

His daughter, the comic / Galloway Township family's ups and downs fodder for one-woman show

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What do you do when your daughter the comedian goes on stage in New York and starts airing the family's dirty laundry for laughs? If you're Jack Fox of Galloway Township, you charter a bus so everyone you know can come and enjoy it.

On Saturday, the coach bus leaves the Milton and Betty Katz Jewish Community Center in Margate and travels north for a matinee show of "MazelTov Cocktail," Jamie M. Fox's one-woman show inspired by, among other things, how her family handled her brother Jeremy's drug addiction.

Jack Fox, executive director of the Jewish Center, originally didn't know what to expect when his daughter told him about her idea for the show.

"I encouraged her to tell her own story as I always have, and I was actually happy with the way it turned out," said Fox, 62, who has already seen the show four times. "I really didn't have any fears. I was excited that she was going to be able to present her story on stage because she has been involved with theater and the stage since she was 8."

"MazelTov Cocktail" follows a Jewish woman as she juggles her job as a personal assistant, her cocaine-addicted and recently jailed brother and the neurotic parents who spawned them. Fox, a veteran of Second City and Comedy Central Stage, portrays six different characters, including the mother, father and daughter of the fictional Golden family. She performs the show through Feb. 20 at the McGinn Cazale Theatre, 2162 Broadway in New York.

Jamie M. Fox, 34, amazed her father by how she was able to inhabit each character.

"A transformation came about in her face, her demeanor, her behavior and her intonation. She did a character that was based on me, but was certainly not me. I felt like it was me up there on stage. She had all the movements down," the father said. "Her face looked like mine. It doesn't normally, fortunate for her."

Jamie M. Fox took creative license with her parent characters because she said the audience has to have fun in a show billed as a comedy.

"It's the kind of comedy where the humor comes out of moments that are so truthful, they are hilarious because we all do these ridiculous things to get through the day sometimes when we are faced with pain," Fox said. "There is a lot of eating in the show too. Most of the characters eat or have some discussion of food in some way. People do the strangest things with food."

Jamie M. Fox took what sounds like material for a drama and made a family-based comedy out of it. She first performed it in 2005.

Seattle City Ago Go wrote "hilarious and thoughtful." The Jewish Journal said, "A whole new side of Jewish living. ... the hysterically unusual side." LA Weekly stated, "Fox nimbly darts from one scene to the next, from character to character without skipping a beat. Fox is an engaging personality."

A survival mechanism for growing up in a family with a member suffering from addiction is humor, Fox said.

"My family always had humor and what better way to tell a story than through humor because it makes it a little easier to digest," said Fox, now a Los Angeles resident. "We all do ridiculous things in our lives when are faced with denial."

Fox said her brother has seen her show. He was there at the end of one of the shows when there was a talkback segment.

"He raised his hand, and I said, 'Oh, my God, what the hell is he going to say?' He said, 'Jame, you're really talented.' It may have been the only compliment he has ever given me," said Fox laughing at the recollection.

Fox is frequently asked after her shows by audience members what is up with her brother, but she says that's his story to tell.

"It's based on my journey of having a sibling, who is very troubled and wanting him to be well, and not being able to make him healthy. It's saying goodbye to the brother I wish I had and accepting him as who he is," Fox said.

The two aspects of the shows that are based on real things that happened are her brother going to jail for cocaine distribution, and the fact she did work as a celebrity personal assistant. There was something behaviorally that was pulling these two stories together when she was writing. It was as if her family was her brother's personal assistant.

"Basically, I started writing the story when my brother was arrested, and my family was going through all of that. I found it really interesting that there were very few stories about that side, how addiction affects the family dynamic," Fox said. "What the play is about is how you can't change people, how hard it is to change yourself, and it's up to you to do it, but you can do it through a lot of perseverance and through a lot of tough decisions. You can do things differently."

Once Fox's New York shows are over, she will start doing research for her next show, dealing with the families of inmates.

