

THE GOLEM OF LA JOLLA

A NEW OPERA

a parable for our times



**music – Michael Roth
text – Allan Havis**

**first three scenes as presented
in the workshop concert premiere
December, 2022**

THE GOLEM OF LA JOLLA

SCENE ONE –

*A cafe in La Jolla, California –
a Rabbi from Prague meets with a congregant from Temple Beth Judah, a local synagogue*

PRAGUE RABBI

This is very good coffee.
Yes. Strong and bitter.
Cream changes
Everything dark.
What did you get?

CONGREGANT

Decaf.

PRAGUE RABBI

And no cream?

CONGREGANT

Lactose intolerant.
You're a rabbi?

PRAGUE RABBI

I'm a rabbi.

CONGREGANT

From Europe?

PRAGUE RABBI

Yes Europe-
From the city of Prague.

CONGREGANT

Prague - The city of Kafka?

PRAGUE RABBI

Yes, the city of Kafka.

CONGREGANT

You have family here?

PRAGUE RABBI

No No - No family here.
No family.

CONGREGANT

No family?

PRAGUE RABBI

This is not a problem
Mishpucha is family
Mishpucha is bigger
See this spoon, my friend, *(Prague Rabbi holds up the spoon, suddenly it bends)*
Please now, watch it bend.

CONGREGANT
Gey shray gevalt!
Is that a trick spoon?

PRAGUE RABBI *(contorting the spoon back to normal)*
No... no ... no
There is no trick spoon –
Listen with both ears
Think of your worst fears
For you know
Overnight
Is blood fight
Soon it will happen – happen here –

There's a mob marching closer and closer - a band
of White hate – aimed late – Exalting a Christian land
Think of our worst fears -
Listen with both ears -

Do you know the Kabbalah?
Jewish mystics avatar
Coercive incantations
Summoning demons
Sane men in their elation
Old Kabbalists saw creation
Of a giant from deep red clay

CONGREGANT
Of a giant from deep red clay

RABBI
Yes! - The purest alchemy of the day
Proving Jewish mystics right
Daylight wrong, truth is the night.

CONGREGANT
Daylight wrong, truth is the night

PRAGUE RABBI
Yes, my friend
The Hebrew language
The Yiddish language
All relied on common words
But the forbidden words
Ignite the skies like evil birds.
Tales of mystic rabbis
Sparking life from dust
Making Golem

CONGREGANT *(counterpoint)*
Golem

PRAGUE RABBI
Our Golem

CONGREGANT
Our Golem

PRAGUE RABBI

Yes! Making Golem a folk hero
Saving Jews from pogroms
But know too the lifeforce
Can go astray
So we say
Fear the Golem.
Love the Golem
Inspect the Golem
Respect the Golem

Of all the mad thoughts
Stick with the best thoughts
Nothing is quite as good
Nothing is quite as safe

PRAGUE RABBI:

Yes - When Jew haters attack
Not one hundred cops
Nor one thousand marines
Not a million machines
Can stop the Tiki Torchers

CONGREGANT

Tiki Torchers

CONGREGANT (*with Rabbi, counterpoint*)

Best Thoughts -
Nothing—quite as good—as safe

PRAGUE RABBI

They mock Vatican Two

CONGREGANT (counterpoint)

Vatican Two

PRAGUE RABBI

Popes in the past
Said Jews killed Jesus
And with that lie
A millennium or two
Of persecution -

CONGREGANT

(*spoken – stopping the music*)

We're always at risk.

PRAGUE RABBI

Yes! We're always at risk.

(*music continues*)

I wish your modern rabbi would see this truth.

CONGREGANT

Our rabbi is young.

Our rabbi is new.

Too much faith.

PRAGUE RABBI

Does your Rabbi see this truth?

Coming from Utah

Coming from Idaho

From Arizona

Coming from Pittsburgh

See the white nationalists' caravan
In just a day or two
A bloodbath – a bloodbath

CONGREGANT
And this Golem?

