

**Piti Theatre Co. presents teen-written show in Greenfield on Sunday
by Madison Schofield June 5, 2026**



Piti Theatre Co.'s Valley Playwright Mentoring program will put on a performance of "Finding Family," a show written by the program's cast, on Sunday, June 7. Credit: MADISON SCHOFIELD / Staff Photo

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GREENFIELD — Follow the story of a Greenfield teen's search for relatives after finding a letter from a long-lost dad through Piti Theatre Co.'s performance of "Finding Family."

The show, written by teens in the Valley Playwright Mentoring program, will be performed at Greenfield Middle School on Sunday, June 7, at 1 p.m. Tickets are free and can be reserved in advance at ptco.org.

Director Jonathan Mirin said the teens participating in the Valley Playwright Mentoring program have been working since November to develop the show. It was written largely through improvisational and character-building exercises, where the cast and crew played around with different ideas while they discovered the story they wanted to tell.

"The story is of a Greenfield teen, Billy, who is being raised by a single mom and is struggling in school, and he discovers a letter from his dad, who left when he was younger, and he sets out to find him," Mirin said. "He proceeds to track him down in New York City and basically runs away. He meets some wacky people, and his mom is hot on his trail."

Mirin said the cast developed a bunch of "quirky characters" to test their skills and have fun with new ideas.

"A lot of the scenes are opportunities for the kids to do character work and play with these eccentric New York characters," Mirin said. "A lot of the actual dialogue comes out of their improvisations."



Piti Theatre Co.'s Valley Playwright Mentoring program will put on a performance of "Finding Family," a show written by the program's cast, on Sunday, June 7. Credit: CONTRIBUTED

Rosie Isupov, a sophomore at The Academy at Charlemont, is playing a few roles in the show, including a police officer and one of Billy's not-so-nice friends. She said the Valley Playwright Mentoring program is different from other theater troupes because, rather than choosing an existing script, the cast is taught how to turn their life experiences into one.

"I've done theater before, but this is different because we start by just talking about our days," Isupov said. "It was a really cool experience. ... Since we write our own parts, it's just really funny to see how it changes over time."

Emma Horton-Woods, a recent graduate of Four Rivers Charter Public School, plays Billy's mother. She said that as a teenager herself, it felt funny to play the mom of a teenager, but she's been enjoying the role.

"I didn't go into it with any sort of expectation; I just enjoy trying out different characters and I was excited to have more screentime than I have in the past. It's been funny to assume the role, but I enjoy it. It's a good challenge, a good way to stretch myself," said Horton-Woods, who has been involved with Valley Playwright Mentoring for four years. "I definitely have to check myself and my mannerisms and evaluate if it feels motherly."

She said her favorite part of the show is the ending when the mother and son reunite.

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"The main characters meet each other again at the end, and it just wraps up in a really nice moment," Horton-Woods said.

Horton-Woods added that the show covers heavier topics such as belonging, mental health and family dynamics, but also weaves in a lot of humor as well.

"There's a really nice balance of laughter, but also this piece of truth to it," Horton-Woods said. "I feel like people can relate to it."

"It takes itself more seriously than I think it should," added Ren Waggenbeek, stage manager and another recent Four Rivers Charter Public School graduate. "It comes off more funny than serious."



Piti Theatre Co.'s Valley Playwright Mentoring program will put on a performance of "Finding Family," a show written by the program's cast, on Sunday, June 7. Credit: MADISON SCHOFIELD / Staff Photo

Waggenbeek said everyone has worked hard for the past six months and the cast will put on a strong performance.

"It's not going to be completely perfect, but it's going to be something, and the people have been working very hard, and that's going to be shown by the quality of acting we have and the skill," Waggenbeek said. "The whole program is pretty great. For kids to come together and improvise stuff, build their acting and writing skills, everyone's learning to work hard to make it happen, so to me, it's gonna be great."

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Ware is the Crab Universe

Original play
written, performed
by teens

By **Paula Ouimette**
Editor

pouimette@turley.com

WARE – A group of local teens spent the last six months preparing to perform an original play, which they wrote themselves thanks to a program by Valley Playwright Mentoring.

This program was made possible with support from the Ware Cultural Council, Quaboag Hills Substance Use Alliance, Workshop13, the Town of Ware, Country Bank, Monson Savings Bank and more.

