

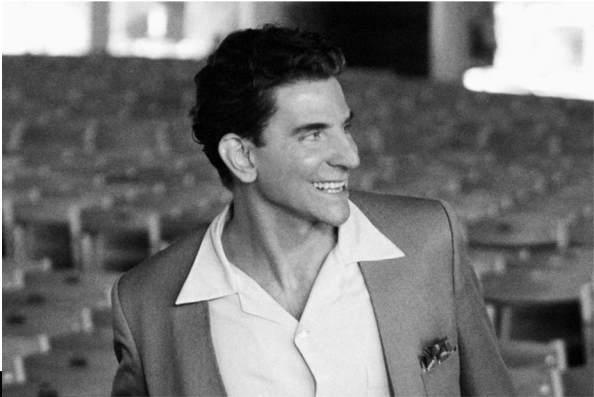


Why Identity Matters: Non- Jewish Actors in Jewish Roles **A Tenenbaum Tutorials Talk**

Sophie Harris

Opening Remarks

Non-Jews in roles that are explicitly Jewish



What is Jewish Identity?





Religious Judaism

Halakhic definition of Judaism: A Jew is someone who is born to a Jewish mother or one who converted 'according to Halakhah'

“halakhah”=Jewish law

Judaism is passed on **Matrilineally**:relating to, based on, or tracing descent through the maternal line(Merriam Webster)

Non-Halakhic: Anyone who is not born to a Jewish mother.

- Non-Halakhic Jews have the opportunity to convert according to Halakhah, and be considered a Jew by these religious delineations



Ethnic Judaism

- **“Yiddishkeit”, also known as Jewishness**
- a person of Jewish parentage and background who does not necessarily actively practice Judaism, but still identifies with Judaism or other Jews culturally



Cultural Judaism

- Oftentimes a mix of ethnic and religious Judaism, following more the customs, traditions, and values of Jewish People
- What is represented most in mainstream media (television shows, movies, plays)
- Caricatures of Judaism stem from varying levels of cultural representations.



Important Terms

Identity-Conscious Casting: making space and embracing how actors and artists can bring their whole identities or even parts of their identities to a process, to a character in theatrical spaces

Deracination: to remove or separate from a native environment or culture. especially : to remove the racial or ethnic characteristics or influences from (Merriam Webster)

- Especially prevalent in Jewish Culture
- Seen in various prominent theatrical works
 - Lehman Trilogy
 - Death of a Salesman
 - Oklahoma!



Katerina McCrimmon, National Tour, 2023



Beanie Feldstein, Broadway, 2022



Barbara Streisand, Original Broadway Production (1964), Film Adaptation (1968)



