

Timeline
Theatre Company

OSLO

by J.T. ROGERS
directed by NICK BOWLING



BACKSTORY YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS

At TimeLine, we believe in creating theatre that is more than just a few hours in a seat.

Our collaborative artistic team presents riveting stories that link our past, present, and future—exploring today's social and political issues through the lens of the past and inspiring ourselves to re-imagine tomorrow—performed, directed and designed by some of Chicago's finest artists in an intimate theater where you are never too far from the action.

The TimeLine experience extends well beyond the stage!

This *Backstory* magazine is created for every production, providing historical context, artist interviews, and more behind-the-scenes insight.

We invite you to explore interactive lobby experiences created for each production (don't miss the one in the Broadway Playhouse lobby today), engage in conversation with artists and fellow audience members at discussions during the run, download our mobile app for exclusive content (free via your Apple or Android store), and visit our blog Behind the 'Line (timelinetheatre.com/blog).

These are just some of the ways TimeLine creates space for you to indulge your curiosity and take action on whatever the art on stage inspires.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT OSLO

The staff and company of TimeLine Theatre have spent the past several months striving to do this play, its characters, and its narrative, justice. We have explored the text and examined historical resources, and in writing this *Backstory* and all our supplementary materials, have worked to steer as neutral a course as we can to present historical context about matters that we know are inherently political and subject to points of view and biases, including our own. Though the material presented is necessarily abbreviated and incomplete, we hope you will use it as a starting point for further investigation and conversation. And we encourage you to enter this play with the spirit it honors: a belief in human connection and friendship as the basis for fruitful discussion, debate, and growth.



A peek at the TimeLine of tomorrow: Preliminary conceptual rendering by HGA of TimeLine's future new home in Uptown.

Be Social!



Find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube at the handle @TimeLineTheatre. Join the conversation online by sharing your experience at *Oslo* today, and don't forget to tag us and use #OsloTL and/or #TimeLineTheatre.

Learn more and stay in touch

Visit our booth in the lobby today to chat with a TimeLine team member, learn about upcoming shows, sign up for our mailing list, or just check out the merch! And for more, visit timelinetheatre.com.

"Productions at TimeLine are a 'getaway' for the mind."

— TimeLine patron

A MESSAGE

FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR PJ POWERS

Dear Friends,

Welcome to TimeLine's production of *Oslo*. Whether you've followed our work in Chicago for years, or you're experiencing a TimeLine production for the first time, we're delighted to introduce you to this Tony Award-winning play by one of our favorite playwrights, J.T. Rogers, directed by TimeLine co-founder and Associate Artistic Director Nick Bowling.

Since 1997, through more than 75 productions of new plays and reimagined classics, TimeLine has been exploring today's topics through the lens of the past—making connections between past, present, and future, and probing the social and political issues that define our times.

You're joining us at an exciting moment. TimeLine recently announced plans to establish a new home in Uptown, renovating an historic building that will elevate everything that has distinguished TimeLine's work for more than two decades. Through that future home and by bringing this production of *Oslo* downtown to the Broadway Playhouse, we're creating space to grow, innovate, and support new artistic possibilities and community connections—all in service to creating theatergoing experiences for you that extend far beyond the stage.

When I saw *Oslo* in New York, J.T. remarked afterward that the play is "like a love letter to TimeLine's mission." I'd already been thinking the same thing, marveling at his ability to transform weighty and well-researched material into riveting, compelling, and surprisingly hilarious drama.

We discovered long ago that there was a synergy between TimeLine and J.T.'s writing, leading us to produce his play *Blood and Gifts* in 2013, also directed by Nick. I encourage you to read more in this *Backstory* about J.T., his partnership with Nick, and his penchant to "tell stories that are framed against great political rupture ... putting characters onstage who struggle with, and against, cascading world events—and who are changed forever through that struggle." That's also a fitting encapsulation of the stories TimeLine brings to the stage.

Set in 1993, *Oslo* takes us behind closed doors for the secret meetings, feuds, and alliances that orchestrated a momentous handshake between



Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, and Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. It was a gesture that generated both optimism and fury across the globe as the Oslo Accords were signed.

History has obviously shown that the Accords did not hold up, and 26 years later, peace between these two adversaries remains a process fraught with intricacy and rancor. Yet it can be argued that *Oslo* still brims with relevance and resonance.