Directed by Jonathan Mirin of the Piti Theatre Company, “Ware is the Crab Universe” is the combination of two short plays created by the students. It explores

friendship and bullying through the eyes of small town kids with big hearts.

The performance started with a scene where the character Sophia is being bullied by Ash because of the shirt she is wearing. Sophia’s friend sticks up for her, but Sophia goes home and asks her mother to take her shopping for new clothes.

The next day, Sophia wears a new shirt, but Ash continues to target her.

Ash goes home that day and complains to her father about Sophia for being poor. Her father scolds her, but also calls the school’s principal to see what is going on.

He finds out that Ash has been bullying Sophia, and he sits his daughter down to talk.

Eventually Ash and Sophia get assigned to work on the same group project in school, and a friendship begins to form. It is here that the audience first hears of the possible existence of a Crab Universe in Ware.



Turley Photo by Paula Ouimette

The teens began to form a friendship during a school assignment.



Please see **ORIGINAL PLAY**,
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The action then turns to the local Subway, where teens are working to create the perfect ham and cheese sandwich for Ash, a demanding but loyal customer.

Talk of the Crab Universe comes up, and one of the characters mentions a secret lab that will transport you there.

The Subway workers and Ash make their way to the lab, where Ash pushes a button she's not supposed to and is trapped within the Crab Universe. The other teens run away, and hope that all will be normal when they return to work tomorrow.

All is not well the next day, when Ash doesn't show up to order her sandwich, and the Subway manager Crystal begins to seek answers. Being the last ones to see Ash, the police come in to question the group of teens.

They take the police officer to the secret lab, where despite their warnings, he pushes the same button Ash did, this time sending all of them to the Crab Universe.

They find Ash, but she

has been morphed into a crab and is organizing crab cakes under the rule of the Crab Queen.

The group of teens try to convince Ash to return home, but she said she has no friends there. They convince her otherwise, and with the help of the Crab Universe Subway manager, Vanessa (and a new sandwich recipe), she comes home.

Back home, the teens realize they need to live better in their town, and forget about the Crab Universe.

Vanessa comes to visit Ware and see the new friends she made, and they all enjoy a lively dance performance set to "Rock Lobster". Even the Crab Queen joins in on the fun.

Following the performance, the audience and cast participated in a question and answer period. The first question asked was "When is the next play?" which received a resounding applause of support.

Mirin said his theater company is ready to return to Ware for next year, and that registration for teens ages 13-19 can be found at ptco.

org in the coming weeks. Teens from Ware and Palmer are eligible to register for this afterschool program. No previous theater experience is required and space is limited to 12 participants.

All of the teens cast in "Ware is the Crab Universe" said they will be returning next year, and they talked about the friendships they formed since they started working together in January.

Max Perez, age 14, who played Ash, said the best part of this experience was "Having fun with people I like and writing a play."

Yasmin DosCantos, age 15, said she enjoyed the acting (and yelling) required of her character. Natalie de Melo, age 16, said she was happy for the opportunity to get on stage and act.

Sapphyre Boone, age 12, said she really enjoyed writing the play, and the roles she was cast in. Boone was the narrator in the first part, and the Crab Queen in the second.

Naomi Vazquez, age 13, said her favorite part of the play was when she got to yell "Wake up!" as the character



The teens learned about the Crab Universe.

Turley Photos by Paula Quimette

The cast of "Ware is the Crab Universe" dance to "Rock Lobster" during a performance of the original play at Workshop13 on May 30.



Director and actor Jonathan Mirin pushed a button he's not supposed to.



Alice Vazquez also portrayed Vanessa.

Jay Griffith, age 15, enjoyed the on-stage interactions with the different character's, especially Subway Dave, portrayed by Frankee

Hernandez Crehan, age 15.

Hernandez-Crehan said she enjoyed the chance to build stronger friendships with her peers.

"I'm happy I got to grow closer to them," she said.

Ash, portrayed by Max Perez, became stuck as a crab in the Crab Universe.

Teens take to stage for awareness

'Mind Matters Most: A Mental Health Cabaret' on Sunday

By **ANTHONY CAMMALLERI**
Staff Writer

GREENFIELD — A group of teens who have been rehearsing since November will share their work with an audience on Sunday, June 23, with "Mind Matters Most: A Mental Health Cabaret."