PRAGUE RABBI
I don't own him.
He doesn't own me.
We have – shall I say?
a casual, open relationship

CONGREGANT -
But - do you control the Golem?

PRAGUE RABBI
No. No. No.
The Golem can have life
Because he is given life
From you -
From your community
But you need more than a minyan of ten
More than a minyan — ten Jewish men
To give this Golem strength
To give this Golem life

CONGREGANT (*counterpoint with above*)
To give this Golem strength
To give this Golem life

PRAGUE RABBI
The sacred Zohar says
The Zohar is the ark
The Zohar is the light
For those connected to the Light
For those on The path of True Lineage
Of Kabbalists in exile in flight
Hoping for redemption
Through God's mercy
God's mercy - mercy
The Golem can have life
Because he is given life from you -
From your community

CONGREGANT
But Tell me honestly
Why are you here?

PRAGUE RABBI
To be the broker of prayer.
Between you and the Golem.
To be the broker of prayer.
Between your rabbi and Kabbalah
This Golem is a thunderbolt
Killing every Jew hater.
We can't simply light candles

CONGREGANT (*counterpoint*)
To give this Golem strength
To give this Golem life

Connected to the light

Hoping for redemption
Through God's mercy, God's mercy
God's mercy, God's mercy ...

Parade with an open Torah
Give alms to the poor

CONGREGANT
And your eye patch?

PRAGUE RABBI

YES! - My eye patch - -
I tried to embrace this Golem.
He took my soft blue eye
And fed it to wolves -
Such a monster
Hardened me, changed me
To an army general
Here I am before you

(Lifting his eye patch to the Congregant)

A spindly cyclops -
A fearless warrior -
Like Moshe Dayan -
No hero more glorious -
Saddened by blindness
My sacrifice was great
An eye for an eye
I would give much more
For my people
For you – and your community -

We live in supernatural times
And so your young Rabbi
Must meet with me
And tell all the good members
Of Temple Beth Judah –
Who love the Torah
To love the Torah -
Dawn to dusk
To assemble this Shabbat
Prepared for a
Great reckoning

CONGREGANT
Yes my friend -
You must meet with our new rabbi - Now - !

(The Congregant and Prague Rabbi walk to the synagogue - Rabbi Joan appears outside of the synagogue The Congregant meets with Rabbi Joan, the Prague Rabbi waits nearby patiently)

SCENE 2

CONGREGANT
You are very brave
So brave Rabbi.

RABBI JOAN
No, no, no – No bravery here -
Thank you but I am just like you.
That is to say,
If I am brave -
you are very brave too.

CONGREGANT

Far from brave. Thank you but
I'm afraid – I'm afraid -
We need more security-
Security guards at the gate -
before it's too late -

RABBI JOAN

You look troubled -

CONGREGANT

I cannot sleep.
There's a strange Rabbi waiting outside
A strange Rabbi from Prague ...
A strange Rabbi
Complete with a black eye patch
Yes but Rabbi, but Rabbi – Rabbi Joan -

JOAN (*counterpoint*)

A strange Rabbi...

From Prague complete with an eye patch

RABBI JOAN

Yes -

CONGREGANT

He says he can conjure a Golem, a Golem
A Golem, a ten-foot Golem
Wide like an army tank
Capable of scaring off
10,000 Tiki torch cadets

JOAN (*counterpoint*)

A Golem? A Golem?

A Golem, a ten-foot Golem?

RABBI JOAN

A Golem?
This rabbi is outside
Our shul, waiting – waiting – for what?

CONGREGANT

Yes, he's waiting - pacing
He acts like a prophet –
Predicting violence
Worse than before
Predicting violence
Worse than before - - -

JOAN (*counterpoint*)

Pacing outside?

RABBI JOAN

Do you really think
This is a prophet - a Jewish prophet?

