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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome Theatre Calgary patrons!

Theatre Calgary's 2024-2025 Audience Guides are intended to support your experience at Theatre Calgary this season. We hope this guide will help you make an informed and thoughtful decision about your ticket purchase and set expectations for the production. While certainly not mandatory to enjoy the production, this material presents opportunities to connect the piece to your personal life, deepening your understanding and appreciation of the show.

We encourage you to review the content included in the guide to help you prepare for and follow up on the production you are seeing. To that end, you will find background information on the play and playwright or other members of the creative team; social, linguistic, and historical context; details regarding the creative process; and questions to consider as you reflect on the work.

We hope that you enjoy your experience at Theatre Calgary this year!

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE

An open mind.

Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.

Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.

The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! Actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.

Theatre-makers ask the audience to “suspend their disbelief.” If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.

Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.

Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.



ABOUT THE PLAY

The Lehman Trilogy is written as if poetry—divided into three parts and multiple vignettes, spanning more than 150 years and multiple generations. Three actors tell the story of the Lehman Brothers from their immigration to the peak and downfall of their business. *The Lehman Trilogy* is the story of a family who made their way in a new world, which, ultimately, consumed them.

SUMMARY.

(contains spoilers)

Part One: Three Brothers

Prologue. New York (2008). Radios announce that Lehman Brothers is on the verge of bankruptcy. Their office is empty except for a janitor.

1. The Traveler (1844). We meet Heyum Lehmann at the end of his long journey to America from Rimpark, Germany.

2. The Shop (1847). Henry's fabric shop in Montgomery, Alabama, serving the poorest members of the community. It is closed only on *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) in order to be able to pay off his debts. His brother, Emanuel, arrives from Germany to join him.

3. The Arm and the Potato (1850). The shop, three years later. Emanuel is painting a new sign, "Lehman Brothers," a recurring motif in the play. A third brother appears—Mayer—who is also painting. They joke that Henry is the head of the family (the brains) Emanuel, the arm (a hard-worker), and they compare Mayer to a potato (a bland, neutral party). Henry suggests expanding the business to supply cotton farming supplies. Mayer is supportive, but Emanuel is not.

4. Hanukkah (1853) A fire consumes Montgomery's cotton plantations. This tragedy means that all supplies must be bought again, but farmers don't have the money. Mayer recommends they accept raw cotton as credit that they can resell at a higher price. Henry and Emanuel both agree it's a great idea.

GLOSSARY

There are a number of Hebrew & Yiddish words and phrases throughout The Lehman Trilogy. To help provide context, we've defined some of these terms below:

Baruch Hashem. The literal translation is 'Bless God,' although *Hashem* actually translates to 'name.' In Judaism, it is sacrilegious to speak the biblical names for God outside of prayer. The colloquial meaning is 'thank god,' an expression of gratitude and relief.

Mezuzah. An ornamental wooden or metal box hung on the doorframe of Jewish homes with a tiny prayer scroll rolled up inside it. It represents the lamb's blood that Hebrews were commanded to put on their doorframes in Egypt so that the angel of death would pass over their homes (as described in the book of Exodus).

Shabbat. The Sabbath; a day of rest where no work can be done, lamps lit, or money exchanged; observed from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

GLOSSARY (con't)

Passover. A Jewish holiday, called *Pesach* in Hebrew, celebrating the biblical account of the Israelites' escape from 400 years of Egyptian slavery. Rituals include an annual retelling of the Exodus story and food traditions including the elimination of leavened (raised) bread (called *chametz* in Hebrew) because tradition states that the Jewish people fled without enough time for their bread to rise.

Hanukkah. A holiday celebrating the miracle of light, where Jewish people light a candle each night for eight days. They sing songs and eat foods cooked in oil, like *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (jelly donuts).

Shiva. A seven-day mourning period following the death of a Jewish loved one where mourners sit on low chairs, keep their faces unshaven, wear torn clothing or a ripped cloth pinned to their clothes, and cover mirrors to avoid vanity. People come to visit and care for the mourners throughout the week, bringing food and sharing stories about the dead.