The audience will be taken on a vaudeville-style journey through time with scenes addressing topics like healthy relationships, family dynamics and supporting loved ones in crisis. The performance, set for 7 p.m. at Hawks & Reed Performing Arts Center, will be followed by a question-and-answer period with the cast and artistic mentors.

Teens to stage Mental Health Cabaret

TEENS FROM B1

"We worked hard on it," cast member Ren Waggenbeek said during rehearsals on Thursday evening. "I hope that [audience members] are entertained, and also more aware of issues related to how teens view the world and how teens view mental health and other issues that they might not think about."

"Mind Matters Most" serves as a culmination of the work of teenagers involved in Valley Playwright Mentoring, a Piti Theatre Co. program where teens transform challenging experiences into theater productions and podcasts.

The show is co-directed by Piti Theatre Co-Artistic Director Jonathan Mirin, Teaching Artist Laura Josephs and the ensemble. Local podcast creator Vala Jenczyk, 16, joined the team this year as a scriptwriter.

"Teenagers these days are more and more savvy about mental health and wellness," Mirin said. "This group is particularly savvy and they're also drawn to theater and expression, and it's been a joy seeing them take more and more control of the process."

The performance is intended for ages 13 and up, given some mature themes. Admission is free, but reservations are recommended at ptco.org/vpm.

"Last year, the group decided to have gun violence be the focus after a



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/DOUGLAS MASON

From left, Ezekiel Mirin and Hendrick Carew rehearse "Mind Matters Most: A Mental Health Cabaret."

number of them experienced a lockdown at Greenfield High," Mirin said in a statement. "This year, they decided to dive into teen mental health and they've done a great job of making tough situations understandable, sympathetic and even finding lighter moments. Anyone who enjoys theater or wants a real-time snapshot of what young people are thinking about will get a lot from this production."

Valley Playwright Mentoring is also accepting registrations from new participants for October 2024 for troupes in Greenfield, Holyoke and Shelburne Falls. The program, which

offers stipends to actor-playwrights who complete the six-month mentorship, is made possible through the support of the Massachusetts Cultural Council's YouthReach program, the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, the Mount Pleasant Foundation, the Charles H. Hall Foundation, the Markham-Nathan Fund for Social Justice, the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association and Swiss Harmony.

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Greenfield theater show brings audience into teenagers' daily lives

By [MARY BYRNE](#)

[Staff Writer](#)

Published: 06-15-2023 1:26 PM

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[Piti Theatre Co.](#)

GREENFIELD — Over weeks of collecting stories and experiences of teens in a local theater group, one issue seemed to resonate with students more than others: gun violence.

“One day, the majority of the group came to rehearsal after there had been a lockdown at their high school following a fake school shooting threat,” said Piti Theatre Co. Artistic Director Jonathan Mirin, referring to a swatting incident that took place in March at Greenfield High School. “Talking about what had happened and the level of stress created by gun violence in American schools led to their wanting to incorporate that experience into the show.”

After months of rehearsals, Valley Playwright Mentoring, a Piti Theatre program for teens, will present “A Day in Our Lives,” a performance depicting a 24-hour period in the life of a teenager, building up to that moment on that day in March. The show is set for Saturday at 1 p.m. at Hawks & Reed Performing Arts Center.

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lockdown. “It kind of gave me a glimpse of just how frightening it is to be a student. Even for kids who have not had these experiences, it’s very troubling.”

The show consists of a series of connected scenes that give a sense of their lives at home and school.

“The majority of the show is the other 22 hours of a day in their lives,” he said. There will also be moments with family at home and in theater class at school, for example



PLANTING SEEDS OF JOY

Piti Theatre Company combines entertainment, education and nature for all ages

By Eveline MacDougall

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PLANTING SEEDS OF JOY

Children rehearsing at Bloom
Inset: Improv Residency at Sheffield
Elementary in Turners Falls.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONATHAN MIRIN, PITI THEATRE COMPANY

Piti Theatre Company
combines entertainment,
education and
nature for all ages

By **Eveline MacDougall**
For Valley Kids

Jonathan Mirin and Godeliève Richard founded Piti Theatre Company over 20 years ago, and they entertain, educate, and change the lives of people of all ages around the world. They have many programs for children and teens coming up, and are launching Bloom, an arts and ecology center on 37 acres in Charlemont. “We got a grant to turn a barn into a theater,” said Mirin. “We’re excited to host classes and events for all ages.”

