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**THEODORE BIKEL PORTRAYS YIDDISH GREAT IN THE OFF-BROADWAY
PREMIERE OF “SHOLOM ALEICHEM: LAUGHTER THROUGH TEARS”**

**FOLKSBIENE’S 5-WEEK OFF-BWAY RUN OPENS TUESDAY NOVEMBER 17
AT 7PM**

The Drama Desk Award-winning National Yiddish Theatre – Folksbiene presents the New York premiere of “Sholom Aleichem: Laughter Through Tears,” a new play with music, written by and starring the Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning actor, folk legend and liberal Jewish activist **Theodore Bikel**, opens tonight at the Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Avenue (at 25th Street).

Presented by the National Yiddish Theatre – Folksbiene, “Sholom Aleichem: Laughter Through Tears,” brings to life the vivid characters and keen observations of the Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem, one of the most admired writers of the early 20th century (who this year is the subject of tributes commemorating the 150th anniversary of his birth). “Sholom Aleichem: Laughter Through Tears” – in English with some Yiddish – world premiered at Theater J in Washington DC in December of last year. The critically acclaimed production, which Folksbiene is producing by special arrangement with South Florida’s National Jewish Theater, runs through December 13.

Directed by Derek Goldman, “Sholom Aleichem: Laughter Through Tears” mixes the satirist’s words and stories (culled from over 40 volumes of his writing) with anecdotes by those who knew him. A generous and witty observer of his times, Sholom Aleichem, who lived the last years of his life in New York and whose funeral in 1916 was national news, was one of the most popular and widely-read writers of his time. He is often referred as the Jewish Mark Twain.

The show features an enchanting trove of songs from Eastern Europe (including a number of the Yiddish-language folk classics Bikel popularized over the years). These songs, which Bikel delivers in both Yiddish and English (English supertitles are used whenever Yiddish is either spoken or sung), are rendered with the pianist (and music director) **Tamara Brooks** and the accordionist **Merima Ključo**.

Like the songs, the show’s production design balances vivid reality with a dreamlike lyricism that is both timeless and contemporary. **Robbie Hayes** designs the set, and **Zachary Borovay** handles the projection design. The lighting is designed by **Dan Covey**, and **Gail Cooper-Hecht** is responsible for the costume design.

Bikel, who has played Tevye the milkman in “Fiddler on the Roof” (based on the the Sholom Aleichem stories) more than anyone else -- over 2,000 times, on Broadway and the road -- earned a best supporting actor Oscar nomination in 1958 for “The

Defiant Ones." He had major roles in "The Blue Angel," "My Fair Lady," and "The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming". He also created the role of Baron von Trapp in the original production of "A Sound of Music" on Broadway. A world-renowned folksinger, social activist and spokesman for liberal Jewish causes, he also was a former president of Actors' Equity. He headlined a concert celebrating his 85th birthday at Carnegie Hall in June.

The schedule is as follows: Tuesdays & Wednesdays at 2pm; Thursdays at 2pm & 8pm; Saturdays at 8pm and Sundays at 2pm & 6pm, with special performances on Fridays November 27 and December 4, both at 12 noon. Tickets, \$55 and \$45, by phone at 646/312-5073 or at www.folksbiene.org

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