

## **SYNOPSIS OF INDECENT**

When Sholem Asch wrote his play *The God of Vengeance* in 1906, he was twenty-six years old. Dedicated, like many other Jewish authors of his time, to preserving and fostering the Yiddish language, his first stop when trying to give the play life was a salon at the home of I.L. Peretz, a Yiddish writer and scholar. Peretz famously told the young Asch to destroy it, “Burn it, Asch, burn it.” Asch’s play tells the story of Yekel, a brothel owner who lives with his wife (a former member of the brothel) above the brothel. Yekel’s life’s desire is to preserve his daughter, Rifkele, from any harm; to mold her into the perfect maiden, a spotless candidate for marriage to a scholar (“A sweetheart, — a golden one. A wonderful student, of a fine family.” Sarah, *The God of Vengeance*). To that end, he commissions the writing of a Torah scroll – a sacred and expensive task – so that he can hang it in his daughter’s room for protection. What Yekel doesn’t count on is the developing love between Rifkele and Manke, one of the prostitutes in his brothel. Paula Vogel’s *Indecent* tells the story of the original productions of *The God of Vengeance*, ranging from its premiere at the respected Deutsches Theater in Berlin in 1907, through celebrated European productions and finally a staging in the United States. It is only with a production in English in 1923 on Broadway that the trouble begins. After complaints filed by a local respected rabbi, the play is shut down and the producer, director and some of the actors are charged with obscenity. *Indecent* merges fact and fiction around a theater company, their personal stories, and ultimately their sacrifice for the art they hold so dear. A play with music, *Indecent* combines the high entertainment of Yiddish theater with the heartbreak of the loss of art and culture for an entire people