Mirin is an American playwright and actor; Richard is a Swiss choreographer, dancer, and visual artist. In Europe, their home base is Les Ponts-de-Martel, Switzerland. The name of

their company (pronounced “PEA-tea”) is an ancient Indian (Pali) word that can be translated as joy or rapture. Their offerings include after-school programs, whole-family activities, in-school residencies, summer programs, and touring performances.

“I was a theater kid,” said Mirin. “I got hooked in high school; I had a great drama teacher. I did more theatre at Swarthmore

(College), and then went straight to New York City. I got involved with Neighborhood Playhouse, and enjoyed traveling and acting.”

Along the way, Mirin discovered Vipassana meditation, also referred to as insight meditation. “It shifted my inner artistic landscape,” said Mirin. “I realized I wanted to create my own plays. I wanted to feel like the work I was doing could benefit the audience, the actors,



PAUL FRANZ PHOTO



Piti Theatre Improv Show at New Hingham Elementary, Carol Lollis photo; A Bee and Blossom participant works on a mural, photo courtesy of Jonathan Mirin, Piti Theatre Company; Jonathan Mirin and Laura Josephs in To Bee, Isaac Harrell photo; Rodney Moore (left) as Charles Green and Djeli Celestia (right) as John Putnam with Piti Youth Troupe members in Night at the Museum, Piti's docu-drama about local African-American history, photo courtesy of Jonathan Mirin, Piti Theatre Company

everyone involved.” Mirin’s journeys led him to the Edinburgh (Scotland) Fringe Festival, where he met Godeliève, who would become his wife.

Godeliève Richard grew up in a Swiss family of visual artists; she gravitated chiefly to dance. “I went to dance schools in Cannes and in Montreal,” she said, “where I studied classical, modern, and many other forms.” A key element in Richard’s life is her love of nature; she, her husband, and their son, Ezekiel, spend a great deal of time outdoors. “I love

working with children, passing the day outside where we can be near a stream. Our new center is focused on arts and ecology because I like to help people connect to nature, to respect nature, and to express themselves creatively.” Richard sees dance as “very healthy. It gets us moving and helps bring out creativity.” Her interest in health also led Richard to study herbalism, which she says has helped her with various health challenges.

One of the many programs offered by Piti is

Valley Playwright Mentoring (VPM), an after school program occurring from October through May that encourages teens to transform personal stories into performance.

“VPM is currently available in Greenfield, Shelburne Falls, and Holyoke,” said Mirin. For younger kids, there’s Youth Troupe, an after school program in Greenfield and Shelburne Falls designed for ages 8 - 12 where participants create a performance inspired by their

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Upcoming Events through Piti Theatre Company

*(know before you go /
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- Valley Playwright Mentoring
Holyoke and Greenfield Troupes
Spring Performance Dates tba @
ptco.org/vpm
- 5/30: Shelburne Falls Youth
Troupe Presents "The Endless Ad-
venture" (working title) @ the Water
Street Barn, Shelburne Falls, 5/30 @
5 pm
- 6/28: Story Wizards @ Work-
shop13, Ware
- Dino Trail Week, 7/5 - 7/13**
(ptco.org/dino)
- 7/5: Dinosaur Day with Paleontol-
ogist Barbie & Ken @ Pocumtuck
Valley Memorial Association, Deer-
field: Local History Day with Jurassic
Roadshow's real fossils
- 7/9: Dino Trails Day @ the Beneski
Museum of Natural History: 10AM -
Noon Scavenger Hunts, Guided
Tours and at 2:30PM Piti's Story Wiz-
ards, Amherst College
- 7/10: Evolution Revolution @
Springfield Museums: Hands on ac-
tivities & preview the New Dino Ex-
hibit
- 7/11: Kidleidoscope Story Hour:
Dinosaurs at 10:30 a.m. + Talk by Dr.
Paul Olsen, time tba @ the Great
Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls
- 7/12: Story Wizards @ the Green-
field Public Library, 7/12 @ 10:30 am
(Dino-Theme for Dino Trail Week)
- 7/13: Sensory Friendly Dino Family
Fun Day @ Wistariahurst Museum,
Holyoke: Dino Dance Off, Scavenger
Hunt & Dino Tracks

