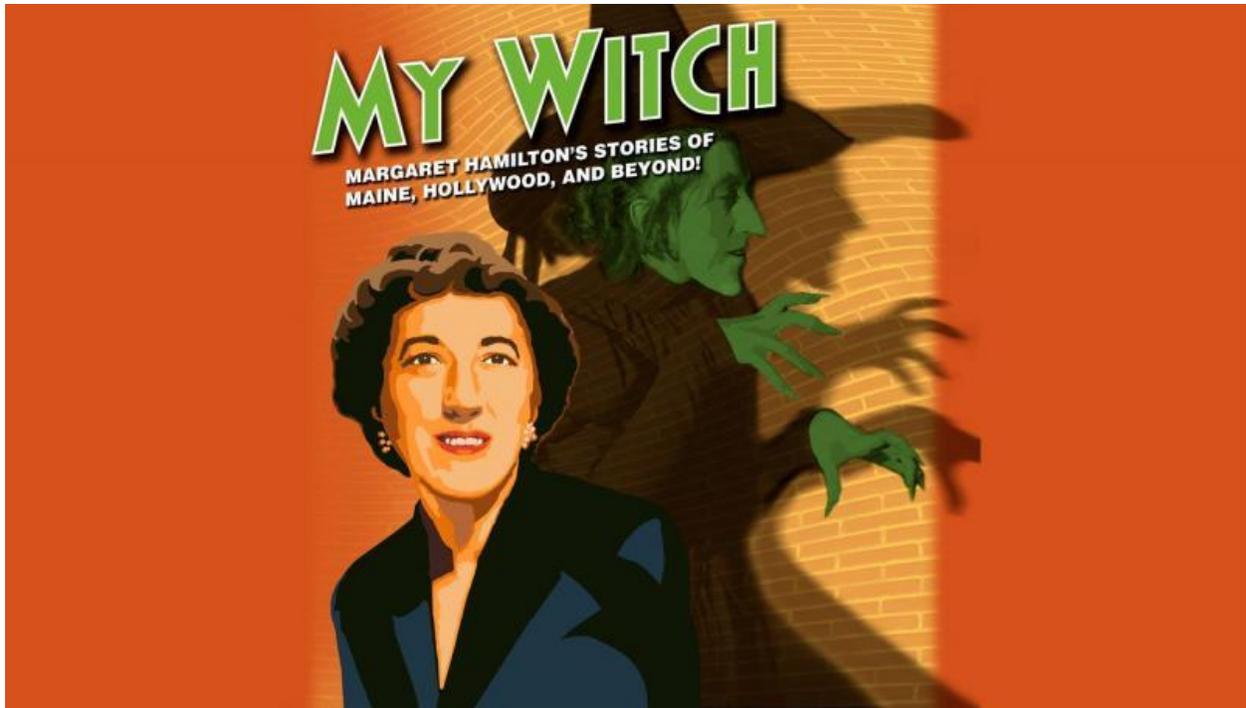


'MY WITCH': Meet the woman behind the green paint

One matinee: Sunday, Oct. 31 at 3 p.m.

LISA KRISTOFF/BOOTHBAY REGISTER



Show opens Oct. 29 at Meetinghouse Arts in Freeport.

The footlights on the one-woman show “MY WITCH” first went up on a Maine stage in 2018 at Portland Ballet Co. as a developmental production. On Friday, Oct. 29, the rewritten play, “MY WITCH: Margaret Hamilton’s Stories of Maine, Hollywood and Beyond” has its world premiere at Meetinghouse Arts in Freeport for a three-day run, part of a rolling world premiere.

Jean Tafler reprises her role as Hamilton. The actor has a long list of professional credits to her name – from Shakespeare to musicals, from television to film. Tafler and husband John Ahlin, playwright, actor, director and author, have been researching the actress, a.k.a. the Wicked Witch of

the West, since 2009 when Tafler received a review likening her performance as a female Scrooge to Hamilton's portrayal of the WWOW.

Initially Tafler had mixed feelings about the review, but Ahlin thought differently: "I thought to be likened to that iconic character was a good review! It always stuck in my head."

"She has certainly gotten under my skin," said Tafler. "And there are traits we both share: loquaciousness, forthrightness, strength ... What continues to impress me, us, is how well she is remembered. She was so loved. In New York, Maine, wherever we go we meet someone who has a story to tell about her. And they always say she was such a lovely person, or she was so friendly, so kind."

Tafler's connection with Hamilton has strengthened and grown deeper. There is even admiration in her voice when she talks about Maggie being a single mother juggling work, and about how Hamilton faced the typecasting, particularly by the movie studios, that was in vogue then; and about Margaret's refusal to have a nose job affected the roles she was able to audition for.

"She was pigeonholed into playing certain parts in the movies. On stage it was a little better," Tafler said. "Since then, we've expanded our views on beauty a bit."

Oz and Hamilton fans should know there's a lot in the show about the land of Oz. In this version of the play there's a supernatural element that neither Ahlin nor Tafler were willing to elaborate on, however, Ahlin did say, "Since Hamilton was the Wicked Witch of the West, the supernatural, the magic, was there. She was in Oz; she's only on screen for 12 minutes, but the Wicked Witch was always a presence throughout the film. We went with that."

One story among those that had to be cut from this rewrite centered around the Steinway grand piano that was left behind by the previous owner of the Cape Island cottage. "This former owner defaulted on payments. The piano company came to repossess it ... but none of the lobstermen who helped bring it out there were willing to help. And there it remains ... I tried to make the story work in the show, but there was the

issue of how to get a grand piano on every stage the show is performed at from here on end," explained Ahlin. "I thought that was too much to ask of any theater company."

There will be scenes with some subtly clever dialogue like this one: During the play a storm comes up. Margaret, looking out a window, observes it isn't anything to worry about because, "It's just a gale from the West."

Audiences will see her practicing for an audition; Margaret will talk about those appearances on Mister Roger's Neighborhood and Sesame Street ... and then there's the supernatural element that no one's elaborating on ... Sometimes Margaret will be talking to herself as she is busy opening up the cottage for summer and other times she will speak directly to the audience (asides).

Tafler and Ahlin said people found Hamilton extra special, and the couple discovered how extra special she was through 12 years of interviews with her son, Hamilton Meserve and his wife Helen on Southport Island, and their grown children; theater folk, her agent, friends and neighbors; watching her films (many of which are on YouTube); and reading reviews, among other sources.

Tafler received an outstanding review of her performance in the 2019 version of the show in one of the Sag Harbor shows that can be found on Broadway World's website: "My Witch is everything great theater can be and then even more. Thrilling, entertaining and interesting...A must see if you love the movie 'The Wizard of Oz,' but it's also a must see because Jean Tafler gives a brilliant, strong, Tony Award-worthy caliber performance effortlessly displaying her talent, skills and gifts as an actor."



Jean Tafler as Margaret Hamilton. Courtesy photo

The curtain rises on this rolling world premiere of “My Witch: Margaret Hamilton’s Stories of Maine, Hollywood and Beyond” Friday, Oct. 29 through Sunday, Oct. 31 at Meetinghouse Arts, 40 Main St. in Freeport, as a co-production of Margit Ahlin’s Snowlion Repertory Company and John Ahlin’s Fat Knight Theatre.

From there the show is at Hubbard Hall in Cambridge, New York in November, and finally Bridge Street Theater in the Catskills beginning in early December.

The Maine performances are at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 29 and Saturday, Oct. 30 and Sunday/Halloween at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$23 and can be bought

through snowlionrep.org. Proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test must be presented, and masks are required.