

Célébrons nos communautés inclusives



Celebrating inclusive communities

Renowned comedian Brad Williams will take to the stage at this summer's *Nasty Show* at the Just For Laughs Festival

The **Just For Laughs Festival** has announced the return of *The Nasty Show* this summer, with six performances from July 18 to 21 at MTELUS in Montreal, with additional shows added from July 24 to 28.

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Brad Williams
(Photo source, Internet)





Tampa's Straz Center for the Performing Arts: A commitment to accessibility

By Alexandra Cohen

The entrance to the Straz Center.
(Photo credit, Rob Harris)

TAMPA - While in Tampa recently, I was fortunate enough to have the chance to see *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in Concert, featuring the Florida Orchestra. The production took place at the always lively Straz Center for the Performing Arts (www.strazcenter.org), where only one year earlier I had seen the Broadway touring production of *An American in Paris*.

The Harry Potter concert series has been growing in popularity. For those unfamiliar with the concept, the film is projected as if in a movie theatre, but rather than listening to the music previously recorded for the film's soundtrack, the orchestra sits on a stage below the screen and performs the score live, creating a full and beautiful sound sweeping throughout the theatre. This, however, is no typical orchestral performance. Prior to the show, audience members are asked to identify their Hogwarts houses, immediately setting the tone for the rest of the evening. The audience, in fact, was encouraged to react audibly throughout the film to their favorite characters and moments. Loud boos were even elicited upon the arrival of more villainous characters, contributing to an incredibly energetic and enthusiastic atmosphere.

The Straz opened in 1987, and I must say

that it is a beautiful performing arts center; in fact, it is the largest in the Southeast. I simply love this venue and was thrilled to find a reason to return. The center has demonstrated a commitment to making the performing arts as accessible as possible. Wheelchair accessible seating may be purchased online or by phone, and other available services include ASL interpretation, open captioning, and headsets for patrons with hearing impairments to assist with both amplification and clarity. If you hope to attend a show and require any of these services, you are encouraged to call ahead at (813) 229-STAR.

If you are planning on visiting Tampa at any point in 2018, be sure to look into what show is playing at the Straz. You can consider taking in a production by Opera Tampa, the Straz Center's resident opera company, and this year, the Straz will also be receiving hits including: *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Color Purple*, *Beautiful - The Carole King Musical*, *Waitress*, *Sound of Music*, *Forever Plaid*, *The Illusionists*, *The Body Guard* and *Cinderella*. Not only that, but they are fortunate enough to have secured for their 2018-2019 season the most in-demand musical currently in the world: *Hamilton*. With a season like that, it is no wonder that the Straz continues to thrive!

Learning how to be inclusive at BBYO International Convention

By Stuart Nulman

ORLANDO, FLORIDA – For nearly a decade, the worldwide Jewish youth organization BBYO has promoted its regions to adopt the concept of inclusion amongst its 80,000-strong membership.

At BBYO's annual International Convention (IC), which took place this year from February 15 to 19 in Orlando, Florida, you couldn't miss that sense of inclusion amongst the more than 3,000 Jewish teens from around the globe who were in attendance, and that was quite evident with a large number of attendees with special needs.

On "BBYO Leads Day", I attended a session called "Creating Inclusive Environments For All: A Look into Disability Services", where experts in the field of inclusion services for the disabled spoke about new, innovative approaches and best practices.

It began with an engaging and entertaining presentation that was given by Pamela Schuller, a New York-based professional stand-up comedian and inclusion advocate. Diagnosed with what she call "the most severe case of Tourette Syndrome in the country," Pamela explained to the teens and staff how she uses improv, comedy and storytelling to not only inspire people to have a new sense of awareness about inclusion, but also

encourage people – especially teens – with disabilities to embrace, love and even find the funny in what makes them different (like she has done with her struggle with Tourette Syndrome). Pamela uses her talents towards being an inclusion advocate through her work as an inclusion specialist, a manager of a teen and mental health initiative for the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services in New York, as well as her own organization Stand Up Inclusion (www.standupinclusion.com).

Afterwards, I attended a session that was run by the Nora Project, which teaches empathy by creating friendships between students and their peers with disabilities – through three goals: teaching students how to see the world through another's eyes; creating opportunities for children with complex medical needs and disabilities to experience social inclusion; and building communities that are filled with support and kindness. Rena Rosen, ambassador for the organization, explained how they pair children with special needs with students from a grade 5 or 6 class. The positive im-

pact of this pairing is recorded by a mini-documentary that the students put together, and is shown at a special "Nora Night". Ms. Rosen showed a mini-documentary produced by a grade 5 class from a Chicago area school. It documented their special friendship with William, a young boy their age who suffers from a genetic disorder that leaves him unable to communicate.



Pamela Schuller speaking at BBYO International in Orlando.