Amidst division—both stateside and abroad—*Oslo* is a beacon of hope, demonstrating how we might never be able to tackle major discord without starting with seemingly minor points of connection. Listening. Relating. Sharing a meal. A joke. A vulnerable piece of ourselves. Being willing to recognize the humanity in our antagonist. With humor, pathos, and suspense, J.T. audaciously challenges us to imagine such a possibility.

As we begin our 23rd season, *Oslo* launches a series of four plays that explore history while delving into issues of love, race, gender, and family power dynamics. Chicago premieres of *Rutherford and Son* and *Kill Move Paradise* and the world premiere of *Relentless* are still to come, presented at our current home in Chicago's Lakeview East neighborhood.

I hope you'll join us there to continue experiencing yesterday's stories, discussing today's topics, and imagining tomorrow's possibilities.



"I wanted to write a play, not a textbook or a reenactment."

As a playwright, I look to tell stories that are framed against great political rupture. I am obsessed with putting characters onstage who struggle with, and against, cascading world events—and who are changed forever through that struggle. While journalism sharpens minds, the theater can expand our sense of what it means to be human. It is where we can come together in a communal space to hear ideas that grip us, surprise us—even infuriate us—as we learn of things we didn't know. For me, that is a deeply thrillingly, political act. I hunt perpetually for these kinds of stories. ...

As I researched I drew a tight bracket around the historic events preceding and occurring during the time of [what came to be known as the Oslo Channel—the secret channel through which the Accords

were birthed]. I burrowed into this sliver of history as deeply as I could, in order to summon a specific moment in time and place. Then I took the who, what, when, and where of journalism and threw them into a blender. I wanted to write a play, not a textbook or a reenactment. I sought to capture the spirit of those real events—their craziness, fear, joy, and heartbreak. I wanted to tell a story about men and women risking their own lives and challenging their own beliefs as they struggle without a road map toward peace.

The historic events in *Oslo* are all true, but I have taken dramatic liberties. I have theatricalized and reinvented—all to focus my play on the radical act at the center of the actual Oslo Channel.

In the middle of the endless bloodshed and hatred, members of the Israeli Government and the PLO chose to sit across from their enemies and see them as human beings. Each side listened to the other and was permanently changed by that listening. I am awed by the personal and political courage that took. It is a moment of history that I do not want forgotten.

— Excerpted from the Introduction to the print edition of *Oslo*, by J.T. Rogers, *Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, January 2017*

ABOUT THE PLAY: *OSLO*

Oslo swept the 2016-2017 awards season in New York, winning the 2017 Tony Award for Best Play, as well as the Drama Desk Award, New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, Lucille Lortel Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, Drama League Award, and Obie Award.

Oslo was also mounted in London in the fall of 2017 at the National Theatre, then transferred to the West End, where it was nominated for the both the Olivier and Evening Standard awards for best play.

Oslo is inspired by the amazing true story of the back-channel talks, unlikely friendships, and quiet heroics that led to the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between the Israelis and Palestinians. Thus far, it has been produced in five different countries: the United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Canada, and Norway.

THE PEOPLE

ABOUT THE PLAYERS, ON STAGE AND OFF

Here is a brief guide to some of the real people involved in the world of *Oslo*. For more about these individuals then and now, visit the TimeLine mobile app or timelinetheatre.com/oslo.

THE NORWEGIANS



The Norwegian contingent, circa 1993. From left: Holst, Heiberg, Larsen, and Juul.

Jan Egeland (b. 1957) is a diplomat, political scientist, and Labour Party politician who holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Oslo. He served as State Secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1990–1997).

Marianne Heiberg (1945 – 2004) was a social scientist and researcher educated at Harvard, the University of Oslo, and the London School of Economics. She served as a Senior Researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (1983–2004) and was married to Johan Jørgen Holst.

Johan Jørgen Holst (1937 – 1994), was a Labour Party politician who served as Norway's Minister of Defence between 1987 and 1989 and from 1991 until being appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in April 1993.

Mona Juul (b. 1959) is a diplomat who has been generally affiliated with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1986; in 1993 she was working as the Agency Manager. She holds a master's degree in Political Science from the University of Oslo and is married to Terje Rød-Larsen.

"Mona's delicacy was offset by a fierce intensity and almost dogged singleness of purpose. ... Mona operated ... in a way appropriate to her Norwegian style of understatement." — *Uri Savir, The Process: 1,100 Days that Changed the Middle East*

THE TIMELINE: KEY DATES IN ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN HISTORY

1897 The first Zionist Congress takes place, a three-day conclave at which the movement that led to the establishment of a state for the Jewish people took its first organizational steps.

