



# Eight Nights

Written by Jennifer Maisel  
Directed by Emily Chase



## Los Angeles Times

### Review: In the play 'Eight Nights,' drawing a line from the Holocaust to today's refugees

BY PHILIP BRANDES | NOVEMBER 25, 2019

Sharply written and expertly performed, Jennifer Maisel's new play explores the refugee experience and its repercussions through the deeply personal story of a concentration camp survivor and her descendants... Director Emily Chase and her cast bring the human reality of persecuted refugees to life with breathtaking emotional impact.

It's 1949, the first night of Hanukkah, and 19-year-old Holocaust survivor Rebecca Blum faces a rocky start to her new life in New York. Over the course of "Eight Nights," her journey of recovery and renewal offers a deeply personal window into the refugee experience and its generational repercussions in Jennifer Maisel's insightful and moving new play, developed and expertly performed by the Antaeus Theatre Company.

Maisel's play is structured in eight episodes corresponding to

the Jewish festival of lights, with each night of candle-lighting set in a successive decade to illuminate a different stage of Rebecca's life.

On the first night, a dark shadow looms over the reunion of frail, teenage Rebecca (Zoe Yale) and her guilt-ridden father (Arye Gross), who managed to escape the Nazis while the rest of her family died in a concentration camp.

Even as her dad and a sympathetic suitor (Josh Zuckerman) try to coax her back into the world, the distressed, nearly mute

## CONTINUED

Rebecca is haunted by the ghostly presence of her mother (Tessa Auberjonois). She precariously balances past trauma and future hope.

As Rebecca's fortunes improve through her 40s, Yale's portrayal masterfully reflects the psychological legacy of that trauma. In a poetically choreographed handoff, a superb Auberjonois seamlessly takes over the role of Rebecca in her later years, and Yale reappears as Rebecca's daughter and then as her granddaughter, providing elegant continuity in tracing the enduring aftermath of persecution.

Repressed details from Rebecca's refugee trauma emerge in a gradual spiral that playwright Maisel expands to include the stories of other victims of persecution and their descendants.

At the start of the civil rights era in 1964, the legacy of slavery

weighs on the heroic black veteran (Christopher Watson) who'd rescued Rebecca from the concentration camp and who is still struggling to find a solid footing in white-dominated society. His wife (Karen Malina White) has to remain a silent partner in her business venture with Rebecca.

By 1988, Rebecca's daughter is marrying a grad student (Phinneas Kiyomura, alternating with Devin Kawaoka) whose Japanese American family had been sent to internment camps during World War II. A Syrian refugee (Gross) brings a current global perspective to the final segment.

Weaving these disparate cultural threads involves some narrative artifice, but director Emily Chase and her cast bring the human reality of persecuted refugees to life with breathtaking emotional impact.



**STUNNING!  
MESMERIZING!**

-GIL KAAAN, *BROADWAY WORLD*



## Intensely Mesmerizing EIGHT NIGHTS Features A Tour de Force From Tessa Auberjonois

BY GIL KAAAN | NOVEMBER 9, 2019

Antaeus Theatre Company's stunning world premiere of Jennifer Maisel's EIGHT NIGHTS vividly details the life of Holocaust survivor Rebecca Blum from the day she arrives to New York City at age 19, through significant life milestones, to becoming a great-grandmother at age 86. And all this accomplished rather smoothly with increasing intensity and gravitas in less than two hours without an intermission! ...Emily Chase ever so tightly directs her very talented ensemble as they tackle multiple roles.

...The actual interview Rebecca finally agrees to do is cleverly edited start-and-stop to include Rebecca's important

responses, and vital questions unanswered. This is where Tessa Auberjonois SHINES! Her candid, still partly guarded responses as Rebecca punches your gut with her deep, deep, wrenching pain. A master class in acting. I think I held my breath for Auberjonois's entire interview scene. Brava, Ms. Auberjonois!!! She also must be applauded on believable portraying the various ages of Rebecca without resorting to distracting caricature. Wow!

Do go spend EIGHT NIGHTS at Antaeus. So thought-provoking.

[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)





WOW!  
POWERFUL AND MOVING

-STEVEN STANLEY, *STAGE SCENE LA*

# STAGESCENE LA

## Eight Nights Review

BY STEVEN STANLEY | NOVEMBER 8, 2019

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As powerful and moving a journey through time as any theatergoer could wish for, *Eight Nights* ties together events from the distant past with those as recent as this week's headlines while reminding audiences that what happened then can happen again.

Emily Chase directs with attention to character, era, and nuance, staging decade-to-decade transitions with seamless finesse... It's a play that regional theaters across the country would be well advised to snap up asap. Like Jennifer Maisel's *The Last Seder* ("You don't have to be Jewish to fall in love with *The Last Seder*") and *vathespeedofjake* ("Theater at its life-affirming best"), *Eight Nights* will make you laugh, make you cry, make you think, make you feel, make you stand up and cheer.