- 8/18 - 8/22: Theater + Nature for
ages 8+, Charlemont
- 8/25 - 8/29: Theater + Nature for
ages 8+, Charlemont

***Bee and Blossom, Valley Playwright
Mentoring and Youth Troupes start
their seasons***

- 10/4: Dance and Choreography
Workshop Student Performance,
Bloom Center, Charlemont

MATTHEW CAVANAUGH PHOTO



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONATHAN MIRIN, PITI THÉÂTRE COMPANY

Jonathan Mirin and Godeliève Richard, founders of Piti Theatre Company; Jason Montgomery, Artistic Mentor for Valley Playwright Mentoring in Holyoke and Valley Arts Mentors, Piti's program for early career artists.

CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE

ideas and improvisations. And for kids eight years old and younger, there's Bee & Blossom, an arts and nature program.

Piti's school residencies have taken place in many regional elementary, middle, and high schools. "Our residencies allow schools to add a theatrical element to the curriculum," said Mirin. Current programs include Improv and Page to Stage, a program for ELA classes. An offering called Your Town encourages students to focus on local history, and the popular To Bee or Not to Bee leads to a large-cast performance of an environmentally themed show.

That already sounds like a lot, but Piti offers much more: since 2017, they've collaborated with the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association on the Great Greenfield DinoFest. The troupe is broadening the program, geographically, to present a Valley-wide coalition of Dino-themed institutions to produce Dino Trail Week from July 9 - 13. Also this summer, they're doing theatre and nature programs at Bloom the last two weeks of August.

Piti offerings extend beyond solely theatrical, thanks to Richard's training and skills. For youngsters 12 and up, there are weekend sessions of dance and choreography that culminate with an October performance. In addition to running participatory programs, the Piti folks also present their own work internationally. (Check out the sidebar for upcoming programs and shows.)

"Piti programming plants seeds of joy, sustainability and justice in hearts, minds, and communities," said co-founder Mirin. "Our local programming is dedicated to engaging underserved rural communities across Franklin County. We also facilitate unique cultural and human connections between Switzerland and the U.S. by creating shows in French and English and offering the possi-

bility of artist/student exchange between the two countries."

Longtime educator Susan Pelis, who's taught in the Gill-Montague School District for 20 years, is a big fan: "Piti builds community, makes everyone feel welcome, and provides a safe place for children to be known and to be themselves. We've brought them into the Sheffield School to facilitate improv with our students, which has helped with mediation and conflict resolution." Pelis added that pandemic-related disruptions negatively impacted many children. "Kids were isolated all those years, and not socializing. (Teachers) needed to keep adapting to meet kids' needs. Jon (Mirin) and Laura (Josephs, a Piti colleague) had a wonderful impact on our school. The most reticent child in the classroom just blossomed. Jon's personality really works with children. He's present, kind, and brings cool props."

Perhaps the most compelling recommendation comes from a young person who participated in Piti programs. Quinn Mass is a Valley Playwright Mentoring graduate now studying at Swarthmore College. "VPM was an amazing experience," said Mass. "I joined while a junior at GHS. My little sister signed up with her friend, and I had to drive them. The program sounded fun, so I went along and helped do a show about mental health. I enjoyed every session. It was such a welcoming community, and it became my favorite part of the week."

Eveline MacDougall is the author of "Fiery Hope" and, for a decade, participated in traveling theatre companies. To reach: eveline@amandlachorus.org.

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Charlemont's Piti Theatre Co. launching 'Bee and Blossom' nature and arts program



Children play outside Piti Theatre Co.'s barn on Avery Brook Road in Charlemont. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

By [MADISON SCHOFIELD](#)

[Staff Writer](#)

Published: 09-16-2024 1:22 PM

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CHARLEMONT — Outdoor time anyone? Piti Theatre Co., an award-winning theater troupe, is launching "Bee and Blossom," a program designed to encourage nature and arts exploration for children up to 8 years old.

The program allows kids time to play outside and explore nature while incorporating activities that promote rhythm, such as music, yoga, art and games. The program, offered on Piti Theatre's 34 acres of land on Avery Brook Road, runs on Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with an optional extended playtime until 3 p.m.