1914 The First World War starts, during which Central powers including Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire fight against the Allied powers including Great Britain, France, Russia, and later, Italy and the United States.

1916 Great Britain and France secretly sign the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divides up the eastern Mediterranean into French, British, and international zones.

November 1917 The British issue the Balfour Declaration, a letter sent by Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, promising that the British government will favorably view the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and that it will "use the best of their endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object."

December 1917 British rule in Palestine formally begins through the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA).

November 1918 The British and French issue a joint declaration supporting Arab national self-determination in the regions previously under the Ottoman Empire.

Terje Rød-Larsen (b. 1947) is a politician, diplomat, and sociologist who helped establish the Fafo Institute for Applied Sciences in 1981. As the first director of Fafo (1981–93), he initiated a research project into the living conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He is married to Mona Juul.

“Even the most daunting setback usually left him unfazed, and he was to play a critical role in easing the many crises ahead.”

— Uri Savir on Terje Rød-Larsen, *The Process*

THE PALESTINIANS

Yasser Arafat (1929 – 2004) was born in Cairo to a Palestinian mother and father. He attended the University of King Fuad I, where he embraced Arab nationalism. In 1958, Arafat co-founded Fatah, a paramilitary organization advocating armed struggle, the destruction of Israel, and the establishment of a Palestinian state. In 1967, he joined the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), ultimately becoming its leader. He reversed the PLO's position on the destruction of Israel in a 1988 speech to the UN.

Hassan Asfour (b. unknown) was forced to move from country to country in the 1960s and '70s due to his affiliation with the Communist party. Later, in Tunisia, he became active in the PLO. During the 1980s, he was assigned

Uri Savir (left) with Ahmed Qurei in Oslo, circa 1999. (Sven Nackstrand / Agence France-Presse)



Borregaard Manor, one of the real sites in the countryside near Oslo where negotiations between these players took place, and where J.T. Rogers sets much of the action of the play Oslo.

to coordinate the Palestinian Communist Party's relationship with the PLO and began to work closely with Yasser Arafat.

Ahmed Ali Sulieman Qurei (b. 1937), also known as Abu Ala, was born in Abu Dis, a West Bank suburb of Jerusalem, to a wealthy family. He worked as a banker before fleeing Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967. He joined Yasser Arafat's Fatah, a faction within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), in 1968. In 1993, he served as Finance Minister for the PLO.

THE ISRAELIS

Yossi Beilin (b. 1948) is an Israeli politician and scholar who served in the Israeli Defense Forces during the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War. After the 1992 Labour Party victory, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs under Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Yair Hirschfeld (b. 1944) was teaching in the Department of History at Haifa University in 1993, and had connections to the Palestinian community.

“With his wild brown beard, untamed hair, and bemused expression, Yair looked like a typical Viennese intellectual of the 1920s.”

— Uri Savir, *The Process*

Shimon Peres (1923 – 2016) was born in Poland and relocated with his family to Tel Aviv in 1934. First elected to the Knesset (Israel's legislature) in 1959—where he would go on to become the body's longest-serving member in Israeli history—he was acting as Israel's Foreign Minister under Rabin in 1993.

“Even in our wildest dreams we did not imagine that this meeting might lead to a process that would eventually culminate in the signing of a Declaration of Principles.”

— Ron Pundak, quoted in the newspaper *Haaretz*

Ron Pundak (1955 – 2014) was born in Tel Aviv, studied the history of the Middle East at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and earned a PhD from the University of London. In 1993, he was serving as executive director of the Economic Cooperation Foundation in Tel Aviv.

Yitzhak Rabin (1922 – 1995) was born in Jerusalem to Jewish immigrants from Ukraine. Appointed Prime Minister of Israel in 1974 after Golda Meir resigned, he himself resigned in 1977. Rabin was re-elected Prime Minister in 1992 on a platform that relied significantly on embracing a peace process between Israel and Palestine.



Yasser Arafat (from left), Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for their efforts to create peace in the Middle East. (Saar Yaacov / Israel GPO)

Uri Savir (b. 1953) was born in Jerusalem and studied International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Before participating in the Oslo Accords, he worked for the general manager of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Joel Singer (b. 1950) was a colonel in the Israeli army, where he helped draft its military rules of engagement, before resigning and moving to Washington, D.C. to take a position as an attorney at the prestigious American law firm Sidley Austin.

“He was blunt. He was biting. And he made an arrogant first impression.” — Uri Savir on his first meeting with Joel Singer, *The Process*

April 1920 At the San Remo Conference, the League of Nations gives Britain the mandate to administer Palestine and Mesopotamia, while France receives the mandate to administer Syria and Lebanon.