Lea Michele, Broadway, 2022-2023

My Funny Girl Experience

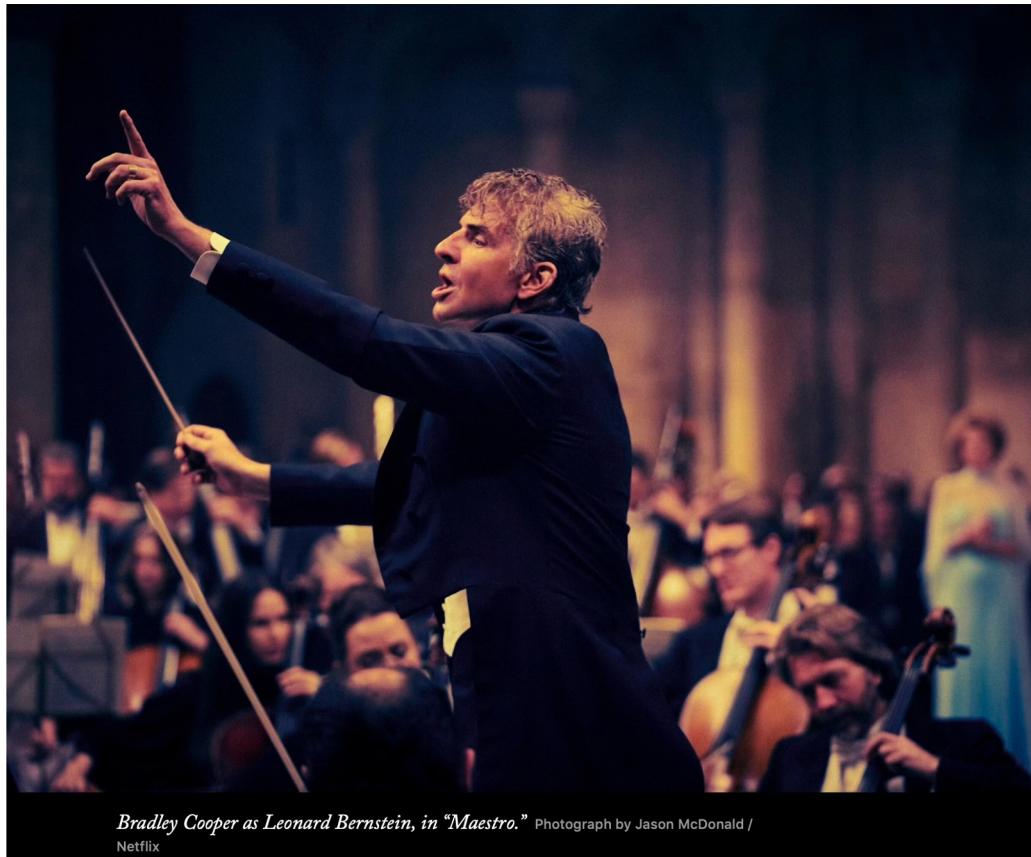


FANNY BRICE (1891 – 1951) was a trail-blazer in the entertainment world. She was born to Jewish immigrants and became a star, building a career in vaudeville, theatre, film and radio. Ms. Brice made her stage debut at Frank Keeney's Theater in Brooklyn in 1906 and it became clear that she was destined to become a showbiz legend.

In 1910 she was contracted by Florenz Ziegfeld for his 1910 *Follies* and she became Broadway's highest-earning star. She performed in 11 Ziegfeld productions and headlined the 1921, 1934, and 1936 *Follies*, where she performed her most famous character, Baby Snooks. Ms. Brice would continue to perform Baby Snooks for a weekly radio program until the end of her life. In 1918, Ms. Brice married Nick Arnstein and the couple had two children together. She married songwriter and stage producer Billy Rose in 1929; they divorced in 1938. A beloved barrier-breaking comedienne and performer, Ms. Brice was honored with two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Ms. Brice's career was instrumental to the future of women in comedy. Her life story and rise to stardom inspired the musical *Funny Girl*.

- November 25th, 2023
- Broward Center for Performing Arts in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida
- McCrimmon does not align with this identity whatsoever
- Seeing her adapt jewish sayings feels like a mockery
- Minstrelsy
- Two key moments:
 - Rat-atat-that
 - Fanny's Opening Night Celebration





Maestro, 2023




Cooper & Bernstein

“What caught viewers’ attention was Cooper’s nose. It appeared to have greater presence—lots more going on, in terms of length, breadth, and over-all affect—than the noses with which admirers of both Cooper and Bernstein are familiar. The news spread that Cooper had worn a prosthesis, and soon nostrils were flaring worldwide, with critics on social media and in the press decrying “Maestro” for propagating an antisemitic trope.”-Rosen, 2023

Righting these wrongs-





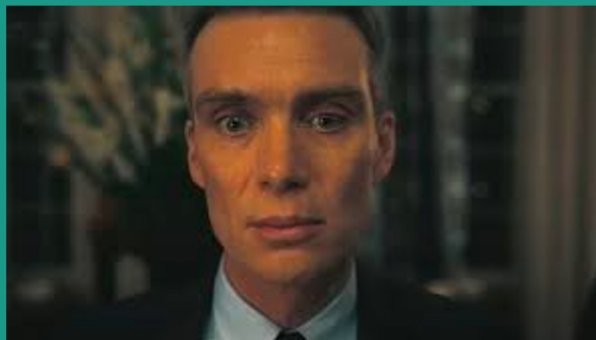
I have come to the decision today that I can no longer play the character of "Missy" on the animated TV show "Big Mouth." At the start of the show, I reasoned with myself that it was permissible for me to play "Missy" because her mom is Jewish and White — as am I. But "Missy" is also Black, and Black characters on an animated show should be played by Black people. I acknowledge how my original reasoning was flawed, that it existed as an example of white privilege and unjust allowances made within a system of societal white supremacy, and that in me playing "Missy," I was engaging in an act of erasure of Black people. Ending my portrayal of "Missy" is one step in a life-long process of uncovering the racism in my actions.

As I look back on the nature and emergence of my own voice in comedy, I know that I have made mistakes along the way. I can't change the past, but I can take accountability for my choices. I will continue to engage in meaningful anti-racist action, to be thoughtful about the messages in my work, to be curious and open to feedback, and to do my best to take responsibility for the ways that I am a part of the problem. Most importantly, though, to anyone that I've hurt: I am so very sorry. Black voices must be heard. Black Lives Matter.

Additional Representations



- Oklahoma!
- Lehman Trilogy
- Marvelous Ms. Maisel
- Oppenheimer
- Fiddler on the Roof



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Questions?