Sheloshim. For close family, the period of *shiva* extends for 30 days, including not cutting hair or beards.

Mourner's Kaddish. The *Kaddish* is the prayer for mourning, recited morning, noon, and night for the period of *shiva*. The *Kaddish* is recited daily throughout the first year following a loved one's death.

5. Product (1854). Customers have diversified under their new business plan to include farmers paying in raw cotton and Northern industrialists who process the cotton. Emanuel accepts an invitation to visit one of their client's factories in the North. He sees how efficient the factory is and realizes how much more cotton they could be selling. He proposes to Henry that they expand, but Henry is hesitant. Mayer steps in, once again, to resolve the conflict. And they rebrand again to 'Lehman Brothers Cotton' with a plan to use their savings to buy more cotton to resell for profit.

6. Shiva (1855). Henry dies from Yellow Fever, and his brothers honour him in the traditional Jewish way by sitting *shiva*. The store is closed for seven days, the longest since Henry opened it.

7. Kish Kish (1856). Their business model is not making the profit they hoped, despite the increase in the number of cotton wagons they sell annually. Emanuel travels to plantations to drum up business but is not successful. Mayer falls in love with Babette. While speaking with her father for permission to marry, Mayer is asked to explain their business as "middlemen" and manages to convince her father to let him marry his daughter. Emanuel, impressed by Mayer's powers of persuasion, enlists him to be the negotiator for their business, which has now grown from five to 24 farms.

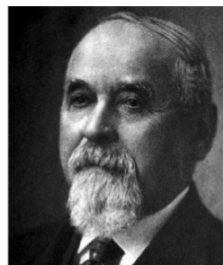
8. Something about New York (1860). Emanuel travels to New York City for the New York Cotton Fair and insists Lehman Brothers set up an office there. While there are business interests, Emanuel has romantic interests, as well—Pauline. He is rejected by her and her family at first but is determined to prove himself. Mayer visits the new office but hates the city and returns to Montgomery. Emanuel continues to build the business and visit Pauline weekly. After months of wooing, they finally marry. With industrialists from the north and producers from the south in attendance at the wedding, a huge fight breaks out at the reception signaling the start of the American Civil War.



Emanuel Lehman



Mayer Lehman



Philip Lehman



Bobby Lehman

GLOSSARY (con't)

The Talmud. A compilation of rabbinical comments, stories, debates, conjectures, and observations pulled from the *Torah*, or Old Testament.

Rabbi. A Jewish scholar or teacher and the leader of a Jewish congregation.

Purim. Considered one of the few 'fun' holidays in Judaism, *Purim* marks the victory of the Jewish trickery of an evil king set on destroying them. In Israel, *Purim* is considered the 'Jewish Halloween,' where you throw parties and wear costumes.

Mazel Tov. Hebrew term for "Congratulations;" literally translates to "good luck"

Synagogue. The name of the building where a Jewish congregation meets for worship and instruction.

Shavuot. The commemoration of the day that the Jewish people received the *Torah* at Mount Sinai after wandering in the desert for 40 years following their liberation from slavery in Egypt; observed 7 weeks after Passover.

9. Survival (1861). The brothers' business is caught in the middle of the American Civil War. Factories close as workers go to war. Plantation crops become battlefields. The industry is paralyzed with thousands of people dying in battle. The brothers manage to keep their business alive, but when the war ends, "everything has changed again."

10. The Puppeteer (1867). In Alabama, Mayer tries to reconnect with his farming contacts, but most of them have no business to offer him. Mayer goes to the governor and convinces him to lend the Lehman's money to start a bank that will invest in rebuilding Alabama. Meanwhile, in New York, Emanuel is thriving. He has a son, Phillip, who is brilliant, and his business investments are now in coffee. Emanuel tries to convince Mayer to relocate to New York. When they are visited by Dr. Beauchamp, who speaks of Henry's dream of them ending up in New York, Mayer agrees, and they leave Alabama for good.