June 1922 Winston Churchill and the British Cabinet publish the White Paper on Palestine, in which they affirm support for the Zionist cause but also reassure Arab populations that they do not support the eradication or destruction of Arab national sovereignty.

1929 Violence occurs between Jewish and Arab groups during the Western Wall Riots in Jerusalem; more than 200 Jews and Arabs are killed and many hundreds injured.

1936 to 1939 An Arab revolt breaks out in Palestine, protesting against British control and continued Jewish migration into Palestine. These revolts are suppressed by the British administration but lead the British to slow Jewish migration to the area and to more seriously consider a two-state solution.

1939 to 1945 World War II is fought and the Holocaust occurs, during which 6 million Jews and millions of other non-combatants are systematically murdered.

February 14, 1947 Great Britain gives the United Nations responsibility for administering Palestine, and the UN forms the UN Special Committee on Palestine.

1947 to 1949 The Arab-Israeli War, known as the Nakba (in Arabic, “The Catastrophe”), or the Israeli War of Independence, takes place.

May 14, 1948 Israel declares independence.

The United States has long had interests in the Middle East and an ongoing relationship with Israel, including working on several peace negotiations. This was particularly the case after the first Gulf War (Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, 1990 – 1991). Yasser Arafat had supported Saddam Hussein and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, putting him at odds with other Arab nations and weakening his position in the Middle East. Additionally, the Soviet Union was dissolving in 1991, creating a newly close relationship between the U.S. and the Soviets. This filled many foreign-policy watchers with hope that the timing might be right for an Arab-Israeli peace conference.

After eight months of exhaustive diplomacy by Secretary of State James Baker, the U.S., under President George H.W. Bush, and Russia, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, hosted a peace conference in Madrid, Spain. Between October 30 and November 4, 1991, Israeli, Jordanian-Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese delegations met to hold negotiations. The parties continued to meet for bilateral talks in Washington, D.C. on December 9, 1991 and for multilateral talks in Moscow on January 28, 1992.

THE OSLO ACCORDS: KEY FEATURES OF THE AGREEMENT

The Declaration of Principles, what would come to be known as the Oslo Accords, created several shifts in the relationship between Israel and Palestine. It called for Israel to withdraw from Jericho and Gaza, and eventually the West Bank; five years of limited autonomy for Palestinians in those areas; the election of a Palestinian Legislative Council within nine months; and establishment of a Palestinian police force. The question of Jerusalem was left undecided, and Israel was left in charge of border security.

A key agreement was that the PLO affirmed its recognition of Israel's right to exist, and in turn, Israel recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

In 1992, the talks gained steam with the election of Yitzhak Rabin as Prime Minister in Israel. Also in 1992, Bill Clinton was elected U.S. President; the Bush administration would not see the fruits of its diplomatic efforts.

By 1993, however, the talks were at an impasse. They were restricted by their own rules: Palestine was represented by a Jordanian-Palestinian negotiating team, which would not agree to any terms until they connected with the PLO. But the PLO was not in the room, because they were not acknowledged by Israel or the United States as the legitimate representative of Palestine.

At the same time, the Norwegians were setting up a more direct communication channel between Israel and the PLO. The opportunity for direct communication and the atmosphere created by the Norwegians—in which the parties were left alone to speak with each other personally—allowed for more fruitful conversation and led to the Oslo Accords.

Yet the United States was still front and center during the signing of the Accords. In part this was because both Israel and Palestine wanted the legitimacy that being seen with the Americans would bring—and the U.S. enjoyed the credit for bringing about a seminal peace accord.

Both Israel and Palestine were aware that they were negotiating on two different channels. They found a positive flexibility to the secret channel, which was not subject to immediate media speculation. And the U.S. was aware of the Oslo Channel, but did not think it was likely to bring about results.

THE PLACES

NORWAY, ISRAEL, PALESTINE, AND BEYOND



A map showing the land as shared by Palestine and Israel, circa 2010. (Infographic by Good / Column Five)

The secret conversations known as the Oslo Channel actually took place on many dates and at many locations. Most meetings were in Norway, but some were in Sweden and France. They were often held at country homes, where the owners thought groups of Middle East investors and businessmen were meeting. Occasionally they were in hotels, including one instance in which everyone registered with the last name Larsen, as though it was a family gathering. For the purposes of the play, J.T. Rogers sets the action primarily at Borregaard Manor, one of the real negotiation sites in the countryside, a short drive from Oslo.