"Research clearly shows that children who learn and play in nature are healthier mentally and physically, so we will be offering abundant play outside while incorporating an arts-themed activity each week," Elana Kirshenbaum, one of the program's co-teachers, said in a statement. "Our hope is that children end their day with dirty feet, messy hair and sparkling eyes, embodying the spirit of joyous discovery."

"My best memories from childhood are largely running around outside with my friends," added co-teacher Laura Josephs, who was a teacher at an outdoor education program in Texas before joining Piti Theatre.

The program had its first session on Sept. 6 and will continue until May 30. Sessions will not be held on Nov. 11, Dec. 20, Dec. 27, Jan. 3 and Jan. 10.

Children under the age of 2 must be accompanied by an adult. Children ages 3 and older may be dropped off, however adults are welcome to stay if they wish. Limited transportation can be provided for families living in the Greenfield area.

Prices vary from \$850 to attend 17 of the 34 sessions to \$1,700 to attend all 34 sessions, allowing families to choose the package that best fits their schedule and financial means.

Other programs

Piti Theatre also recently announced its other fall programs: Youth Troupe, an after-school theater program in Greenfield and Shelburne Falls where actors ages 7 to 12 use improvisation to create their own play; and Valley Playwright Mentoring, a program offered in Greenfield, Shelburne Falls and Holyoke where teens create a show inspired by their own stories.

Valley Playwright Mentoring begins in October and space is limited. Only 12 teens will be selected.

Participants create a performance or podcasts based on stories from their lives that are shared with the community. They are paid a \$200 stipend for their stories. They learn vocal warm-ups and how to develop scripts, theater games and storytelling skills.

Mentoring sessions take place in Greenfield on Tuesdays from 6 to 8 p.m.

Through Youth Troupes, participants learn improv and acting skills, and develop their own short play.

The troupes meet weekly, with the Greenfield sessions running on Tuesdays beginning Oct. 22, at 4:30 p.m. at The LAVA Center, 324 Main St., and the Shelburne Falls sessions running on Mondays beginning Oct. 21, at 3:45 p.m. at the Water Street Barn & Studio, 31 Water St. Prices are on a sliding scale from \$90 to \$175 and the program runs through the end of February.

"No one will be turned away for a lack of funds," Piti Theatre Co-Artistic Director Jonathan Mirin noted in an interview.

For more information or to register, visit ptco.org.

Reach Madison Schofield at mschofield@recorder.com.

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Kids teach history through new film 'The Princes of Deerfield,' featured at DinoFest



Members of the Piti Theatre Youth Troupe join Artistic Director Jonathan Mirin (center) to take a bow at the Greenfield Public Library following the premiere of "The Princes of Deerfield" during DinoFest on Saturday. STAFF PHOTO/BELLA LEVAVI

By [Bella Levavi](#)

Staff Writer

Published: 12-17-2023 1:37 PM

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GREENFIELD — Young people spent the weekend connecting with local history during the seventh annual DinoFest.

"We are traveling throughout time," said Piti Theatre Co. Artistic Director Jonathan Mirin, who organizes the event each year in collaboration with the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association in Deerfield. "It is all interesting."

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‘Inclusion Improv’ residency wraps up at Sheffield Elementary in Turners Falls



Sheffield Elementary School third-grader Zechariha Hammonds is posed as “crying man” by classmate Dayzar Crapps as part of Piti Theatre Co.’s improv performance outside the school last week. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ [» Buy this Image](#)



Staff Report

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TURNERS FALLS — Following last year’s residency focused on performances of “To Bee or Not to Bee,” Piti Theatre Co. led a six-visit theater residency with second- and third-graders at Sheffield Elementary School that concluded early this month.

This year’s focus? Improv.

“We have been doing more and more improv-focused residencies with schools,” Piti Theatre’s Co-Artistic Director Jonathan Mirin said in a press release. “It gives us a lot of flexibility to address what is happening in the moment with each class and encourages students to think and feel on their feet, say ‘yes’ to each other’s creativity, and learn how inclusion of different ideas and students can be practiced through improv.”

Mirin was joined by Piti Theatre ensemble artist Laura Josephs of Greenfield. They worked with six classrooms. According to the release, the residency was coordinated by second grade teacher Susan Pelis.

“It was a pleasure to work with Jonathan and Piti Theatre Co. for our second year,” Pelis said in the release. “Jonathan is masterful at drawing in children, from the most reticent to those who have had some experience on stage. He has an authentic way of making all children feel safe and comfortable sharing their creative selves with the group. Our children can easily transfer the social skills they’ve learned from participating in ‘Inclusion Improv’ to the school playground, their local parks and neighborhoods.”

