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# Award-winning actor comes to Portland to highlight Jewish diversity

The Tony and Grammy award-winning actor and writer Ari'el Stachel will join several events hosted by the Maine Jewish Museum, including a performance of his one-man show.

Community: **Portland**

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Tony and Grammy-winning actor and writer Ari'el Stachel will join several events hosted by the Maine Jewish Museum, including a performance of his one-man show. (Photo by Gabrielle Mariella)

Tony and Grammy award-winning actor and writer Ari'el Stachel hopes to challenge binaries and highlight the diversity of Jewish culture during his visit to Portland next week, hosted by the Maine Jewish Museum.

"Right now, the Jewish community is facing spiraling anti-Semitism with roots in the toxic binaries that are polarizing our society," said Maine Jewish Museum Executive Director Dawn LaRochelle. "Ari'el's work is urgent (because) he uses theater to challenge the assumptions that allow anti-semitism to root."



Ari'el Stachel. (Photo by Gabrielle Mariella)

Stachel will take part in three events on Oct. 16 and 17: a performance and conversation with Maine public school students as part of the museum's Delet Program, which educates K-12 students about Jewish culture to challenge stereotypes; a pescatarian Yemenite-inspired Shabbat dinner; and a performance of "Other," his autobiographical one-man show that recreates pivotal moments of his life centered around his struggles with anxiety and his embracing of his identity.

Stachel won the 2018 Tony Award for Featured Actor in a Musical for his role in "The Band's Visit," and a Grammy the same year for Best Musical Theater Album.

"I don't do this to just wave a political wand; I do it to connect with people on a very deep level," said Stachel. "The goal of this art form is for people to enjoy a story and, afterwards, reflect on their own lives and feel a little moved and refreshed."

Stachel, the son of a Yemenite-Israeli father and an Ashkenazi-American mother, said that his cultural identity had been a point of tension for him in part due to a perception that Jews are white and European; Stachel's skin is darker, like his father's, he said. Stachel said this stereotype, combined with anti-Arab sentiment in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, resulted in years of him trying to hide his dual identities. He credits the theater as the place where he found a sense of belonging and meaning in his teenage years.

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Stachel said he is much more comfortable in his cultural identity now and the fact that it doesn't have to be tied to a single truth.

"I'm trying to preach for peace, co-existence, and unity, so I always like to be a voice that is both the proud son of a Yemenite Israeli and someone who is tolerant and not hateful," he said. "I live in that grey area that a lot of people think is impossible."

Recently, Stachel has been hard at work on Shalom Habibis, an initiative that aims to bring ethnicities perceived to be at odds with one another, such as Jews, Arabs, and Muslims, together through conversations and Shabbat dinners, which he said will "showcase our shared humanity."

"It is all about seeing people beyond the boxes, beyond the labels that we often put on them," said Stachel.

LaRochelle hopes that Stachel's visit will appeal to non-Jewish Mainers as well.

"This is compelling theater, not just a homework assignment," said LaRochelle. "Anyone, regardless of their background, who has been misjudged, told they don't belong, or felt pressure ot conceal part of their identity, will recognize something in his story that resonates with them."

## IF YOU GO

**'At the Table with Ari'el Stachel: A Yemenite-Inspired Shabbat,'** Oct. 16, 6- 8 p.m., Maine Jewish Museum, 267 Congress St., Portland. The event is a Yemenite-inspired pescatarian Shabbat feast prepared by Maine Jewish Museum Executive Director Dawn LaRochelle and conversation with Ari'el Stachel, tickets $75. Get tickets at eventbrite: eventbrite.com/e/at-the-table-with-ariel-stachel-a-yemenite-inspired-shabbat-tickets-1999214091164?aff=oddtdtcreator.

'**An Evening with Ari'el Stachel**, Oct. 17, 7- 9 p.m., Maine Jewish Museum, a performance of "Other," Stachel's autobiographical one-man show, tickets $54 at eventbrite eventbrite.com/e/an-evening-with-ariel-stachel-tickets-1999215174404?aff=oddtdtcreator.

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