The most important places in the play are the contentious regions of Israel and Palestine. Borders in the region have changed significantly since those set by the UN in 1947. Borders, lands, and water rights make up a significant portion of the conflict for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Two main regions are discussed in the play. Gaza, located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, borders Egypt on the southwest for 6.8 miles and Israel on the east and north along a 32-mile border. It is geographically isolated from the other Palestinian territory: the West Bank. The West Bank is so named because it lies on the western bank of the Jordan River. It is surrounded by Jordan on the east and Israel on the west, and has a small coast on the Dead Sea.

June 5–10, 1967 The Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria occurs. Simmering tension along Israel's southern border with Egypt breaks into open conflict. When the fighting is done, Israel has conquered the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. For Palestinians, the culmination of this conflict comes to be known as Naksa (in Arabic, "The Setback").

1972 At the Munich Summer Olympics, the Palestinian terrorist group Black September takes 11 Israeli Olympic team members hostage and kills them.

October 6–23, 1973 The Yom Kippur War occurs. Hoping to win back territory lost during the Arab-Israeli War, Syria and Egypt launch an attack on the Jewish holy day, taking the Israeli Defense Force by surprise. Egypt attacks in the Sinai Peninsula and Syria in the Golan Heights. The U.S. rushes to support Israel and the Soviet Union to support both Syria and Egypt—risking engagement between the Cold War superpowers. The UN ultimately brokers ceasefires to end the conflict.

1978 The Camp David Accords are signed, which settle the southern border of Israel with Egypt, returning land on the Sinai Peninsula taken during the Arab-Israeli War. Egypt becomes the first Arab nation to normalize relations and recognize Israel.

1982 Due to increased conflict between Israel and Lebanon that has resulted in civilian casualties on both sides, PLO leader Yasser Arafat leaves Beirut, ultimately settling in Tunisia.

1987 to 1993 The First Intifada occurs. At first a largely non-violent protest by Palestinians about Israeli occupation, it devolves from boycotts and demonstrations to attacks with stones,

Declaration of Principles (DOP) is a set of legally non-binding principles or standards agreed to by those parties who sign it. The DOP referenced in this play is the “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements,” which sought to establish a framework for future negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

Fafo is an independent social science research foundation. Fafo was founded by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions in 1982 and reorganized to become a non-profit foundation in 1993. The Oslo negotiations were started under the auspices of Fafo and its director, Terje Rød-Larsen.

Fatah is a political group founded by Yasser Arafat and a small group of Palestinian nationalists in 1958. The group exists within the PLO, serving as an umbrella organization for a number of Palestinian nationalist groups. Fatah quickly became the most powerful group within the PLO. After the Oslo Accords, Fatah was considered one of the more moderate groups within the PLO. They currently retain the presidency under Mahmoud Abbas.

Hamas was founded in 1987 by Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Dr. Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, both of whom have since been killed by Israel. Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious and political organization with branches throughout the Arab world. In 1988, Hamas wrote its charter, which calls for the destruction of the state of Israel. The charter is still in effect today. Hamas has made political strides among Palestinians, winning



Yitzhak Rabin (from left), Bill Clinton, and Yasser Arafat at the signing ceremony for the Oslo Declaration of Principles, September 13, 1993. (Vince Musi / The White House)

the 2006 election and taking 74 of the 132 seats in the legislature. Part of the popularity of Hamas can be attributed to their extensive network of schools, orphanages, health clinics, and other social services that are not fully provided by Israel or the Palestinian Authority.

Intifada derives from an Arabic word meaning “to shake off.” The term has been used in several Middle Eastern countries to refer to a legitimate uprising against an oppressor or occupier. In Palestine, it is used to refer to the Palestinian resistance to occupation by Israel, specifically between 1987 and 1993 (First Intifada) and between 2000 and 2005 (Second Intifada).

Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is a conglomerate of several Palestinian nationalist organizations created in 1964. In its first decades, the PLO sought to destroy Israel and replace it with a Palestinian state. Yasser Arafat employed military tactics toward this end, including attacks on Israeli civilians. This changed after the Oslo Accords, when the PLO accepted Israel's right to exist in exchange for Israel recognizing it as the legitimate representative of Palestinians. The PLO runs the Palestinian National Authority, and the Chairman of the PLO is also the leader of the government. In practice, the PLO governs the West Bank, and Hamas governs Gaza.

