

A Comedy of Us Jews

אַ קאָמעדיע וועגן אונדז אידעלאַך

A komedye vegn undz idelakh

"The play takes place in our time, 1940"



Friends' Meeting House, Friargate, York

12 and 13 June 2017



Cast and Crew

Brendan O'Farrell	Joseph Kleiderman
Millie Jessup	Hannah, his wife
Kayleigh McCallion	Sarah, customers, porter, sexton
Olivia Jeffery	David, Kleiderman's employee
Roberta Petraccone	The mannequin
Hugh McCarron	Accompanist
Mark France	Director
Rebecca Gallon	Student director
Tabby Holland	Production manager
Angel Lloyd	Costume Design
Simo Muir	Lead researcher, translator, script advisor
Lisa Peschel	Producer, script and lyrics adaptation
Cheryl Coons	Lyrics adaptation

A Comedy of Us Jews

A Comedy of Us Jews was written in Yiddish by Helsinki-born Jac Weinstein in the autumn of 1940, and performed there during what is now called the Interim Peace.

The Finns had signed a peace agreement in Moscow after the recent Winter War against the Soviet Union, but they were preparing for further conflict as they sought to recapture their eastern territories.

In the meantime, although the Second World War was already raging in Europe, Finnish Jews went on with their lives as did other Finnish citizens.

Most Jews in Helsinki were in the clothing business, and there were dozens of small clothing shops in the city.

In June 1941, half a year after *A Comedy of Us Jews* had been performed, Finland joined with Nazi Germany in their fight against the Soviet Union. During this so-called Continuation War, Jewish soldiers from Finland found themselves fighting alongside their worst enemies, the Nazis.



Jewish clothing store in the centre of Helsinki (Finnish Jewish Archives/National Archives of Finland)

Back home, the wartime shortage of supplies made it difficult to run a business, and rationing made the situation even worse. Even if there was something to sell, customers often didn't have enough points on their ration cards.

The heavy concentration in just one type of business put the Jewish community in an economically very vulnerable situation. It also made them a target for antisemitism.

Some antisemitic groups in Finland demanded that Jews should be banned from the clothing trade, or that their clothing shops be marked as Jewish as had happened in Nazi Germany.

In November 1942, supposedly for violating rationing regulations, eight Austrian Jewish refugees, who had fled to Helsinki, were deported by the Finnish Security Police to Nazi Germany.

Finnish Jews feared that minor offences committed by some Jewish businesses might lead to the deportation of the whole community, but when the tide of war turned against Nazi Germany in the autumn of 1944, Finland finally signed a peace agreement with the Soviet Union.

The Finnish Jews had avoided the deportations and escaped the Holocaust.

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