Part Two: Fathers and Sons

1. The Silent Brother (1878). The New York location is successful, and despite his initial hesitation, Mayer and his family are now New Yorkers. His youngest son is born there, and the Lehman connection to Germany and Alabama grows more distant. As Mayer ages, he retreats into himself and is the butt of laughter everywhere he goes.

2. Wall Street (1881). The stock exchange is established on Wall Street, where abstract commodities are traded. It's described as a "place of words." It is clear that Emanuel's son, Phillip, will be successful there as he is a master talker who will debate anyone.

3. Trains (1884). Wall Street invests in the railroad, but Emanuel thinks his nightmares about a train are a premonition, and he won't. Phillip convinces him to consider it when they travel to see a United Railways site looking for investors. Phillip takes charge of the meeting, insisting on a minimum guaranteed profit. He's such a successful salesman, Emanuel agrees to pass the leadership of Lehman Brothers to him.

4. The Card Player (1887). Under Phillip's leadership, the business grows, investing in trains, oil, and cigarettes. Phillip demonstrates an impressive ability to strategize, a skill he even uses to choose a wife.

5. Herbert (1887). Herbert, Mayer's son, struggles with Jewish tradition and faith. He wants fairness in an unfair world and asks endless questions.

6. A New Language (1891). Emanuel and Mayer find themselves in a new business world, outpaced by young people. The company has a decision-making board now and, instead of investing in houses for the growing working class, the board votes to help build the Panama Canal to force a paid trade route without having to travel around South America.

7. Shiva (1897). Mayer passes, and Emanuel sits *shiva*, but instead of the traditional period of mourning, the bank closes for three days. Phillip has a son, Bobby, a precocious child who Phillip believes will follow in the family's banking footsteps. Emanuel feels like he is the last one in New York who remembers Germany.

8. Horses (1901). Bobby loves horses, so his grandfather, Emanuel, takes him to horse races, but Bobby doesn't care who wins. He tries to explain how and why things are valued differently at different times. Phillip decides the company should expand its name to match its business to "Lehman Brothers Finance." Herbert wants the company to remain accessible to everyday workers who aren't wealthy, and being a financier for stocks would exclude them. Phillip takes risks, and Herbert is practical. Phillip decides Herbert isn't cut out for business, so instead, Herbert becomes a politician—the Governor of New York. With Herbert off the board, Phillip offers his place to Bobby, who has returned from Yale University with extensive knowledge of banking, industry, and finance. He advises the board to invest in entertainment and accuses his father of keeping them in the 1800s.

9. Sukkot (1919). Phillip has a recurring nightmare of decorating a hut for *Sukkot*, where people keep piling on decorations until the hut is so heavy it will collapse. The dream is a metaphor for Phillip's focus and strategy failing him. The company is rebranded "Lehman Corporation" and focuses only on finance.

10. The Acrobat (1929). The night before the stock market crashes launching the Great Depression, Phillip desperately holds onto his role as president of Lehman Corporation. Bobby and Herbert speak to him about the board's concerns with how he runs the business. Phillip dismisses them.

GLOSSARY (con't)

Bar Mitzvah. A Jewish rite of passage that occurs around age 13, where young adults read aloud from the *Torah* and participate in a *Shabbat* ceremony to mark the honour of becoming an adult. For girls, the ceremony is called a *bat mitzvah*.

Chuppah. A ceremonial fabric, or canopy, is attached to four poles to cover a couple during their wedding ceremony. It represents the home that they will build together.

Sukkot. Similar to Thanksgiving, *Sukkot* is a Jewish harvest festival. It is similarly celebrated with a huge feast.

Sukkah. To celebrate *Sukkot*, Jewish people build temporary huts that resemble the structures in which the Israelites lived in the desert after their exodus from Egypt.

Reformed Judaism. Many Jews identify with one of three main streams of Judaism: Observant (or Orthodox), Conservative, or Reform, which is considered the most secular. While it may appear to more observant Jews as if Reform Judaism is about "doing it our way," it is more about letting go of rigid, traditional ways to observe Judaism.