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The theater company is also offering Inclusion Improv to kindergartners, as well as third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, at Hawlemont Regional School in Charlemont. The release states Inclusion Improv was made possible thanks to funding through the Massachusetts Cultural Council’s STARS program and the Montague and Charlemont-Hawley cultural councils.

Other upcoming Piti Theatre events include:

■The streaming premiere of the final cut of “Dexter and the Dinosaurs,” on Sunday, June 12, at 4 p.m., with tickets available through the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (deerfield-ma.org).

■A performance of “Calling Foundry Village” at Colrain Central School on Tuesday, June 14, at 2 p.m.

■And the Zoom premiere of a new batch of podcasts from Piti Theatre’s teen improv-inspired program Valley Playwright Mentoring at sometime in June at ptco.org.

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Warwick Improv Club puts creativity to test with annual performance



The 15 students in Warwick Community School's Improv Club gave a demonstration under the direction of Jonathan Mirin, co-founder of Piti Theatre Co., at Warwick Town Hall on Tuesday. Staff Photo/ZACK DeLUCA

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WARWICK — Warwick Community School students let their imaginations run wild on Tuesday, pretending to be animals and creating spontaneous stories during an Improv Club performance at Town Hall.

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The 15 students in the school's Improv Club gave a 30-minute demonstration, sponsored by the Warwick Arts Council, under the direction of Jonathan Mirin, co-founder of [Piti Theatre Co.](#) in Shelburne Falls. It was the third year the club has appeared following the Senior Meal. The club is a combination of new third-graders and older students who have participated in Improv Club since its beginnings in 2017.

"I'm not usually one for acting, but it's a smaller group so it's fun," said fifth-grader Cordelia Rhodes.

Cordelia said she has been a member of the club since it started, along with fellow fifth-graders Wyatt Whitman and Audrey Elwood. All three young actors said the Improv Club has helped expand their imagination and boost their confidence, with Audrey adding that the quick thinking has even improved her problem-solving skills.

"I used to get butterflies all the time, but now they're gone," Wyatt said.

"That shyness fades away," Cordelia agreed.

Warwick Community School was in session on Tuesday to make up for snow days, and the entire school walked to Town Hall to sit in the audience and share a laugh. Mirin guided the students through warm-up routines before diving into various exercises.

"We'll start by having them start to walk around and just be themselves," Mirin said. "They're pretty good at that."

As students moved around the stage, he slowly began to introduce new "rules." Mirin told students they could only take sharp turns to switch direction, or move faster and faster before suddenly moving in slow motion. He had them pretend to be deer, with students moving on all fours or creating antlers with their hands. Calling to the audience for suggestions, students turned into meditating flamingos and stood on one leg before quickly transforming into fluttering hummingbirds.

For one routine, students created a story on the spot by adding pieces of the improvised tale, sentence by sentence. Mirin pointed to students at random and they slowly created the story of a turtle who ate too many hamburgers. The turtle, according to the students, eventually got a job at a fast food restaurant and wound up eating the entire building.

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Students also showed off their quick thinking and creativity by "creating a moment" with a simple prop — a brown scarf. Mirin passed the scarf around to students who, one by one, pretended it was something unique and came up with different short stories. One student turned into Rapunzel and used the scarf to "let down her hair," while another disappeared after putting on the "invisibility cloak."

Mirin then had students split into groups, each with its own prop. The groups created a quick story using the prop and a few key rules. They had to use the word "pickle." One group found themselves in a pretend work-place dilemma.

"I have to give a presentation on pickles," Wyatt said, taking the stage. "The thing is, I hate pickles."

Using a dinner plate, a second group had students "go out to eat" and order pickles, but they were "rotten" when they arrived at the table. To fix the problem, the waiter quickly ran to a store, with another student acting as the deli worker who sold them "the freshest pickles" their money could buy.

Mirin said the routines performed on Tuesday are just a few of the templates the club experiments with when they get together for rehearsal after school each week, thanks to funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council's STARS program and the Warwick Cultural Council. The group will continue to meet through mid-March.

"I like to work with this mix of ages," Mirin said. "Kids love to make stuff up."

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