Palestinian National Authority (PNA or PA) was established under the Oslo Accords in 1993 as an interim body that runs parts of Gaza and the West Bank (but not East Jerusalem), pending an agreed-upon solution to the conflict. It is led by a directly elected President, who appoints a Prime Minister and a government.

During rehearsals for *Oslo*, director Nick Bowling (NB) spoke with playwright J.T. Rogers (JTR) about his award-winning play, the real people who inspired it, and that dinner with President Bill Clinton.

(NB) TimeLine first got to do one of your plays, *Blood and Gifts*, as a Chicago premiere in 2013. Can you talk a little about that experience?

(JTR) What was appealing about doing the show at TimeLine was one, the mission of the company—were I in Chicago, I would be a subscriber, put it that way. And it was a cracking production.

What was so interesting was the almost filmic, intimate production in that gorgeous, small house you guys have. That is a play that plays out on a vast scope and was devised to be done so, but it is also structurally a series of intimate conversations behind closed doors, the kinds of which most people never get to hear, and start to realize, “oh, this is how power actually works.” And so, all of a sudden, it was as if we were in the room, and it created this intimacy and this “hush” that wasn’t possible otherwise. That was thrilling.

(NB) Will you share how you came to write *Oslo*?

(JTR) Well, it came out of the New York premiere of *Blood and Gifts*. One of the things I like to do is bring in experts. Bart Sher, the director, brought in this man named Terje Rød-Larsen, who was the special representative for the head of the UN. He came from the world of diplomacy, and everyone found him utterly fascinating. He was sort of dazzling and spirited with his stories of the reality of how geopolitics works, and his incredible adventures in the Middle East. He’s a great raconteur.

I got him to talk about the Oslo peace process, and discovered that he, and his wife, Mona Juul, along with others, had hatched this secret idea of a back channel between the Israeli government and the PLO, where they would secretly slip into Norway and drink Johnnie Walker Black and talk about their kids and try and find common ground. The radicalness of this just blew my mind.

Molotov cocktails, and weapons. The Israeli military responds with force and by the end of the uprising, Palestinian deaths will outnumber Israeli deaths.

December 13, 1988 In a speech at a special UN session in Geneva, Switzerland, Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, declares that the PLO renounces terrorism and supports “the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to live in peace and security, including the state of Palestine, Israel and other neighbours.” It is a first step to opening up a peace process.

August 10, 1990 The PLO, under Arafat’s leadership, does not stand with Arab League nations to condemn the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which alienates it from other Arab nations. The PLO had received substantial support from both Kuwait and Iraq, so is forced to make a choice.

October 30 – November 4, 1991 Under the auspices of U.S. President George H. W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, delegations from Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine meet to discuss peace at the Madrid Conference.

December 9, 1991 Israeli, Jordanian-Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese delegations continue bilateral talks in Washington, D.C.

January 28, 1992 Multilateral talks between Israeli, Jordanian-Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese delegations continue in Moscow.

1992–1993 The Oslo Channel opens and secret talks between the PLO and Israel, facilitated by Norwegian diplomats, lead to the Oslo Accords. (For details of this time period—which encompasses events depicted in the play—visit our lobby experience at the Broadway Playhouse.)

This would be the rough equivalent of secretly getting members of the Obama Administration and Al-Qaeda to break bread together and forge personal bonds. Think what would happen if word of that leaked out. The moment he started talking about it, I thought: there's my next play.

(NB) Wow. And you have put Terje and Mona in the center of a teeter-totter. The real action of the play is the Israelis and the Palestinians, but you've put them at the center, holding that whole thing together.

(JTR) I was just so stunned to discover that this had happened. And that I had access to these Norwegians. I wanted to make a story where everyone was given their due intellectually, and as characters, and human beings. And it's fascinating, to see the context change for audiences in each city. The Chicago audience will have its own experience that I probably couldn't predict at all.

(NB) Here in the U.S., it could become about the left and right in our politics.

(JTR) Well, yes. Life changes your play. That's what's amazing, how it's different. We opened this play off-Broadway and it was just about this moment with Israel and Palestine in Norway. And then seven months later, by the time we opened on Broadway, Trump was elected, Brexit happened, the French Republic almost fell, and all of a sudden it was a very different play.

(NB) Tell us about probably the most famous couple who came to see the play and their response.