Part Three: The Immortal

1. Radio (1929). We hear radio news across the country about the stock market crash and meet a Nebraska restaurant owner and Hungarian lamp maker making their way in the world.

2. Ruth (1929). The impact of the crash becomes clear as stockbrokers sell without reinvesting. We hear about brokers taking their own lives. Bobby continues attending horse races, betting, and winning. He meets Ruth, a rare divorcée. They begin dating. More stockbrokers commit suicide. Everyone is selling and demanding their money, but it is already gone. Bobby marries Ruth, who wants to understand the business and what's at stake for Bobby.

3. Black Skies (1929). Phillip, unsure how to proceed, sees the banks taking responsibility for calming the panic caused by the crash. Bobby reports that 12 of their colleagues, plus the U.S. Bank, are bankrupt. Bobby predicts the government will blame the banks, bringing industry to a standstill and the end of many businesses. He is counting on the government backing banks to rebuild the economy. It's evident that Bobby has a clear vision for the future, and Phillip is ready for him to save them.

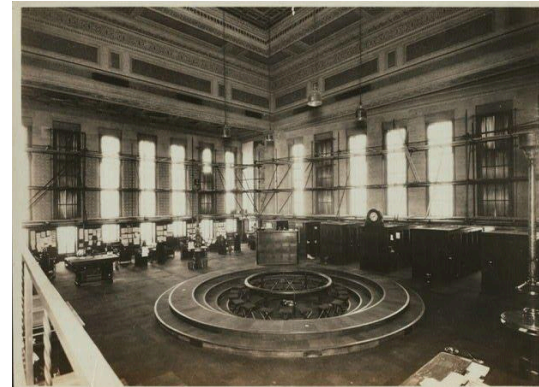
4. The Flood (1930). As business owners press forward, Bobby refuses to keep Ruth in the loop about the business, so she threatens to divorce him. He is alone and feels the weight of the world. Herbert, in government, also carries that weight, but Bobby sees him as competition, particularly as Bobby's father continually compares him to Herbert. Ruth divorces Bobby, while Herbert remains happily married. But Bobby successfully brings the company through to the other side.

5. A New Country (1939). Lehman Brothers restructures: ten shareholders put up the money to save the bank, and Bobby is the chairman. Lehman invests in the war effort, but Herbert is now a senator and putting many regulations in place. Investing in 'trust' is a new idea to Bobby.

6. Shiva (1947). A *shiva* is held for Phillip, but most of the European traditions have been lost. Where there once was a lengthy mourning period that followed the traditions of the old country, Americans calling themselves "Reformed Jews" can't imagine shutting down business to mourn, so they close for three minutes of respect.



The Lehman Brothers' origins in Alabama



New York Cotton Exchange



Transporting cotton bales

7. The Instinctive Act (1965). The Lehmans adopt the idea of ‘marketing’ –that people don’t just buy the things they need, they buy instinctively, with money they don’t have, increasing their need for banks. Everyone needs to borrow from the banks. This, in the midst of discussions around Communism, makes Americans feel superior. Everyone can buy—and borrow to buy—so they are all equal.

8. Babel. Lehman is now international. Bobby’s nightmares feature business people from across the world stacking a tower of briefcases until the tower falls because no one was able to communicate with one another. Bobby meets with two young people who convince him that computers will connect the world through a universal language.

9. The Golden Calf (1963). Bobby brings in younger employees with brighter ideas. Lew Glucksman, the son of the lamp maker, proposes a trading division using phones and computers. Bobby accepts, and Glucksman starts a new office that looks like chaos to the older men but proves itself by tripling profits in its first month.

10. The Twist (1969). Bobby is the last remaining Lehman with the company, overseeing the animosity between the bank and the trading office. The company continues to make money.

11. Ping Pong (1983). Pete, the son of the Nebraska restaurant owner, is now the President of Lehman Brothers. Lew buys Pete out to gain control of the whole company. Within a year, the business is taken apart and resold. This last vignette of the story covers the final 25 years of the Lehman Brothers trading business. The play ends in 2008. The phone rings, indicating the end of the Lehman Brothers, as the U.S. plunges into another economic recession.