CONGREGANT

Rabbi, Rabbi - He carries photos
of this monster
This ten-foot Golem

RABBI JOAN

No no no -
There are no Golems they don't exist
Don't waste my time
lies and myths and -

CONGREGANT (*trying to interrupt*)
Rabbi - Rabbi -

JOAN (*interrupting*)
NO - !

I understand your concerns,
They're my concerns too
Everyday I'm working on this problem-
Now, not tomorrow, for you
And all of us -
We're keeping track of the money

CONGREGANT
Track of all the money -

JOAN
Yes, yes
we track down the funders
Who "donate to hate"

CONGREGANT
Donate to hate ... ?

JOAN
Yes - Our Holy estates
Protected by armed
police at our gates.

CONGREGANT (counterpoint)
Police at our gates...

Piercing infrared light
Unmasks-bitter night
Steel doors that bolt tight
It's only right
For us to learn self-defense
Not to make light
Not to take flight
But to

CONGREGANT
Rabbi -
Rabbi -

CONGREGANT (*interrupting*)
This Golem, this monster, this thing.
Paralyzes all Jew haters
Scares the race baiters
Yes, yes, honest to God –
But Rabbi, Rabbi
The Golem from Prague.
We can train him.
He can shield us.

It's the not the single shooter
We have to fear,
There is a marching mob – -
It's the mob – marching – closer and closer – on fire
Worse than any crazed looter
They chant like a church choir
"Jews - will not - replace us."
"Jews - will not - replace us."

Every morning my family prays for calm

To please keep the terror away
But rabbi there's only darkness and fear
It can happen here
darkness and -

Hashkeveinu Hashem Eloheinu l'shalom
Grant, O God, that we lie down in peace,
V'ha hamideinu malkeinu l'chaim
and raise us up to life renewed.

Congregant sings
Joan sings counterpoint

Shield us beneath the shadow of Your wings.
And Defend us against enemies and famine and sorrow and war
Guide us with your love to peace evermore.

CONGREGANT
But Rabbi, there's only
darkness and fear
it can happen here

It is worse than Charlottesville –
Worse than Pittsburgh - or Texas-
We could be worse than Poway –

RABBI JOAN
Poway

CONGREGANT
San Diego's Poway

When Jew haters attack not one hundred cops
Nor a thousand Marines, not a Million machines -
It's the Madness –
It's the mob – marching – closer
Please wake up, Rabbi Joan
Talk to this man, this learned man
This man of God -

RABBI JOAN
You must believe in your heart –
There is no such thing as Golems –
But I will talk to your Rabbi,
This Rabbi from Prague

We will always open the door for a stranger
A distant Rabbi -

CONGREGANT (*counterpoint*)
A stranger

CONGREGANT
(*spoken*) Thank you, Rabbi Joan.

(*The congregant steps aside, motioning for the Prague Rabbi to enter. Lights shift, the congregant steps aside, Prague Rabbi enters*)

SCENE 3

RABBI JOAN
Rabbi -

PRAGUE RABBI
Rabbi -

RABBI JOAN
Shabbat Shalom.

PRAGUE RABBI
Shabbat Shalom.

RABBI JOAN
How can I help

PRAGUE RABBI (*interrupting*)
Your *shul* is beautiful.
Inside and out.
Your *shul* is ...

RABBI JOAN (*interrupting*)
Thank you.

PRAGUE RABBI
I had a *shul* in Prague.
Twenty-three years.
Best *shul* in Europe

RABBI JOAN
in Europe ...

PRAGUE RABBI
One rabbi's opinion -
The congregation failed.
We lost all the young ones.
Can you imagine such a thing?
And then there was arson -
Such arson - !
Can you imagine such a thing?
We had priceless Torahs.
Insurance doesn't care, Rabbi.

RABBI JOAN
I am so sorry for your loss, Rabbi.

