

# Back to Isra-Isle

A play for two actors and an urn

By Nava Semel

Directed by Orly Rabinian

Produced by Itim Ensemble TLV

Premiere: Tel Aviv, September 2015

Based on Nava Semel's novel *Isra-Isle*, (Yediot Achronot publishing House 2005), soon to be published in the USA by Villard Press, summer 2016.



## Synopsis

What if Israel did not exist? What if instead there was a Jewish state on an American island, founded centuries ago?

Isra-Isle is the state that could have been.

The play is inspired by a true historical event. Before Theodore Herzl, there was Mordechai Manuel Noah - a journalist, a diplomat, a playwright and a visionary. In September 1825 he founded a Jewish state on a Native American island by Niagara Falls and named it "Ararat". He called upon all Jews to come and settle in this safe haven of his own creation, but they never came.

*Back to Isra-Isle* brings this forgotten state to life, and creates a parallel reality where the Jews did answer Noah's call. Under the patronage of the USA Isra-Isle has been the legal home of the Jewish people for almost two decades.

Simon T. Lenox, a black, gay photo-journalist flies to Isra-Isle on its 190<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. He carries with him an urn full of ashes, looking for a perfect burial spot for his lover David Goldberg, a native of the Island. In his Journey through this foreign land, Simon meets different women who guide him on his path. His quest turns the Zionist narrative upside-down, and raises questions of wandering, belonging, and the relentless search for the promised land.

By the end of the play a surprise awaits both Simon and the audience. David had a different plan in mind. He wanted his remains to be scattered somewhere else, far far away from the safe and secure Jewish island in America...

The play explores current issues of racism, minorities and the high cost of a territorial dispute. It places Jews, Native-Americans, African-Americans, and all persecuted people in a shared search for a homeland, asking the question "What if?"



Photo: Nilli Maman