



JewishBoston

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Local Artists Receive Grants From CJP To Highlight Jewish Experiences

CJP will award \$75,000 to support 10 artists and their teams on creative projects.

TOP PICK JANUARY 20, 2023



Paloma Valenzuela (Courtesy photo)

For a third time, CJP awarded its annual round of Arts and Culture Community Impact Grants to support artists throughout Greater Boston. The fund was developed to help

individuals and collaborative groups make their artistic visions a reality, permitting everyone to explore and appreciate the beauty of Jewish arts and culture. This year, ten local artists and their teams were granted \$75,000 to create new works that embrace the diversity and complexity of Jewish identity, community and tradition.

Sparking questions, fostering curiosity and inviting communal dialogue on a range of topics both within the Jewish community and across diverse identities, these works will debut throughout the year. Yiddish traditions, Sephardic Jews and the Ladino language, Jews of color, the Holocaust, death and Jewish faith, marriage traditions and so much more will manifest as live performances, audio recordings, sculpture, photography and film. Meet the artists below.

[Adah Hetko](#)



Adah Hetko (Courtesy photo)

Western Massachusetts-based composer, vocalist and dancer Adah Hetko's project, "*A Zise Vokh* (A Sweet Week)," is a musical exploration of [Havdalah](#), the ceremony that ends Shabbat and wishes everyone present a sweet week ahead. It will reimagine the Havdalah experience through original and traditional Yiddish, Hebrew and Sephardic songs.

This project will be led by the Boston-area trio [Levyosn](#) (Yiddish for “leviathan”). Levyosn’s members include Hetko (voice and guitar), Lysander Jaffe (violin and voice) and Kaia Berman-Peters (accordion and voice). They will present four live performances of “*A Zise Vokh*,” pairing their music with participatory singing, dancing and rituals. They will also record the songs as part of their debut album, “Levyosn’s Lullaby.”

Becky Behar



Becky Behar (Courtesy photo)

Becky Behar, a photographer based in Newton, will use her grant to create a photography experience called “*Tu Que Bivas (May You Live)*,” that will highlight family, immigration, memory and loss. Behar calls on her heritage as a Sephardic Jew to explore the idea of “home” and how it is made up of the experiences, cultures, mores, traditions and memories that each of us pick up along the way.

Each of the approximately 20 images of portraits and still lifes will be titled with a Ladino saying that contains eternal wisdom. They’ll be curated together alongside objects and food to create an interactive environment that engages all the senses, allowing audiences to conjure up their own collection of what family and home means to them.

Brooke Saias



Brooke Saias (Courtesy photo)

Brooke Saias, a filmmaker based out of Boston, is creating a short documentary film inspired by her Sephardic heritage. It will explore the history and underrepresentation of Sephardic Jews in America and how they have been largely absorbed into Ashkenazi culture.

The film will explore identity, representation, and collective memory through archival material and personal narratives to elevate Sephardic culture and the endangered Ladino language. Saias' documentary film will be screened in the Boston-area and will include a panel discussion.

Derek David



Derek David (Courtesy photo)

Boston-based composer, conductor and music educator, Derek David's project is "Yiddishkeit," a contemporary concert music experience. Featuring original compositions written for a diverse collection of musicians from both the classical concert and Jewish music worlds, "Yiddishkeit" will promote, disseminate and celebrate a modern Yiddish artistic voice and the burgeoning renaissance of Yiddish language and culture.

In the days leading up to the concert, guest artists will work with students in [MIT's Music & Theater Arts](#). Both students and the general public will have the opportunity to interact with the guest musicians in events surrounding the concert.

Hadar Ahuvia



Hadar Ahuvia (Photo: Maria Baranova)

Hadar Ahuvia, a rabbinical student at Boston's Hebrew College, will create a contemporary solo performance titled "Nefesh." Her performance is inspired by Jewish mystical teaching, Ashkenazi *chazones*, and hasidic *nigunas* forms of individual and collective praise, celebration, self-soothing, mourning, and yearning.

"Nefesh" lingers in the details and forms of rocking, *shuckling*, vocal sliding and *krechtsing*, uplifting these practices as sources of life-giving nourishment and cross-cultural practice. Through the body's articulation of text, melody and movement it foregrounds the labor, sensuality, and life-giving nourishment of sacred service.

Jenna Billian



Jenna Billian (Courtesy photo)

Greater Boston's Jenna Billian is creating a sculpture and installation exploring the traditions and rituals surrounding death in the Jewish faith. The installation comprises vibrantly painted plaster molds of stones borrowed from the graves of loved ones in the Jewish community. Each stone will be displayed on wooden supports next to photographs of the original graves where each one came from.

The final installation will be on display at [The Danforth Museum of Art](#) in Framingham. "By being exhibited in a non-denominational space," Billian explained, "the show will bring

awareness of Jewish traditions to the broader culture, which is extremely important, especially during this time of rising antisemitism.”

Jessi Stegall



Jessi Stegall (Photo: Lo Kuehmeier)

Jessi Stegall is a dance theater artist, applied ethicist, arts educator and media designer based in Boston. Her project centers around completing a dance production entitled “The Theremin Vignettes,” set to and inspired by the music of Clara Rockmore, a Lithuanian Jewish violist and theremin player who overcame immense hardship to pioneer the relationship between electronic interface and classical music. With four of 12 vignettes already choreographed, Stegall will choreograph two additional pieces to Rockmore’s arrangements of famous Jewish composers.

Leslie Starobin



Leslie Starobin (Courtesy photo)

Boston-area photographer and montage artist Leslie Starobin's "[Looming in the Shadows of Łódź](#)" shows how memories and stories of the Holocaust affect multiple generations of one family. Starobin's relatives were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau from the Łódź Ghetto. On the 75th anniversary, the family went to Poland to retrace their footsteps. The only survivor still alive, Dorka, was able to share memories and tell stories from the photographs they took.

"Looming in the Shadows of Łódź" incorporates written testimony and excerpts from Dorka's post-war diary around the borders of site-specific photographs. By layering textual memories of the past onto visual depictions of the present, Starobin asks viewers to move between past and present, between word and image, as they survey these topographies across time and space.

Mishkaleh



Mishkaleh (Courtesy photo)

Somerville artist Mishkaleh will be making a series of silver sculptures exploring the dichotomy present in Jewish identity, community and tradition. Each piece will look pointedly modern, while showcasing techniques used to adorn ancient Yemenite Jewish wedding jewelry. They will also be oxidized to mimic the natural aging process, allowing the modern and ancient to coexist in single objects, the same way they coexist in Jewish society and people. This duality will encourage conversation around dichotomies that exist in all cultures, including Judaism.

Paloma Valenzuela



Paloma Valenzuela (Courtesy photo)

Dominican American writer, director, actress and educator Paloma Valenzuela will complete post-production on her short film, "[The Seltzer Factory](#)." Because her family lost so many Hungarian family members in the Holocaust, there has been so little they actually know about their own story. Legend has it that Paloma's family owned a seltzer factory and a pharmacy in Marghita, Hungary. The film is a hybrid of story narrative and documentary about her family.

"To consider how extraordinary it is that my family is even here today is where the heart of this film is," Paloma said. "My hope is that audiences are moved by the story to consider how extraordinary their family histories are as well."

CJP's Arts and Culture Community Impact Grants will conclude with final projects performed, premiered or displayed next spring. Visit CJP's [Arts and Culture page](#) to learn more about grant programs investing in local artists.