PRAGUE RABBI
I was in the building.
During the fire.
Surrounded by fire - I was

RABBI JOAN (*interrupting*)
Why are you here, Rabbi?,

PRAGUE RABBI
Why are you here, Rabbi?

RABBI JOAN
It's my job, Rabbi
And I have work to do
This is my synagogue.

PRAGUE RABBI

So it is. So it is

This is your *shul*

And yet you see me, you eye me

Like a circus fool, Rabbi

RABBI JOAN

No No NO - Not like a fool, Rabbi- -

But get to the point - -

PRAGUE RABBI -

I fear for you.

RABBI JOAN

Fear for me, Thanks but why?

Po-say-ach -

God hovers over us

God is watching.

PRAGUE RABBI

And so are the police.

RABBI JOAN

Yes

PRAGUE RABBI

Yes, The police can come

The army, the marines

The National Guard can come

But nothing stops hatred.

RABBI JOAN

I know that Rabbi -

We all know that Rabbi

That's why I'm doing what I must do to

Protect this congregation – and -

PRAGUE RABBI (*interrupting*) - -

NO – NO!!

Look at me, Joan

I study Kabbala, Rabbi.

We see time differently.

Different - persistent

And future is always present.

Resentment -

Past sears a living memory.

Your synagogue is next.

In the great global Satanic war

Not against the multitudes

We are never multitudes

But against the righteous few

in the global Satanic war

Against the lonely Jew.

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RABBI JOAN
Lonely Jew, Rabbi?
We may never be multitudes -
But for me the glass is always half full
There is no lonely Jew.

PRAGUE RABBI
Israel's a lonely Jew.
I am a lonely Jew.
Your father too I know -

RABBI JOAN
(spoken) What do you want, Rabbi?

PRAGUE RABBI
I don't have a twin
Nor a doppelganger
But just beyond my shadow
You can see - -
You see the Golem – a Golem -
I am here for one thing
To save your congregation – devastation!
To be the broker of prayer.
Between you and the Golem.
We can't simply light candles
Parade with an open Torah
Give alms to the poor

RABBI JOAN
No offense Rabbi.
This is America – America - !
Not the Czech Republic

PRAGUE RABBI
You don't believe?

RABBI JOAN
In what, Rabbi? In Golems?? Golems?

PRAGUE RABBI
In a protector
The power of a giant - in Miracles -

RABBI JOAN
I believe that miracles
Can be found imbedded in the Bible
But - Never – never – in Heresy

PRAGUE RABBI
No offense Rabbi
But Miracles are not fiction -

RABBI JOAN
Literature is a miracle. -

PRAGUE RABBI
Yes but - - Literature turns to ash

listen to me – take heed

In three days or less.
You'll see this insane wonderous thing
Born from a magic ring
Rising as we pray
This orange Golem of clay.
And Rabbi, you must calm -
Calmly prepare -
Your modern congregation.
Or with one last breath
they will perish
An ancient death.
Rabbi -

JOAN Calm what?
Prepare for what?

Perish?
Ancient death from what?

RABBI JOAN
NO – NO!
What ancient death ..? Death?
How do I know -
Know - that you're not some ...
Domestic, Militant ...
Terrorist - Terrorist
Surrounding,
Pounding, pounding at our gate?

PRAGUE RABBI (spoken, stopping the music)
A terrorist – Rabbi - – really ...?

Rabbi, Come closer, please
Lest you think I tease.
As it is written, so you will see -
That in Kabbala philosophy
The empty space
Is a grand treasure - treasure
Our God – ever so tall
Contracts – ever so small
So - we can find
Earth like a ball.

And we will always open
The door for a stranger -
A welcome stranger - - *(we hear the Shema as congregation enters etc- -)*

CONGREGATION -
Shema Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad

(by the end we only hear Joan alone – at least for now – the congregation enters the synagogue, as does the Prague Rabbi) –

to be continued