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[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)



SHATTERING...  
FUTURE MULTIGENERATIONAL CLASSIC

—TRAVIS MICHAEL HOLDER

# Ticket Holders LA

## Eight Nights Review

BY TRAVIS MICHAEL HOLDER | NOVEMBER 2019

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In the world premiere of Jennifer Maisel's shattering *Eight Nights*, the same cramped but comfortable modest apartment on the lower eastside of Manhattan is home to several generations of one family and the people whose lives they affect and who in turn are affected by theirs.

This is a brilliant homage to the durability of the human spirit as told from the diverse multicultural perspectives of these socially marginalized people linked together not only by their own personal sense of displacement in an often hard and selfish world, but more importantly by their individual indomitable life force... It's not difficult to speculate what inspired this award-winning and uber-talented playwright to write such a unique and remarkable play, which personally produced floods of tears for me during six of the eight holiday gatherings it depicted. Maisel admits she began *Eight Nights* the day after the inauguration of our Celebrity Appresident in 2016 as her response to his ugly, hate-filled speeches about walls and borders and keeping Muslims out of America.

Director Emily Chase does a masterful job making this all work seamlessly, particularly conquering the many scene changes here carried out by members of the ensemble in character, with delicately choreographed movements between them featured downstage as one actor takes over the role of another.

*Eight Nights* should be a required event for every schoolkid and civic group in Los Angeles this "festive" season. It'll destroy you, but it's hugely thought-provoking and pure theatrical magic from start to finish.

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FULL REVIEW AVAILABLE.



# STAGE RAW

This is LA. This is your stage.

## Eight Nights Review

BY IRIS MANN | NOVEMBER 2019

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This heartfelt odyssey, covering eight decades in the life of a Holocaust survivor struggling to move her soul beyond the horrors she has undergone, is lyrically rendered in Jennifer Maisel's beautiful scenario. Maisel's masterfully crafted script... is suffused with an element of magical realism... This finely conceived, sensitively written story is one the public needs to hear.

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[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)

STAGE RAW  
OUR TOP TEN

RECOMMENDED!

-IRIS MANN, *STAGE RAW*

## Theatre Notes. Eight Nights Review

BY PAUL MYRVOLD | NOVEMBER 10, 2019

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Jennifer Maisel's *Eight Nights* is a brilliant, complex script. When the powerful actor Tessa Auberjonois moves from a silent presence to take center stage as the mature Rebecca, she shakes the stage with a bravura performance that tops with a searing climax and a sigh of dénouement.

*Eight Nights* is awesomely complex and superbly directed by Emily Chase. The emotional impact of the show is enormous and gripped this theatre goer from beginning to end. The power of the players is extraordinary. When I left the theatre I said, "This play is perfect."

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[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)

## Eight Nights Reveals the Intergenerational Impact of Historical Trauma

BY JOHN LAVITT | NOVEMBER 2019

Jennifer Maisel's new poignant drama shows how the love of one woman and her family survive – barely – the traumatic weight of the Holocaust's dark legacy. As audience members, even as human beings, we have a responsibility to watch, to understand, and ultimately to empathize despite the pain such empathy brings. However, given the quality of the production, we gladly accept this charge because we know the price that might be paid if we do not. Like every other soul in this world, we must make sure it never happens again. In a sense, this story told by Jennifer Maisel is both a warning and a call to action.

[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)



**PERFECT!**

-PAUL MYRVOLD, *THEATRE NOTES*

**Splash**  
magazines

## Surviving the Impossible

BY ELAINE MURA | NOVEMBER 18, 2019

The cast does a superb job of bringing to life the tale of one Holocaust survivor in playwright Jennifer Maisel's powerful story of pain and the human will to survive against all odds. Developed in the Antaeus Playwrights Lab, EIGHT NIGHTS was staged as part of the company's "Lab Results" series at the end of 2018. Masterfully written, Maisel's study of people who faced the unthinkable and still held on to hope, EIGHT NIGHTS has continued to reverberate with audiences in the wake of a rising current of anti-Semitic attacks and Holocaust deniers.

Skillfully directed by Emily Chase, EIGHT NIGHTS is an emotional roller coaster beautifully depicted by an uber-talented cast.

[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)



POIGNANT!  
THE CAST IS  
STELLAR

-JOHN LAVIIT, *THE HOLLYWOOD TIMES*

## **T** THE THEATRE TIMES

### The World Premiere of “Eight Nights” at Antaeus Theatre Company

BY CHRISTINE DEITNER | NOVEMBER 17, 2019

Antaeus Theatre Company has been instrumental in bringing a new play to life that is a deeply moving story about a Holocaust survivor set during eight different nights of Chanukah over the course of eight decades. Written by Jennifer Maisel and directed by Emily Chase, *Eight Nights* was developed in the Antaeus Playwrights Lab and was a semi-finalist for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. In addition to the production now up in Glendale, the play inspired a series of benefit staged readings in cities across the US called The 8 Nights of Eight Nights series after the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh with proceeds going to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (an organization dedicated to assisting refugees worldwide).