(JTR) Bill and Hillary Clinton came, and the audience response to seeing them was unbelievable. Fifteen hundred people yelling and screaming. At the end of that production, Clinton appeared



Playwright J.T. Rogers after winning the Tony Award for Best Play for Oslo in 2017.

on screen, there was video footage of the actual signing ceremony on this huge screen. And the audience spontaneously—I'm going to choke up as I'm telling you this—the audience spontaneously stood up and turned to Clinton and started applauding and yelling “thank you.” And this went on for minutes. And minutes. It stopped the show. And people were weeping, and he got up and was visibly shaken. It was very powerful.

And then we went to dinner. For four hours. And talked about the Middle East, and this whole process, and the process that came afterward during his time in office, which clearly haunts them and grips them both.

(NB) What can you tell us about projects you're working on, and what's next for *Oslo*?

(JTR) I've written a film of *Oslo* that, knock wood, we're going to shoot next year. It's both the same story but very, very different because the medium of film is very different.

And I just did this big play about the Apollo 11 moon landing, one-night-only on Broadway—I wrote a verbatim play based on my interviews with the actual participants of the Apollo 11 program. Plus I've created a television show, and I'm the show runner.

(NB) Well, I think you've written a masterpiece, and I'm thrilled to be working on it.

(JTR) I'm just so delighted, so honored. I can't wait to see it, and I'm so looking forward to coming back to Chicago.

This is only a portion of Nick and J.T.'s conversation. Check out more at timelinetheatre.com/oslo.

1994 Arafat moves to Gaza City and becomes the President and Prime Minister of the newly created Palestinian Authority.

October 1994 Arafat, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin are awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to create peace in the Middle East.

September 28, 1995 A second significant agreement, often referred to as Oslo II, is signed in Washington, D.C.

November 4, 1995 Rabin is assassinated by a Jewish-Israeli student, Yigal Amir, at a peace rally.

July 2000 Talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Arafat break down over the timing and extent of proposed further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank as mandated by the Oslo Accords.

September 2000 Likud political party leader Ariel Sharon visits the site in Jerusalem known to Jews as Temple Mount and to Arabs as Al-Haram-al-Sharif. The visit sparks new violence, which will become known as the Second Intifada.

2000–2005 The Second Intifada, generally seen as the end of the Oslo and Oslo II era of attempted peace processes, occurs. Talks have broken down between Barak and Arafat and Palestinian suicide bombings are on the rise. Tensions erupt when Sharon stages an inflammatory visit to the contested Temple Mount. The Israeli army fires on protestors and Palestinians respond with violent attacks. By the time the violence peters out in 2005, 1,000 Israelis and 3,200 Palestinians will have died.

January 2001 Sharon becomes Prime Minister of Israel and refuses to continue peace talks.

March–May 2002 The Israeli army launches Operation Defensive Shield on the West Bank after a spate of Palestinian suicide bombings. It is the largest military operation on the West Bank since 1967.

June 2002 Israel begins building a barrier in and around the West Bank, saying its aim is to stop Palestinian attacks, but Palestinians see it as a tool to grab land. The barrier route is also

controversial, as it frequently deviates from a pre-1967 ceasefire line into the West Bank.

March 2003 Arafat cedes his post as Prime Minister to Mahmoud Abbas amid U.S. pressure.

June 2003 The U.S., European Union, Russia, and UN offer a road map to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, proposing an independent Palestinian state. Israel and the Palestinian National Authority both accept the plan, which requires a freeze on West Bank Jewish settlements and an end to attacks on Israelis.

November 11, 2004 Arafat dies in Paris.

September 2005 Israel withdraws all Jewish settlers and military personnel from Gaza, while retaining control over airspace, coastal waters, and border crossings.

January 2006 Ariel Sharon is incapacitated by a stroke. He is succeeded as Prime Minister by Ehud Olmert.

December 2008 Israel launches a month-long, full-scale invasion of Gaza to prevent Hamas and other groups from launching rockets.

February 2009 Right-wing parties prevail in Israeli elections, and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu forms a government.

September 2010 Direct talks resume between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, only to falter over the question of settlements.

September 30, 2015 Abbas accuses Israel of not committing to the Oslo Accords and declares that Palestinians “cannot continue to be bound by these agreements.”

September 2016 The U.S. agrees to a military aid package for Israel worth \$38 billion over the next 10 years, the largest such deal in U.S. history. The previous pact, set to expire in 2018, gave Israel \$3.1 billion annually.

September 28, 2016 Shimon Peres dies in Tel Aviv two weeks after suffering a massive stroke.

December 6, 2017 U.S. President Donald Trump formally recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and states that the American embassy will move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

WHAT IF YOU ONLY HEARD A MONOLOGUE
NOT A DIALOGUE?

