vibrant Yiddish language classes, interactive educational experiences and more, we connect Jewish adults, kids and families of all affiliations with their cultural heritage, working to build a better and more beautiful world for all. Learn more at [www.circle.org](http://www.circle.org).

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