FICTIONALIZATIONS IN *THE LEHMAN TRILOGY*

Solomon Paprinskij, the tightrope walker of Wall Street. In 1974, Phillipe Petit walked between the two towers of the World Trade Center, but there is no evidence of an individual doing so at the New York Stock Exchange at this time.

United Railways. While this railroad company did, in fact, exist, it did not begin until five years after its appearance in the play.

The Panama Canal project was not led by the Lehman Brothers, but, rather, was an initiative of the United States government. There is no evidence of the Lehmans' involvement at all.

Suicidal leaps from Wall Street buildings following the 1929 crash is a common mythology likely perpetuated by the media following an increase in suicide statistics in the months leading up to the crash.

Source: D.S. Williams Dramaturgy

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



HENRY LEHMAN

the oldest brother and the first to arrive in America

MR. NEWGASS

the father of Mayer's wife, Babette

PHILIP LEHMAN

Emanuel's son

PORT OFFICIAL

RABBI LEWINSOHN

MR. TENNYSON

a customer

GEORGIOS PETROPOULOS

aka George Peterson, the father

TEDDY WILKINSON

a Northern industrialist

RUTH LAMAR

Bobby's wife

LOUIS SONDHEIM

father of Emanuel's wife, Pauline

PAUL MAZUR

DOCTOR BEAUCHAMP

DICK FULD

Gluckman's protégé

GOVERNOR OF ALABAMA

PETE PETERSON

Georgios's son



EMANUEL LEHMAN

the middle brother

HERBERT LEHMAN

Mayer's son

GLUCKSMAN

a Hungarian lamp-maker

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

MR. NEWGRASS

the father of Mayer's wife, Babette

LEW GLUCKSMAN

the son of a lamp-maker



MAYER LEHMAN

the youngest brother

PAULINE SONDHEIM

Emanuel's wife

CARRIE LAUER

Philip's wife

ARCHIBALD DAVIDSON

United Railways representative

VARIOUS BOYS IN HEBREW SCHOOL

BOBBY LEHMAN

Philip's son

VARIOUS BRIDES FOR PHILIP



UNDERSTUDIES

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE LEHMAN TRILOGY

- 1** The play might best be compared to a radio play or dramatized podcast performed for the audience.
- 2** Three actors play over 25 characters regardless of age or gender and without the aid of costume changes.
- 3** The original production in 2013 was 200 pages long. This version has been edited to 174 pages.
- 4** The play focuses primarily on three themes: the immigrant experience, Judaism, and the history of the American stock market.
- 5** *The Lehman Trilogy* references death, enslaved people, war, suicide, and some strong language. We encourage you to be aware of antisemitic stereotypes. As with all theatre, keep an open mind, think critically about the work, and engage in discussions before, during, and after the performance.

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The American Civil War was fought from 1861 to 1865 between the states in the northern United States and those in the south. The war began when 11 southern states threatened to withdraw from the country.

Northerners wanted to stop the spread of slavery, and Southerners believed that the government should not have the right to decide whether or not they could enslave people. The Civil War is often referred to as a “moral war.”

The war hurt the Southern economy by destroying farms and land that depended on the labor of enslaved people. Meanwhile, the Northern economy grew stronger with more factories and new ways to handle money, helping the North become a big industrial power.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE DIRECTORS

Sarah Garton Stanley & Tracey Erin Smith



What drew you to *The Lehman Trilogy* as your first directing project since moving to Calgary?

SGS. Five years [after first hearing about the show], I am the new VP of Programming at Arts Commons, and—out of the blue—I get an offer from Stafford Arima to direct this show...YES! I would love to direct this show, but only if we can present it in association with *Arts Commons Presents*...The drive and excitement to work in community, across organizations is one that I personally hold dear.

What can audiences expect from this production of *The Lehman Trilogy*?

