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Roy Horovitz has most of his lines prepared. The incipit, however, remains a work in progress.

“I think my opening sentence is going to be something like, ‘We live here in some kind of confrontation with faith, in a land where being part of the chosen people often feels like having no choice at all,’” he said.

Speaking by phone from his Tel Aviv apartment, the Israeli actor, director and professor wasn’t worried about finalizing his remarks or even the reception he might receive when he comes to Pittsburgh at the end of the month.

“I’m well prepared for everything,” he said. “I have good answers if worse comes to worst.” This isn’t Horovitz’s [first trip to western Pennsylvania](#). He came two years ago to perform “My First Sony,” a monodrama about Yotam, an 11-year-old child who feverishly begins documenting his life after receiving a tape recorder.

Though his upcoming stay will be several days longer than the 2023 stop, Horovitz’s itinerary is a whirlwind. This time, the chair of Bar Ilan University’s drama department is slated to visit local universities and schools, lead a master class for performing artists, deliver remarks to community members and perform two Israeli monodramas at Congregation Beth Shalom in Squirrel Hill.

Classrooms Without Borders
“It’s gonna be a pretty, pretty tight schedule,” he said with a laugh.

Running from one place to the next — while meeting with individuals who study theater, perform theater or have no knowledge of theater — is nothing new for Horovitz. “I’m pretty used to this diversity of audiences. And actually, I kind of like it,” he said. There’s a challenge to wearing various hats, but “everything leads to drama at the end of the day.”

What he means, he explained, is that art, for some, can offer an escape from life; not for Israelis, though.

“Israelis tend to follow the direction that [Shakespeare described in ‘Hamlet’](#) — ‘To hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature,’” he said.

That proximity of life and art is reflected by repeated themes and subject matters, he continued. “Most of the original writing here keeps coming back to the conflict, to the Holocaust, to the tensions between religious and non-religious people.”

This isn’t to say there’s an absence of fantasy.

“We import escapism,” he said. “We do ‘Mama Mia’ or ‘Evita.’ But the majority of the original writing, the original creation, done here is very close to what we experience.”



Roy Horovitz. Photo by Simcha Barbiro courtesy of Roy Horovitz

Tsipy Gur, founder and executive director of [Classrooms Without Borders](#), is helping to bring Horovitz to Pittsburgh. His visit, she said, will showcase the talent of Israeli theater while offering insight into its present foci.

“Roy is an expert in drama who is able to use the arts to talk about theater in Israel after Oct. 7,” Gur said. “His understanding of drama allows a [different way to reach schools, students and adults.](#)”

Horovitz will tap several texts to achieve that purpose, including Israeli works “When the Omelet Touches the Salad” and “Jonathan.” The former presents the tale of two anti-heroes; the latter involves an older woman who cares for an abandoned baby. Both stories are serious but allow space for laughter.

It’s a common recipe in Israeli drama, he said. “We inject humor even into the most heavy subject matters. And that’s that famous Jewish humor that got us through wars, pogroms — that throw anything at us and you will find a punchline kind of thing.”

Whether it’s the monodramas — both of which will be performed in English [at Beth Shalom on Feb. 24 at 7:30 p.m.](#) and followed by discussion — or working with students or speaking with community members, Horovitz is seeking cultural exchange and understanding.

“We have more things in common than things that set us apart,” he said.

He was reminded of that idea during a recent conversation with an American friend, who quoted George Carlin. The [late comedian once remarked](#), “When you’re born into this world, you’re given a ticket to the freak show. If you’re born in America, you get a front row seat.” Carlin’s comment is humorous, but it’s incorrect, Horovitz said: “I think we Israelis are sitting closer to the stage than you.”

Horovitz is a master of piercing earnestness with quips. Doing so is one way of featuring the depth of Israeli drama. He aspires to showcase that richness, but said he has a much larger hope. “I want to open the news and hear that all the hostages are back home again and safe,” he said.

The Israeli theatrical community, he continued, has “a lot to offer. I think we represent normality and calls for dialogue.” Art can prompt conversation and change, Horovitz said. And like life, there’s an intensity and seriousness to Israeli theater. “These are stories from the heart,” he said.

Lest one is concerned his upcoming shows will be too grim or cheerless, Horovitz offered a sobering jest: “That’s what we have the news for.”