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## A MUST-SEE FOR HISTORY BUFFS AND THEATRE FANS 'Soul Doctor' makes a stop at Le Petit on it's way to Broadway in 2011



Ben Crawford plays Shlomo Carlebach in 'Soul Doctor: The New Shlomo Musical,' at Le Petit Theatre. The musical follows the legendary and often controversial father of contemporary Jewish music, whose rise to music stardom, unique relationship with Nina Simone and deep connection to the hippie generation, helped revitalize the Jewish experience in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

"Soul Doctor: The New Shlomo Musical," playing through Thursday at Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, is based on the life of Shlomo Carlebach, the famous singing rabbi, following him from his early life in war-torn Europe through his budding music career and friendship with Nina Simone to his later days as a religious leader and cultural phenomenon in 1960's America and beyond. And the musical, like Shlomo himself, is a charismatic, enlightening evening that rouses the soul. The score, which consists mainly of Carlebach's own music, beautifully weaves the songs into the plot, creating a powerful and touching tale. With book and libretto by Daniel S. Wise and lyrics by David Schechter, the musical focuses on Carlebach's passion for reigniting his Jewish brothers and sisters' love for their faith, his need to be a "soul doctor."

Holly-Anne Ruggiero's direction creates an uplifting and spiritual experience, despite the overwhelming sadness in Carlebach's story, which explores how his embrace of radical methods of outreach alienated him from family and friends.

Ben Crawford is a blithe, tender soul as Carlebach. Crawford finds the insecurities and doubt beneath Carlebach's need to inspire, creating a charismatic yet naive character for whom the audience roots.

As Carlebach's friend and collaborator Nina Simone, Rosalind Brown brings a much-needed contrast that elevates the play by creating a fiery, soulful ally for Carlebach and giving the play added cultural relevance.

Jamie Wax flexes his character-actor muscles as Reb Pinchas, the hilariously conservative tutor who shuns Carlebach for his liberalism. L.R. Davidson is heartbreaking as Ruth, a member of Carlebach's peace-and-love synagogue. Davidson crafts a character whose need to belong means loving people who can never love her in return.

Equally memorable is Turner Crumbley, who plays two roles. As Moishelah, who inspires Carlebach to view the world with Hasidic eyes, he is a lovable and fearless pied piper. In his role as Timothy Leary, Crumbley creates a worthy antagonist for Carlebach.

Well-crafted for the Le Petit stage, Neil Patel's scenic design is a tribute to the joy of the play...the production, which is only here through Thursday, should make the must-see list for history buffs as well as musical and theater fans. And local audiences should see it before it hits Broadway, which, according to an earlier press release, is scheduled for 2011.

**Bradley J. Troll**