

**ANGELA PATON, ANNABELLE GURWITCH AND ARYE GROSS  
LEAD LARGE SPIRITED CAST FOR  
DONALD MARGULIES' *CONEY ISLAND CHRISTMAS***

*World Premiere Commission Helmed by Bart DeLorenzo  
and Dedicated to the Memory of Gil Cates*

*Opening Night November 28, 2012*

**LOS ANGELES, October 24, 2012** — Pulitzer Prize winner **Donald Margulies** weaves together nostalgia, music and merriment in the world premiere commission of a new seasonal classic opening at the Geffen Playhouse.

***Coney Island Christmas***, which is presented by **OneWest Bank**, is a Jewish Christmas story for people of all ages and all faiths. The play introduces us to Shirley Abramowitz (played by **Isabella Acres**) a young Jewish girl who, much to her immigrant parents' exasperation, played by is cast as Jesus in the school's Christmas pageant. Mr. and Mrs. Abramowitz, portrayed by acclaimed stage and screen actors **Arye Gross** (Broadway's *Brooklyn Boy*, television's *Castle*) and **Annabelle Gurwitch** (Murray Mednick's *Joe and Betty*, television's *Dinner and a Movie*) with the help of a much-older Shirley, brought to life by **Angela Paton** (Broadway's *Harvey*), help tell a timeless and universal tale of what it means to be an American during the holidays. The cast also includes **Elitia Daniels, Maya Erskine, Julian Evens, Joe Gillette, Rachel Hirshee, Lily Holleman, Gracie Kaufman, John Sloan, Kira Sternbach** and **Andrew Walke**, who play a host of colorful characters ranging from neighborhood mothers to Shirley's classmates (three more actors are yet to be cast). *Coney Island Christmas* starts in previews on November 20, 2012 and officially opens **November 28, 2012** in the Gil Cates Theater at the Geffen Playhouse.

*Coney Island Christmas*, which is based on the Grace Paley short story *The Loudest Voice*, is helmed by **Bart DeLorenzo**, the founding artistic director of L.A.'s Evidence Room theater company. Both Margulies and DeLorenzo are frequent figures in the Geffen family, with this production marking Margulies' fifth and DeLorenzo's fourth project with the theater. The two artists previously collaborated on *Shipwrecked!*, which shares similar fantastical elements with *Coney Island Christmas*. The idea for a family holiday show that would potentially be an annual event at the Geffen Playhouse, began as a conversation between Margulies and Geffen Playhouse founder Gil Cates. The conversation turned into a commission, and now, Margulies is dedicating this world premiere production to the memory of Cates, who passed away on October 31 of last year.

To further extend holiday memories and spirits, the Geffen Playhouse will once again be partnering with the **Keyes for Kids Toy Drive** to help bring gifts into the lives of children in need, primarily through the **Hope of the Valley Rescue Mission** and **Normandie Recreation Center**. The Geffen is encouraging all patrons who attend the show to bring a new unwrapped toy.

Special events during the run of *Coney Island Christmas* include the theater's Signature Series performances for no

additional cost. These evenings include an intellectual, thought-provoking post show Q&A at Talk Back Tuesdays; a scintillating, one-of-a kind after-party at Girls Night Out; a cultural happy hour with Lounge Fridays and complimentary wine tastings during Wine Down Sundays. For more information, please view [geffenplayhouse.com/coneyevents](http://geffenplayhouse.com/coneyevents).

### **CONEY ISLAND CHRISTMAS**

Written by Donald Margulies

Based on the short story *The Loudest Voice* by Grace Paley

Directed by Bart DeLorenzo

*Preview Performances:* Tuesday, November 20 – Tuesday, November 27, 2012

**Opening Night:** Wednesday, November 28, 2012

**Closing Night:** Sunday, December 30, 2012

#### **Cast**

Isabella Acres	Young Shirley
Elitia Daniels	Ensemble
Maya Erskine	Anna Ling/Ensemble
Julian Evens	Henry Brown/Ensemble
Joe Gillette	Ira Pushkov/Ensemble
Arye Gross	Mr. Abramowitz
Annabelle Gurwitch	Mrs. Abramowitz
Rachel Hirshee	Ensemble
Lily Holleman	Miss Glacé
Gracie Kaufman	Clara
Angela Paton	Shirley Abramowitz
John Sloan	Mr. Hilton
Kira Sternbach	Evie Slotnick/Ensemble
Andrew Walke	Jackie Sauerfeld/Ensemble

#### **Production Credits**

Set Designer	Takeshi Kata
Costume Designer	Ann Closs-Farley
Lighting Designer	Lap Chi Chu
Sound Designer	John Ballinger
Production Stage Manager	Jill Gold
Assistant Stage Manager	Kyra Hansen

#### **Performance Schedule**

Monday	No performances
Tuesday – Friday	8:00pm
Saturday	3:00pm; 8:00pm
Sunday	2:00pm; 7:00pm

#### **Ticket Info**

Ticket prices currently range from \$37 to \$57 for preview performances and from \$47 to \$72 for the regular run. \$10 student rush tickets may be available with a valid student ID half an hour before curtain. Tickets are available in-person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, via phone at 310-208-5454 or online at [www.geffenplayhouse.com](http://www.geffenplayhouse.com).

