

## 'Indecent' at EastLine Theatre

## A provocative farewell

BY DEIDRE S. GREBEN  
Special to Newsday

**W**e produce works that no other place on Long Island is likely to do," says Daniel Higgins, EastLine Theatre's artistic director, of the company's edgy repertoire. Now, the not-for-profit community troupe is actually in need of a place to stage its bold performances. That is, once the final curtain falls on Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel's "Indecent," EastLine's last production in the intimate Wantagh theater space it has occupied since its founding in 2011.

Though arguably incendiary, EastLine's choice for its Wantagh swan song comes as little surprise. In part, it is because the play was inspired by the heightened drama surrounding the Polish-born, Yiddish-speaking playwright Sholem Asch's "God of Vengeance." That play notoriously featured Broadway's first lesbian kiss, leading to the arrest and prosecution of its entire cast on charges of obscenity in 1923, and was performed on the EastLine stage in 2018. (Tom Ciorciari from Coram and Melanie Lipton of Central Islip, who appeared in Eastline's "God of Vengeance," return for Vogel's recounting of its controversial run.)

"Indecent" is also an unsurprising pick for EastLine because of the show's challenging nature. "It is a very demanding play," says Higgins. "We had to find seven actors to portray 35 roles who could all sing and dance and convincingly speak a multitude of languages." While "Indecent" is not characterized as a musical, the director notes, "it is interspersed with Yiddish music performed by a three-person klezmer pit." And then there is the task of re-creating its controversial rain-soaked love scene, in which an actual downpour occurs on stage.

Vogel's attraction to Asch's nearly 100-year-old story about a bourgeois Jewish brothel owner and the romantic rela-

**WHAT** "Indecent"  
**WHEN | WHERE** 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, through Jan. 26, EastLine Theatre, 2123 Wantagh Ave., Wantagh  
**INFO** \$25, \$20 seniors and students; 516-749-5047, eastlineproductions.com

tionship that develops between his daughter, Rifkele, and one of his prostitutes, Manke, as the basis of her own play is unsurprising as well. "God of Vengeance" addresses many of today's hot-button issues — the struggles faced by immigrants, anti-Semitism, homophobia and artistic censorship.

Vogel does the same by relating how, in the process of translating Asch's narrative from Yiddish to English, the play is intentionally altered under the unknowing approval of its playwright. In the process, the strong feelings the two women share are replaced by Manke's seduction of Rifkele purely to enlist her professionally. "As the original actress, Dorothee Nolan, who played Manke commented," says Higgins, "with no love left, it is just about sex."

Notably, Vogel reintroduces the pivotal love scene in the rain at the conclusion of her play. "It suggests rebirth," says Higgins, "that Asch's progressive Yiddish culture may be gone, but its legacy lives on."



Clockwise from top row, Julie Fergus, Gary Tifeld, Melanie Lipton, Tom Ciorciari, Joe Boccia, Nicole Savin and PJ Cirino star in "Indecent," the last production at Eastline Theatre in Wantagh.