

# Passage

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T H E A T R E   C O M P A N Y

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## ***Holiday Musical Celebrates Diversity*** *Passage Theatre Premieres Inspiring New Show, **Nightlights***

Passage Theatre celebrates the holiday season this year with a new musical based on a noted children's book. **Nightlights**, adapted by Janice Cohn from her book *The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate*, is inspired by the true story of a town that came together to fight anti-Semitism in their community. This uplifting holiday production is aimed at children and their parents, and features original music and lyrics by Harvey Edelman and Neil Fishman. Passage Theatre Associate Artistic Director David L. White will direct. Performances take place at the Mill Hill Playhouse in Trenton from December 17 to 19. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children, and reservations can be made by calling 609.392.0766.

The remarkable true events that inspired **Nightlights** took place in Billings, Montana in 1993. A group of neo-Nazis began to distribute literature in the town, and as Hanukkah began, bricks were thrown through windows of homes displaying menorahs. Local churches and schools came together to take a stand against prejudice, with residents of all races and religions placing hand-drawn menorahs in their windows. *The Billings Gazette* also published a picture of a menorah in the newspaper, along with an editorial urging people to hang the picture in their window as a statement against anti-Semitism and other prejudice. Thousands of residents did, and the town became noted for its desire to have people of different religions living together peacefully.

**Nightlights** will feature a cast that includes both professional adult actors and Trenton youth from The State Street Project, Passage's arts mentoring program that aims to raise participants' aspirations through positive experiences in the arts. The show will feature 10 youngsters from the Trenton After School Program performing alongside 10 professional actors drawn from New York, Philadelphia, and the Trenton area. During the rehearsal process, the kids are mentored

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by the professionals, learning new skills and developing the confidence to give a great performance. Many of this year's performers have appeared in previous State Street productions.

Author Janice Cohn is excited to be adapting her book for the stage. "Since *The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate* was published almost ten years ago, I've spoken with literally thousands of children in schools, churches and synagogues about the events in Billings. I'm always struck by how much youngsters have to say on this subject. I think kids and their parents will find this new production very uplifting and inspiring." The original book was described by American Bookseller as "a must have book for all ages - child and adults," and The Children's Book Council praised the story as "a powerful narrative about how two children, their families and a community resolve to stand together against bigotry and hatred."

To encourage thoughtful discussion of the play's issues among audience members, Passage is collaborating with KidsBridge, a nonprofit organization dedicated to diversity appreciation and character education. KidsBridge conducts anti-bullying and character education programs and other community service events in Mercer County. KidsBridge is arranging for interfaith discussions following each performance, led by clergy and character education experts, allowing audience members to talk about the play's issues.

### **TO GO**

Performances of this workshop of **Nightlights** take place at the historic **Mill Hill Playhouse** at the intersection of Front & Montgomery Streets in Trenton. Showtimes are Friday, December 17 at 7pm, Saturday, December 18 at 3pm and 6pm, and Sunday, December 19 at 3pm and 6pm. Free, secure parking is available across the street from the theatre. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. **For reservations, call 609-392-0766, or visit the theatre's website at [www.passagetheatre.org](http://www.passagetheatre.org).**

Passage Theatre is Trenton's premiere professional theatre, in residence at the historic Mill Hill Playhouse. Its educational outreach effort, The State Street Project, is designed to raise young people's aspirations through positive experiences in the arts. Passage's mainstage season is made possible by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, *The Times of Trenton*, Fleet Bank, the New Jersey Cultural Trust, and the City of Trenton Department of Recreation, Natural Resources, and Culture. Additional funding for The State Street Project is provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant program, The New Jersey Council for the Humanities, Verizon, Princeton Area Community Foundation, Princeton Financial Systems, PNC Bank, The Bunbury Company, Inc., WT Grant Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, and the Community Foundation of New Jersey. The interfaith discussion is made possible by a generous grant from Merrill Lynch to KidsBridge, with additional funding provided by the United Jewish Federation of Princeton Mercer Bucks and Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church.

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