#### **Biographies**

##### **ISABELLA ACRES** (*Young Shirley*)

When she was a toddler, Isabella repeatedly attempted to climb onto the stage at a concert, proclaiming that she wanted to be a part of the show. Her journey as an actor began soon after that. At age seven, Isabella landed a series regular role on ABC's office comedy *Better Off Ted*. She later recurred on *Desperate Housewives*. Isabella's big screen premiere was in Miranda July's *The Future*. Her other television credits include roles on *The Middle*, *The Event*, *The Mentalist*, *Monk* and Hallmark's *Beyond the Blackboard*. She is currently playing Soleil Friedman on season two of the Fox series *Touch*, and she continues to voice characters in several animated shows including *Adventure Time*, *Scooby Doo Mystery Inc.*, *Phineas and Ferb*, and *Sofia the First*. Isabella is excited to be making her stage debut at the Geffen Playhouse as Shirley Abramowitz

**ELITIA DANIELS** (*Ensemble*)

Elitia is thrilled to be performing on the Geffen Stage. A recent graduate of the Theatre, Film and Television School at UCLA, Elitia is grateful to be consistently performing and studying in Los Angeles. Proud to be part of the Illyrian Players Theatre Co. ensemble, she was most recently seen as Maud/Victoria in their production of *Cloud 9*.

**MAYA ERSKINE** (*Anna Ling/Ensemble*)

Maya is thrilled to be making her Geffen Playhouse debut. Other theater credits include: *Hamlet* (Ophelia at ZJU), *Snow Falling on Cedars* (Hatsue at Theatre Works), *Crimes of the Heart* (Babe at East West Players), and *A Winter's Tale* (Autolykus at Theatre 80 St. Marks). She trained with the Experimental Theatre Wing at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and the International Theatre Workshop in Amsterdam.

**JULIAN EVENS** (*Henry Brown/Ensemble*)

Julian Evens was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Since first studying acting at LaGuardia High School and then graduating from California Institute of the Arts in 2010, he has been living and working in Los Angeles and enjoying every moment of it. He has worked in film (*Project X*, *Things Never Said*) and commercials while still keeping his love for theater alive. Theater credits include: *Shoe Story* at Theater of NOTE and *The Exile of Petite DeLarge* at Son of Semele.

**JOE GILLETTE** (*Ira Pushkov/Ensemble*)

Joe Gillette couldn't be more thrilled to be making his Geffen Playhouse debut. Hailing from Northern California, he headed south and studied theater at Cal State Fullerton, where he received his B.A. Favorite roles there include: Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Swiss Cheese in *Mother Courage*. He was last seen on stage in Courage Theatre Company's production of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Television: *Desperate Housewives*. Also an accomplished singer/songwriter, Joe's music will be featured in the upcoming indie film *The Fortune Theory* (Blackboard Pictures) and his self-titled EP can be found on iTunes.

**ARYE GROSS** (*Mr. Abramowitz*)

Theater credits – Broadway: *Brooklyn Boy* by Donald Margulies (MTC). Regional: *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *Our Mother's Brief Affair*, *Brooklyn Boy*, *Let's Play Two* (South Coast Repertory), *The Square* (MTF Asian Theatre Workshop), *M. Butterfly* (East/West Players), *Room Service* (Pasadena Playhouse), *Three Sisters* (LATC), *Rose of the Rancho* and *Bandito!* (El Teatro Campesino), *La Bete* (Stages Theatre at The Ford). Arye frequently works with The Antaeus Company, where he is a member of the Ensemble. Film and TV include: *Grey Gardens*, *Minority Report*, *Big Eden*, *Harvest*, *The Riches*, the soon to be released *Commencement* (playing opposite his frequent collaborator Marin Hinkle) and the recurring role of Sidney Perlmutter, M.E., on ABC's *Castle*. Arye is very proud to have appeared with James Earl Jones in the TV Movie *Confessions: Two Faces of Evil*, directed by the late Gil Cates.