WHAT IF THE ACTORS SAID
EVERY OTHER WORD ...
... OR SKIPPED EVERY OTHER LINE?

WHAT IF THOSE CONVERSATIONS
IN OSLO HAD BEEN **FORCED**
TO END HALFWAY THROUGH?

THERE WOULD BE NO CHANCE
TO COMPLETE THE STORY.

NO CHANCE TO MAKE HISTORY.

Your ticket purchase is only half the story. TimeLine Theatre—like our peers in Chicago's vibrant community of not-for-profit theatres—depends upon the support of patrons like you to thrive.

Ticket sales cover about 45% of our total income during the season. Donations are vital to ensuring TimeLine's continued success. Without the generosity of our dedicated supporters, we would not exist!

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BACKSTAGE

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: RICHARD G. AND DIANE WEINBERG

We're delighted to recognize one of TimeLine's Board members, **Richard G. Weinberg**, and his wife **Diane**.

Richard joined the board of TimeLine Theatre Company in 2018, but he and his wife Diane were first introduced to the company by attending Step Into Time. Learning about TimeLine at the gala sparked their curiosity. Once they attended a show, their interest in deepening their support solidified.

A Broadway and television producer, he also served on the Board of Directors of Savoy Pictures Ent. Inc. and has been active in arts organizations across the country, from the University of Southern California's School of Dramatic Arts and Utah's Sundance Institute to New York's Gingold Theatrical Group.

Diane has been a Broadway, film, and television actress for many years and is a certified life coach who teaches releasing, a process to enable manifesting goals in life. She has students all over the world and is an avid traveler with a special affinity for India.

A common thread woven through many of the groups Richard and Diane support is the power of the performing arts to promote empathy, equality, and social change while entertaining audiences. When looking for a Chicago-based theatre to support, TimeLine's mission made it an obvious choice.

"There's so much we can learn by studying our past, and theatre is an outstanding format for this education. Its non-threatening environment can open you up to new ideas, new ways of thinking. Learning from the past can only help inform our future."

Richard and Diane are excited to help introduce TimeLine's production of *Oslo* to Chicago audiences. "Our country, and I think the world, are struggling to find a direction. People are searching for a better way forward, but it's difficult to do when everything is so politicized. Theatre can encourage people to listen—something that's becoming harder and harder to do.

**"There's so much we can
learn by studying our past,
and theatre is an outstanding
format for this education."**



Richard G. and Diane Weinberg.

The Oslo Accords didn't succeed, but it was a serious attempt to bring people together who normally wouldn't speak to each other. Speaking is always better than not speaking. There are so many monologues going on today. Dialogue is a much healthier path."

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Historical Research by Deborah Blumenthal, Maren Robinson, and Holly Dayton

Written by Deborah Blumenthal, Maren Robinson, and Holly Dayton, *with contributions by* J.T. Rogers, PJ Powers, Kimberly Montroy, and Lara Goetsch

Editing and Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

Watercolor illustration of Jerusalem by Ufuk Sezgen

Pictured on cover (from left): Bri Sudia, Scott Parkinson, Jed Feder, Anish Jethmalani, and Nick Bowling

Backstory is published four times each season.

Our Mission:

TimeLine Theatre presents stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.

STILL TO COME IN TIMELINE'S 2019-20 SEASON!

EXPLORING TODAY'S ISSUES THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PAST



RUTHERFORD AND SON

CHICAGO PREMIERE

BY GITHA SOWERBY

DIRECTED BY MECHELLE MOE

NOVEMBER 6, 2019 – JANUARY 12, 2020

Written in 1912 and ahead of its time in its depiction of class, gender, and generational warfare, this family drama tells a smart and absorbing story about a woman's "place" in a male-dominated society.



KILL MOVE PARADISE

CHICAGO PREMIERE

BY JAMES IJAMES

DIRECTED BY WARDELL JULIUS CLARK

FEBRUARY 12 – APRIL 5, 2020

Inspired by the ever-growing list of slain unarmed black men and women, this is a powerful, provocative reflection on recent events and the possibilities of collective transformation and radical acts of joy.



RELENTLESS

WORLD PREMIERE

BY TYLA ABERCRUMBIE

DIRECTED BY RON OJ PARSON

MAY 6 – JUNE 27, 2020

Developed through TimeLine's Playwrights Collective, this startling and vibrant world premiere weaves a mother's past with her daughters' present in a complicated tale of family, legacy, and progress.

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