SGS. To be taken on a ride of a story that will—no matter where they are coming to theatre from—have impacted them...They can expect a really great theatrical experience that will leave them feeling just a little bit clearer about a lot of things. These three fine actors, with this fine text, with a single candle, and a roof to keep out the elements could, I believe, hold an audience in its thrall.

Why is this the right play for Calgary audiences right now?

TES. I think it's a great play for Calgary because Calgary does business so well! And so did the Lehman brothers (until they didn't). The actors are playing characters, but they are also talking directly to us as they narrate the story...This adds to the intimacy between the performers and the Calgary audiences.

SGS. I know that it is a great, relevant, meaningful, impactful, fun, funny, engaging, informative piece of writing. So I guess that's my answer.

INDUSTRIALIZATION

Between the end of the American Civil War (1865) and the Stock Market Crash (1929), focus shifted to agriculture and a reliance on manufacturing. In 1860, Agricultural workers outnumbered non-agricultural workers, but by 1930 factory workers numbered over 38 million. Over this same time period, America rose to be the number one producer of industrial goods globally. Parallel industrialization was happening in Canada at this time following Confederation in 1867.

THE STOCK MARKET CRASH & GREAT DEPRESSION

At the time of the Stock Market Crash in 1929, one third of the country's wealth belonged to .5% of its people. In addition to the money lost at this time, unemployment rose to 25%, at its highest point, and hovered there until World War II brought back jobs in the 1940s. Because people couldn't pay their mortgages, banks foreclosed and savings were lost.

Excerpted from Royal Manitoba Theatre Company

THE IMMIGRANT ECONOMY

Immigration fuels the economy. When newcomers enter the workforce, they increase the "productive capacity of the economy and raise the GDP" (gross domestic product, the monetary value of finished goods and services made within a country during a specific period). Newcomers enter industries and areas where there is a relative need for workers—where shortages minimize growth.

There are national and regional examples of immigrants moving to where the jobs are. During and after World War II, Mexican immigrants alleviated shortages arising from the war effort. During the oil boom of the 1970s and 80s, there was record migration to Texas.

Consumers benefit from the lower prices of the goods and services that immigrants produce, but this wealth is not distributed equally to everyone. These surpluses go primarily to the business- and land-owners and investors.

Benefits of Immigration Outweigh the Costs by Pia Orreniu

A TIMELINE OF THE U.S. STOCK MARKET

Late 1400s | Antwerp is the center of international trade. Merchants buy goods anticipating that prices will rise in order to make a profit.

1611 | First modern stock trading emerges in Amsterdam. Dutch East India Company is the first publicly-traded company and the only one with trading activity on the exchange.

Late 1700s | Small group of merchants draft the Buttonwood Tree Agreement. They meet daily to buy and sell stocks (*part ownership in companies*) and bonds (*money you lend to a company that they pay back with interest*).

1790 | Philadelphia Stock Exchange is formed, spurring the development of financial sectors in the U.S.

1896 | Dow Jones Industrial Average, a price-weighted index that averages the price of the stocks that comprise it, is created for 12 industrial companies.

1923 | Early version of the S&P 500, an index of 90 stocks, is created by Poor's Publishing.

1929 | The U.S. stock market crashes at the end of the 'Roaring 20s,' when speculators bet on the stock market, inflating prices.

1971 | A second U.S. stock exchange, the NASDAQ, is created.

1987 | There is a second catastrophic stock market crash on October 19 known as "Black Monday"

2008 | The stock market crashes due to the boom and bust of the housing market.

2020 | COVID-19 pandemic causes a significant decline in the stock market.

A DANGEROUS TROPE

what happens when we connect Jews and money

A note that the play originated in Italy. The writer was not Jewish but grew up among Jews and has a fascination with Judaism. The play was developed in the UK, a country with a history of antisemitism. Europe is steeped in the wedding of Jews to money (note: William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*). There are things in the play that may be unintentionally provocative.

The wedding of money and Jewishness, the notion that Jews created brokerages and Wall Street, is inherent in the play. The Lehmans were not the originators of these institutions of money, but historic antisemitic and current mythology about Jews is invested in connecting Jews to money and power.