**ANNABELLE GURWITZ** (*Mrs. Abramowitz*)

Annabelle Gurwitz is an actress and a writer. Stage credits include the title role in Murray Mednick's *Joe and Betty*, for which she was included in the *New York Times* Top Ten Performances of 2002 and the *Los Angeles Times* Top Ten of 2001, the 20th Anniversary production of *Uncommon Women and Others* at Second Stage and numerous L.A. Theatre Works productions. Television credits include seven seasons of *Dinner and Movie*, *Dexter*, *Boston Legal*, *Medium* and *Seinfeld*. Films: *Melvin Goes to Dinner*, *Shaggy Dog* and the documentary *Fired!*, which premiered as a Showtime Comedy Special. A former NPR commentator, she's authored two books, *Fired!* (S&S) and *You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up* (Random House), co-written with her husband Jeff Kahn. *Tomato* the play is currently receiving its second national tour. *Autumn Leaves*, an e-book single from her forthcoming comedic memoir is available exclusively at the new literary site [www.zolabooks.com](http://www.zolabooks.com).

**RACHEL HIRSHEE** (*Ensemble*)

Having recently graduated from UCLA's Ray Bolger Musical Theater Program in the School of Theater, Film and Television, Rachel is thrilled to be making her Geffen Playhouse debut. Favorite roles include: Helga in *Cabaret* (UCLA), Pirate in *NeverWonderLand* (BoomKat Dance Theatre) and singing as herself at the Catalina Jazz Club. Besides performing, Rachel can also be found teaching musical theater to kids at 5<sup>th</sup> Row Center in Manhattan Beach.

**LILY HOLLEMAN** (*Miss Glacé*)

Los Angeles theater credits include: *Where the Great Ones Run* (Rogue Machine Theatre), *Circle Mirror Transformation* (South Coast Repertory), *The Trip To Bountiful* (SCR), *Bleed Rail* (The Theatre at Boston Court; Ovation and LA Weekly Award nominee), *All About Walken* (The Dragonfly), *God Save Gertrude* (Boston Court), *Doomsday Kiss* (Bootleg Theater), *Crumble: Lay Me Down Justin Timberlake* (Moving Arts), *A New War* (Theater 68). Film: *@urFRENZ* (Winner: Method Fest and Flagstaff Film Festival Best Actress Award, available now on iTunes, VOD and Hulu), *The Den*, *Tenure* and *How I Got Lost*. Television: *Captain Daddy* (animated pilot), *Key & Peele*, *Southland*, *Tracey Ullman's State of the Union*, *Queen Sized*, *Sonny with a Chance*, *Lewis Black's Root of All Evil*, and *Campus Ladies*.

**GRACE KAUFMAN** (*Clara*)

Grace Kaufman is 10 years old and enjoying life as a 5th grader and young actress. Most recently seen as Betty Parris in *The Crucible* at the Lillian Theatre, her other theater credits include: *Annie* (as Molly, starring with Andrea McArdle) and *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Tootie) for Musical Theatre West at the Carpenter Center (Outstanding Featured Actress, *Stage Scene LA* & Most Promising Newcomer, *SoCal Motion Picture Council*). Film/TV credits include: *Buttons in the Ground* (Best Actress winner, 2012 Hollyshorts Film Festival); *Kaylien* (directed by Zoe Saldana), *Deadtime Stories: Grave Secrets*; guest starring roles on TNT's *The Closer* (with Kyra Sedgwick), NBC's *Free Agents* (as Hank Azaria's daughter) and Disney Channel's *Jessie*; and voicing lead roles in several major animated series for Disney and Nickelodeon.

**ANGELA PATON** (*Shirley Abramowitz*)

Angela Paton was recently seen on Broadway in *Harvey*. Her long theatrical career includes two other Broadway runs plus many roles at regional theaters; i.e., San Francisco's ACT, Washington's Arena Stage, Mark Taper Forum, LATC and South Coast Rep. In Berkeley, where she lived for 25 years, she worked as actress and director at The Berkeley Repertory Theatre and the Magic Theatre and founded the Berkeley Stage Company where she was the artistic director for 10 years. Her favorite roles were Mary Tyrone, Mother Courage, Cleopatra, the Beauty Queen's mother and Peg O' My Heart. Her favorite film roles were in *Groundhog Day*, *American Pie*, *The Con* and *Red Eye*. She has appeared in more TV shows than she can remember. She has translated and adapted plays by Marivaux, Sardou and Molière. She is very proud of her three children, five grand children, and her husband, Robert W. Goldsby, and his newly published book *Moliere on Stage: What's So Funny*.

**JOHN SLOAN** (*Mr. Hilton*)

John Sloan is thrilled to be making his Geffen Playhouse debut in *Coney Island Christmas*. Elsewhere in Los Angeles he has performed at The Mark Taper Forum, South Coast Repertory, Theater at Boston Court and The Odyssey. John is currently the co-artistic director of The Antaeus Company where he has been a member since 2005. Other credits from New York and around the country include Soho Playhouse, La Mama Etc., American Jewish Theater, The Mint Theater Company, Denver Center Theater Company, The Intiman (Seattle) and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. His television appearances include leading roles in the Sci-Fi mini-series *The Triangle*, *Happy Hour* on FOX and the Hallmark movie *The Seven Year Hitch*. Other credits include *Liz & Dick*, *Private Practice*, *Gray's Anatomy*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Glades* and *CSI: NY*. John graduated from Skidmore College with a degree in English Literature.

