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Anchorage performing artists travel to The Netherlands for international memorial event.

Actress Nava Sarracino, director Vivian Melde, and composer Christel Veraart will travel to Amsterdam at the end of November to participate in a series of events, shows and talks on Israeli culture honoring the late Israeli playwright Nava Semel. Sarracino performed Semel's play, *The Child Behind the Eyes*, in Anchorage, Seward, and Victoria, British Columbia, in August and September of 2016. Melde directed the production and Veraart composed a lullaby for the show and the sound design. The 2016 production was done in coordination with RKP Productions in Anchorage.

The memorial symposium will be held November 28, 2018 in Amsterdam and on December 2 in The Hague. Erga Netz, a featured actress for the event, and organizer with Stichting Rainbow, in Amsterdam, reached out to Sarracino through the website created to promote the Alaska/Canada performances of Semel's play.

Through Netz's message to Sarracino this past spring, the women learned of the untimely passing of Semel, which happened in December 2017. Sarracino is one of four actresses that will perform at the memorial symposium. Both Melde and Veraart will be on a panel that includes host Noam Semel, the late playwright's husband and former General Director of the Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv. The international panel includes other artists from Turkey and The Netherlands. The panel, performances, and events will be in Dutch, English, Hebrew, and Turkish. Netz also will perform a shortened version of the entire play from *The Child Behind the Eyes* in Hebrew with English subtitles.

While working on the 2016 production, Melde had invited Nava Semel to come to Alaska, with a promise of wild Alaska salmon. "She was really interested in visiting Alaska and she was intrigued to learn that Anchorage had a Jewish Museum with a permanent exhibit about Alaskan pilots and flight attendants who, in 1947, flew from Alaska and helped transport Jewish refugees to assist with early establishment of the State of Israel," said Melde, recalling her communications with Semel through emails. "She sent me her newest play, *Back to Israel*, and I had an informal reading of the play, which I was considering for a future production." Semel's book was recently published this year in the United States.

Semel also communicated through emails with composer Veraart, who was born in the Netherlands. Veraart originally scored a lullaby and recorded it 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.

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.

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 at the former Out North Contemporary Art House. The Anchorage production of *The Child Behind the Eyes* included post-show panels with representatives of the Alaska Down Syndrome Congress and Stone Soup Group, non-profit organizations that assist families of differently-abled individuals.

More Information: <https://christelveraart.com/projects/stage/the-child-behind-the-eyes/>

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