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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Alaska theater artists travel to Nova Scotia for the Halifax Fringe

Anchorage-based actress Nava Sarracino and director Vivian Melde will travel to Halifax, Nova Scotia the end of August to present a monodrama at the 2019 Halifax Fringe Festival. *The Child Behind the Eyes*, written by Israeli playwright Nava Semel, will play six shows between August 29 and September 8 at the Sawmill Playhouse in Dartmouth, within the municipality of Halifax. They will also present the play and host a community workshop at the end of September in Nome, Alaska.

Sarracino, Melde, and composer Christel Veraart debuted the play in 2016. The Anchorage performances were presented in partnership with RKP Productions. The trio also took the show in 2016 to Seward, Victoria, British Columbia, and in 2018 to The Netherlands. While working on the 2016 production, the three women communicated with Semel via email. Melde had invited Semel to come to Anchorage; however, she never made it before she passed away in December of 2017. Erga Netz of Stichting Rainbow invited the women to participate in a memorial symposium in The Netherlands in November/December 2018, celebrating the acclaimed playwright and literary author, Nava Semel. Sarracino was one of four actresses that performed scenes of *The Child Behind they Eyes* for the memorial symposium, which played in Amsterdam and The Hague. Both Melde and Veraart served on a panel that included host Noam Semel, the late playwright's husband and former General Director of the Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv. The international panel included theater artists from Turkey and The Netherlands. The panel, performances, and events were presented in Dutch, English, Hebrew, and Turkish.

Following the symposium, the artists decided to revive the show and applied, and were accepted for the 2019 Halifax Fringe Festival. They also held a benefit performance for Hope Studios last June and will travel to Nome in September to present the play and host a community storytelling workshop, focusing on themes within the play.

Veraart, who is responsible for the sound design and title song, a lullaby, for *The Child Behind the Eyes*, originally scored the latter in Yiddish. When she sent the lullaby to Semel, the playwright encouraged Veraart to change the lyrics to Hebrew, which is the national language of Israel. The lullaby is available in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish <https://christelveraart.com/discography/lullaby/>. Veraart was the 2017 recipient of the Connie Boochever Fellowship from the Alaska Arts and Culture Foundation and 2014 Individual Artist Award from the Rasmuson Foundation for music composition.

The three artists traveled to British Columbia for the 30th Annual Victoria Fringe Festival, where the show received positive reviews. Before they left Alaska, the show played one weekend in Seward. Following the Victoria Fringe, RKP Productions presented the play in Anchorage at the former Out North Contemporary Art House. The Anchorage productions in of *The Child Behind the Eyes* included post-show panels with representatives of the Alaska Down Syndrome Congress, Stone Soup Group, and Hope Studios; non-profit organizations that provide resources and assistance for differently-abled individuals.

Written in the late 1980s, the play was performed for more than ten years in Israel and translated in Arabic, Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Rumanian, and Spanish. Semel based the play on the real life story of actress Assi Eshed. The one-woman show is about a mother, who has a son born with Down syndrome. The mother has a sleepless night before her son, six years old, goes to school. She recounts his birth and the treatment by medical staff in the hospital and her personal journey in learning to love her son and to see him grow; his relationships with his sister and his grandmother; how he makes his way in the neighborhood with other children who bully him; and the mother's fears anticipating his first day of school.

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