Jewish ritual, ceremony, and language accompanies so many key financial moments in the play. *Why are they lighting Chanukah candles as Alabama burns?* So, it seems important to be aware of and reckon with this conscious or unconscious backdrop to the play and the effect of these stereotypes about Jews and money.

Excerpted from *Lehman Trilogy Jewish Resource Guide* by Diane Flacks, August 2023

Map of Jewish immigration, circa 1880-1924, courtesy of legacytree.com

150,000
Jewish immigrants
between 1820 and 1880

1,115
number of Jewish people
in Canada in 1871

910,631
Jewish immigrants a year
between 1900 and 1915

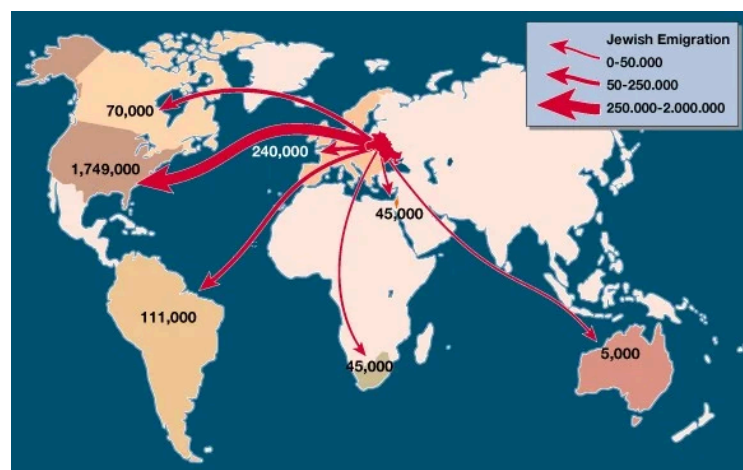
100,000
Number of Jewish people
in Canada by 1915

164,000
people admitted per year
allowed after the 1924
immigration quota

30,000
Jewish immigrants
came to Canada
between 1981 and 1991

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Source: The Canadian Encyclopedia



THE FALL OF THE LEHMAN BROTHERS

In the early 2000s, Lehman began underwriting mortgages and offering mortgage-backed securities (a share in a bundle of home loans bought from the banks or government entities). Many of these mortgages were issued to individuals with low credit under questionable terms and low or no down payments. Their fall was the result, in large part, to millions of these risky mortgages. The Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy on September 15, 2008. Thousands of employees lost their jobs and the economy, already in a recession, went into a tailspin. Committed to mortgage payments they couldn't afford, millions of people defaulted on their loans and lost their homes to foreclosure amounting to USD \$613 billion in debt for The Lehman Brothers and countless other banks left to pick up the pieces.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to consider on your way home from *The Lehman Trilogy* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 The original Italian production featured twelve actors; however, in adapting the English version, it was decided to use three actors to play all of the roles. How does the small cast enhance the storytelling? How would the show be different had there been more actors to spread the characters around?
- 2 Early in the play, the playwright, Stefano Massini, describes a “magical music box called America.” What does this mean to you? How does your idea of North America fit with the image of a music box?
- 3 How is morality addressed (or not) in this retelling of the Lehman brothers’ journey from inspiring Jewish immigrants to vilified businessmen? In what way does their building of a business on the backs of American slave labour impact their ultimate success?
- 4 How do you feel about the way capitalism is represented in the play? How does it build on your existing understanding of the way North Americans do business?
- 5 How does *The Lehman Trilogy* fit into the idea of the ‘American Dream?’ Are these men to be admired as *heroes* or *villains*?
- 6 *The Lehman Trilogy* is noticeably lacking in references to antisemitism the Lehman brothers would have undoubtedly experienced throughout the growth of their business. What do you think accounts for the playwright’s choice to leave this out of the story? How would it change if it was addressed?

THEATRE CALGARY AUDIENCE & CURRICULUM GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

Aliza Sarian

www.alizasarian.com