...There is beauty and respect in the patience we must have with people who are not able to face their darkest times, but there is also beauty and respect in the effort people around them make to understand that darkness... This is a well-written play that avoids easy answers, assumes we are able to keep up, and presents us with questions, which is ultimately ideal.

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[CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL REVIEW.](#)





# JEWISH JOURNAL

## Eight Decades of Family Drama Unfold in Hanukkah-Set ‘Eight Nights’

BY GERRI MILLER | NOVEMBER 6, 2019

The play “Eight Nights” tells a multigenerational family story incorporating multicultural perspectives about the plight of displaced, marginalized and persecuted people, past and present.

“It’s about a German-Jewish refugee who comes to the States after the Holocaust. It’s eight nights of her life over eight decades and it weaves in the interned Japanese, the African American experience and the Muslim refugee crisis,” playwright Jennifer Maisel told the Journal before a rehearsal in the run-up to the world premiere. She took inspiration from the story of the refugee ship MS St. Louis, which was forced to return Jews to Germany in 1939 when no country would allow it entry. “I felt that it reflected the same thing as the articles about sending Muslims back. I started writing this the day after [President Donald Trump’s] inauguration in 2016.”

Of Eastern European Jewish heritage, Maisel grew up Reform on New York’s Long Island, where she attended Hebrew school, had a bat mitzvah and loved celebrating Hanukkah and Passover “because they’re family-oriented,” she said. “I love how a family takes ritual and makes it their own.” (Her previous play is titled “The Last Seder.”)

“Eight Nights” was developed at the Antaeus Theatre

Company’s Playwrights Lab in Los Angeles, where director Emily Chase directed several early readings. “It’s the Jewish experience through time, a play about generations — a sort of double helix of mothers and daughters through time,” she said. “I love what it says about the universal human experience, and specifically, what it says about the Jewish experience. It’s also about what it’s like to have a family, to be a woman, a Jewish woman, and integrated families, and how our Jewish experience should open our hearts to the immigrant experience. We believe in teshuvah. We wouldn’t want to turn away people as we were [turned away] on the St. Louis.”

New York native Chase, who has taught and directed at USC, UCLA and Shalhevet High School, grew up knowing about the immigrant experience from her Yiddish-speaking grandparents. Her father-in-law was on the Kindertransport and she had him come in to speak to the cast.

“Of course, actors can play what they’re not,” Chase said. “But what we loved about landing a Jewish cast is that it is in their DNA, in their cultural identity and that’s one of the subjects of the play. We inherit trauma and resilience and to have actors with an emotional connection is like a shorthand.”

Zoe Yale plays several versions of the character Rebecca. “I get



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to play my grandmother, my mother and my granddaughter,” she said. “It’s an incredible challenge getting to track that lifespan, how we deal with trauma and what we try to shield our children from,” she said. Raised Orthodox in Cincinnati, she had her bat mitzvah in Israel and discovered her love of acting in Jewish day school. Her paternal grandfather also escaped Nazi Germany on the Kindertransport.

“Eight Nights” serves as a reminder of the lessons of the Shoah, Yale said. “The further that we move away from the Holocaust, the more you see resurgence of Holocaust deniers. We see a lot of hate and bigotry in the world, neo-Nazis popping up left and right,” she said. “Sometimes we treat history like this far-away thing but this play makes it alive, and it’s necessary that people feel that reality and see that threat. We’re only able to overcome it if we work together and take it seriously.”

Tessa Auberjonois, who plays older Rebecca, lost maternal ancestors in the Holocaust but was not raised Jewish because her parents (including actor Rene Auberjonois) were atheists. But she identifies as Jewish and has “spent time in my adult life trying to understand what Judaism is and what it means to me personally. It’s one of the reasons I wanted to do this role,” she said. “There’s something about being in a room full of Jewish people — a rigorous intellectual kind of discipline and a great sense of

humor and a lot of heart at the same time,” she added. “It’s really special to be a part of.

“The thing that this play does so wonderfully is showing the effect that being a refugee or displaced or a victim has on a person and their family and the ripple effect that it has through time,” Auberjonois continued. “It’s a beautiful examination of that and how we forget.”

Arye Gross (“Castle,” “Glow”) portrays Rebecca’s father and also a Syrian refugee. An L.A. native who describes his connection to Judaism as “cultural and ancestral,” he has played numerous Jewish characters. For him, the lesson of “Eight Nights” is to follow Rebecca’s example in moving forward from her traumatic past by showing compassion to others. “The way to deal with the burden that we carry is not to ignore it but to move forward and to lessen someone else’s burden,” he said. “That’s what I hope people will get and understand. The oppressed and homeless and stateless should be treated with kindness and generosity.”

“The experience of the Jews is personal and special and gives us strength and depth and also can open our hearts to the needs and experiences of other people in the world and in our country,” Chase added. “As Jews, we have a call to repair the world.”

PHOTOS BY JENNY GRAHAM