

## Piti Theatre Company developing “Bee” show project



Photo by Cameron Graves

Godelieve Richard and Jonathan Mirin, founders and artistic directors of Piti Theatre Company in Shelburne Falls, have a little fun with a puppet bee while working on and generating buzz for their upcoming show “To Bee or Not To Bee.”

By Cameron Graves

SHELBURNE—For the past seven years, Piti Theatre Company in Shelburne has mixed theatre, puppetry and live music into its shows. Now Artistic Directors Jonathan Mirin and Godelieve Richard are designing and rehearsing a new show “To Bee or Not To Bee,” the title quipping a famous line in William Shakespeare’s play “Hamlet” and which may include at least one Shakespearean reference in the story.

According to Mirin and Richard, “To Bee or Not To Bee” was primarily inspired by the documentary “The Vanishing of the Bees.” The movie prompted them to find a simple way to address the cause and allow people to make a basic effort to reverse diminishing bee populations.

“Part of the inspiration began a couple of years ago when we were talking about making a show about lawns and their social and environmental aspects,” Mirin says. “These aspects tend to be multi-faceted, but we found a way to talk about bees and involve agricultural lessons we learned. It’s a story about the choices we make, all based on cultural, economic and other factors, and how they affect the environment.”

Similar to their first family audience nature fable “Elmer and the Elder Tree,” first performed in 2008, with the Jean Giorno story “The Man Who Planted Trees” as source material, “Bee” has Dr. Suess’s The Lorax along with beekeeper interviews, as sources. Mirin said the story is in development, but it will feature human beings as central characters, including a beekeeping farmer and bees coming in as puppets

Northampton singer and songwriter Carrie Ferguson will perform live music with the show, which will be followed by presentations by local environmentalists. Packets of seeds will be handed out.

“We are launching a campaign to encourage people to replant 10 percent of their lawn with bee-friendly habitat from seeds donated by High Mowing Seeds, based in Vermont,” Mirin says. “One of the best ways we can help the bee population is to provide them with more food by planting flowers that bloom at different times between spring and fall.”

page 9

# ARTS

While working on the show, Mirin and Richard are also raising money to bring the show to the stage. On Oct. 16, Hope & Olive hosted a “honey brunch” when the restaurant donated 10 percent of proceeds from a brunch to the show. Honey was an ingredient on the brunch menu and Mirin and Richard introduced themselves and the project to customers, who were given a chance to donate funds directly in a money jar. Whereas most shows generally cost \$7,000-\$8,000 to stage, “Bee’s” budget is around \$11,000. Mirin adds that the company already has a full roster of performances scheduled for the show.

“We both feel a strong affinity for the natural world and, as artists, we want to have our voices heard in the determining of what the ecological fate of the earth will be in the next 50 years,” says Mirin.

The premiere performance of “Bee” is scheduled to be a part of next year’s “Syrup: One Sweet Performing Arts Festival” event at Memorial Hall in Shelburne on March 17. For more information, visit [ptco.org/bee](http://ptco.org/bee).