**KIRA STERNBACH** (*Evie Slotnick/Ensemble*)

Theater: *The Seagull* (LA Theatre Works), *You and I* (PPF South Coast Rep), *Alligator* (The O'Neill), *In A Dark Dark House* (Almeida Theatre, London), *Enjoy* (59E59, NY), *End Days* (Odyssey Theater), *How I Learned to Drive* (Terry Schreiber Studio, NY), *American Girls* (45th St. Theatre, NY), *The Shape Of Things* (Edinburgh Fringe), *Gerald's Method* (Center Stage, NY), *Beef* (Crowne Point Festival, NY), *Raised By Lesbians* (Barrow St. Theatre, NY), *Surgery* (MITF, NY), *One Night* (East Coast Tour) and *Pains Of Youth* (Cal Rep Theatre). Film and television credits include *The Closer*, *CSI Las Vegas*, *The Prisoner*, *My Normal*, *Three Windows*, *Anyone But Me*, *Lately*, and *Virgin*. Represented by Susie Schwarz and Kasra Ajir.

**ANDREW WALKE** (*Jackie Sauerfeld/Ensemble*)

Andrew Walke is thrilled to be making his debut at the Geffen Playhouse in *Coney Island Christmas*. A native of Fresno, CA, Andrew holds a BFA in Acting from CalArts. Some past productions include *Henry V*, *Piedra de Sol* at The Getty Villa, *Our Town*, *The Diviners* and *That Untraveled World*. Andrew thanks his family, Bart DeLorenzo, Donald Margulies and Mary Lou Rosato.

**BART DeLORENZO** (Director)

Founding Artistic Director of the Evidence Room theater in Los Angeles. At the Geffen, he previously directed Donald Margulies' *Shipwrecked: An Entertainment* and the world premiere of *Joan Rivers: A Work in Progress by a Life in Progress*. Recent credits for the Evidence Room include Chekhov's *Ivanov* and Len Jenkins's *Margo Veil* produced with the Odyssey Theater. Other recent directing includes Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* at A Noise Within, the world premiere of Justin Tanner's *Day Drinkers* at the Odyssey, Karen Zacarias' *Legacy of Light* and *Around the World in 80 Days* at the Cleveland Playhouse, *King Lear* for the Antaeus Company, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's *Doctor Cerberus* and Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone* at South Coast Repertory, and Michael Sargent's *The Projectionist* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre. He is on the faculty at CalArts. For his work, he has received six LA Weekly awards, three Backstage Garlands, three LA Drama Critics Circle Awards, and is the 2012 recipient of TCG's Alan Schneider Director Award.

**DONALD MARGULIES** (Playwright)

Donald Margulies' plays include *Time Stands Still* (Geffen Playhouse), *Shipwrecked! An Entertainment* (Geffen

Playhouse), *Brooklyn Boy*, *Dinner with Friends* (Geffen Playhouse), *Sight Unseen*, *Collected Stories* (Geffen Playhouse), *The Loman Family Picnic*, *God of Vengeance*, *The Model Apartment*, *What's Wrong with this Picture?*, and *Found a Peanut*. He has won a Lucille Lortel Award, an American Theatre Critics Award, two Los Angeles Drama Critics Awards, two OBIE Awards, two Dramatists Guild Hull-Warriner Awards, one Tony Award nomination, five Drama Desk Award nominations, two Pulitzer Prize nominations and one Pulitzer Prize. His works have been performed on and off Broadway; at major theatres across the United States including South Coast Repertory, Manhattan Theatre Club, Primary Stages, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Long Wharf Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Old Globe Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse and Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival; and in Paris, London, Rome, Madrid, Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Sydney, Berlin, Vienna and many other cities around the world. Mr. Margulies has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The New York Foundation for the Arts, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. In 2005 he was honored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters with an Award in Literature, by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture with its Cultural Achievement Award, and was the recipient of the 2000 Sidney Kingsley Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Theatre by a playwright. Mr. Margulies is an alumnus of New Dramatists and serves on the council of The Dramatists Guild of America. He is an adjunct professor of English and Theatre Studies at Yale University.

### **ABOUT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE**

The Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the Geffen Playhouse continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates, and is currently helmed by Artistic Director Randall Arney, Managing Director Ken Novice, General Manager Behnaz Ataee, Chief Development Officer Regina Miller and Chairman of the Board Frank Mancuso. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen Playhouse welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains an extensive education and outreach program, designed to engage young people and the community at large in the arts. For more information, please visit [geffenplayhouse.com](http://geffenplayhouse.com).

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