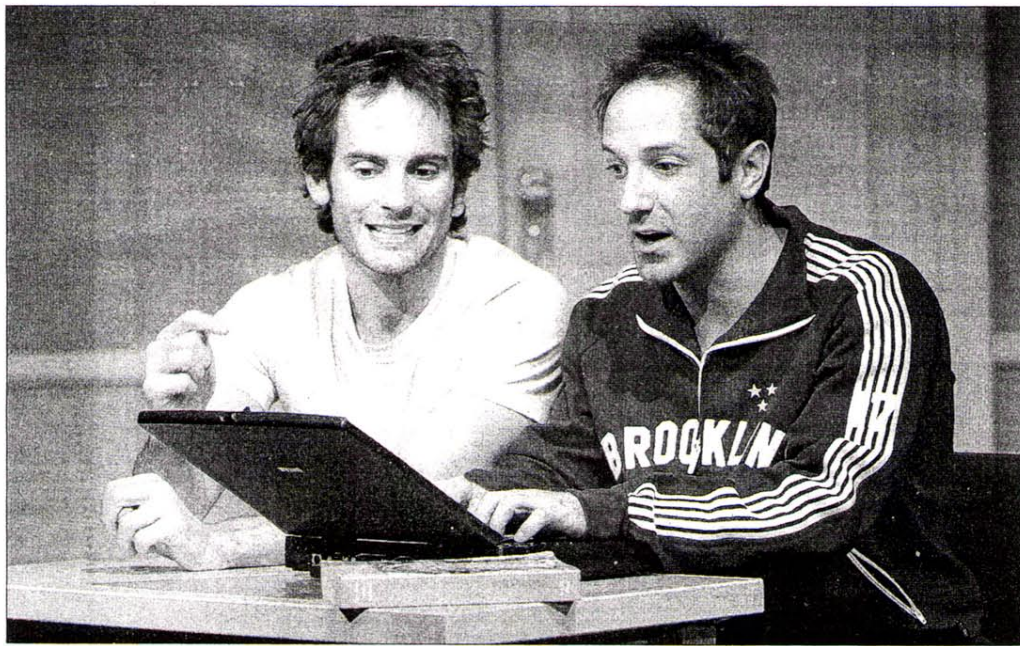


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FRIDAY

YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE
TO ENTERTAINMENT

THEATER/BACKSTAGE



Once struggling actors, Sam Wolfson and Bryan Fogel made a hit out of Jewish and interfaith relationships in the modern age. Mazel tov!

Goy meets girl

Two thirtysomething actors make their mark with 'Jewtopia'

Sitting in a Lincoln Park sports bar near the campus of DePaul University, Bryan Fogel and Sam Wolfson fit right in with the local gestalt. They look like a couple of struggling actors.

That's exactly what they were.

Fogel and Wolfson went from being on the verge of quitting acting entirely—insisting they'd get out of the game after the big three-oh—to telling the inquisitive behemoth Clear Channel Entertainment to butt out and find its own darn box-office smash, not the one they created, thanks very much.

And the ticket to this stunning change in fortune? "Jewtopia."

Like "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change," it's a heck of a title.

And though the show has lacked critical support, it has become a heck of a hit in both Los Angeles (where the show originated) and, more recently, New York. Wolfson and Fogel currently are appearing in all their off-Broadway glory, eight times a week.

"Jewtopia" has become quite the Jewish singles phenomenon. "It's the story about a gentile who wants to marry a Jewish girl," the shtick goes, "so he never has to make another decision."

On the show's Web site—www.jewtopia-play.com—you can even click on a link and find yourself a nice Jewish date to sit next to at this show about Jewish and interfaith relationships in the modern age.

Boy, are Wolfson and Fogel enjoying this ride.

"We were unemployed actors wondering how we could get noticed," says Fogel. "You know how it is in L.A. You go to restaurants at four in the afternoon and they're packed, be-



Chris Jones
Tribune arts critic

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cause everyone is an actor and no-one is working."

"When we started writing the show, we were 28," he continues. "I'd made a pact that if I didn't get a break in two years, it would be over."

So Fogel and Wolfson wrote a ten-minute scene about, yes, a gentile who marries a ... you know the rest.

Tuesday, the Chicago run begins with an endless array of previews at the Mercury Theater—the press won't be let in until late next month. Wolfson and Fogel say that's so they can prepare their all-Chicago cast—Wolfson and Fogel are not appearing, being too busy in New York—and let the show gel. But it's also true that this isn't exactly a show that has relied on critical notices. "Jewtopia" is intended to be date-night amusement, no more, no less.

"We're not going to be winning a Pulitzer Prize," says Wolfson. "Nobody dies in our show."

"We use every Jewish and gentile stereotype imaginable," says Fogel, grinning from ear to ear at his audacity.

Wolfson and Fogel's parents, who had their kids' backs, were no doubt happy to see the \$450,000 production recoup in New York in 20 weeks. And now the Chicago show is to be the prototype in what the happy entrepreneurs

hope will be a long line of long-running "Jewtopias," stretching from sea to shining sea.

Drink wine, get culture

Get stuck at a lousy, boring show and nothing is more joyous than intermission. Heck, even at a decent piece of theater, there's no denying the pleasure of that 15-minute pause. You get to chat, drink (maybe), socialize, steel yourself for more sitting still in the dark. What's not to love?

Some of us have been known to fantasize about a show where the intermission lasts for an hour and the play 10 minutes. Well, over at the Webster Wine Bar this weekend, that's pretty much the drill.

Chicago's Serendipity Theatre Company is offering an unusual little performance event, "2nd Stories." The concept here is that you take a seat with a sweetie, order a pre-selected flight of wine, bend your ear toward the in-house DJ, and relax. About every 45 minutes or so, a writer-actor type pops up and tells a

ten-minute story from a different region of the upstairs bar. You listen to someone talk about what happened to him or her in college, say. And then it's back to the drinking and chatting.

It goes without saying that the stories—which vary nightly, as do the tellers—go over better with wine, which comes from a variety of little vineyards.

Storytellers this weekend include Curt Columbus and Tracie Louise Sellers. Suffice it to say that "2nd Stories" is a very pleasant way to get some artistic edification.

And you can't beat the price: \$15 including the vino. And since there's no curtain time, it's impossible to be late.

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