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This Show Has Taste

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The tempting odor begins wafting through the theatre toward the end of the show. This may not be an odor you're accustomed to in a theatre, but it's warm and welcome.

It's the delicious scent of freshly baked bread, and it's coming from a convection oven on stage. Rotating tantalizingly on the metal rack is a loaf of challah that Deb Filler bakes in *Filler Up!* her one-woman show at the Theatre Project.

The challah, Filler explains, is made from a recipe that belonged to her late father, a Holocaust survivor who operated a bakery in New Zealand, where she was born and raised.

In the course of this wide-ranging 85-minute show, Filler discusses - and impersonates - her father, mother, baritone-voiced aunt, sister, assorted friends and even the women she encounters in group therapy. Along the way, she plays the guitar, re-enacts her first professional acting job - portraying "dead pudgy earthquake victim" in a disaster film - and, of course, she bakes the aforementioned poppy-seed-strewn, braided bread.

A woman of ample but not overabundant girth, Filler admits early on that she is "addicted to food." When she was born, she weighed 10 pounds, or, "six and a half loaves and a cinnamon bun." By age 12, she weighed 140 pounds. A few years later, her mother shipped her to fat camp in the United States.

Filler Up! was scripted by Filler and Lowry Marshall, and while much of it is about food, in a larger sense (forgive the pun), the show is about accepting yourself and forging your own path through life. This may sound like a therapy session of its own, but Filler brings so much humor and understanding to the subject, she keeps it from lapsing into self-indulgence.

Once you get past the awkwardly coy opening - in which Filler apologizes for being late (which she's not) and insists she's having a terrible day - you find yourself rapidly drawn into her unusual family saga. Growing up with a father who couldn't bear to waste food (yet berated her mother for gaining weight), it's hardly surprising that Filler wound up with conflicted feelings about eating.

Because bread is her favourite food, Filler tells us her father never would let her bake it; he was afraid

she'd eat it all. Although she defies him by baking it now, she also abstains, concluding her show by offering the loaf to the audience instead.

Glistening and piping hot, the bread has a rich, yeasty taste. But in the end, what Filler has to offer is more than challah; it's a life-affirming philosophy that warms the heart as much as the stomach.

Filler Up!

Caption:

Actress: Deb Filler Photo(s)

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PRESS QUOTES DEB FILLER

"Extraordinary work, an extraordinary story-teller.." - *Village Voice*

"Filler has an extraordinary talent for mimicry...she dishes up some outrageous impersonations...she brilliantly sets up the laughter..." - *Sydney Morning Herald*

"Filler is a complete chameleon, transforming herself instantly into dozens of relatives and accents...exhilarating and liberating." - *The Independent (London)*

"Consistently clever...extraordinary...tour de force." - *Philadelphia Inquirer*

"magnificent...extraordinary...dazzling...stunning. The press note says she does '35 plus characters'. But I was laughing, crying, thinking and feeling too hard to count." - *The Boston Globe*

"Remarkable..." - *The Age, Melbourne*

"Filler's overriding warmth, relaxed delivery and level of comfort with the material is so engaging." - *The Toronto Star*

"Filler has an extraordinary gift for mimicry ...she has a wonderful smile, and embracing warmth..." - *Globe & Mail (Canada)*

"Filler, a gifted mimic... taps into the same vein of self-deprecating attitude of the great comics. It's the humour of survival and it's never been more aptly applied." - *New York Newsday*

"A consummate performer on every level" - *NOW Magazine, Toronto*

"Brilliant...inspiring...breathtaking...quietly sensational" - *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

"The most striking quality of Deb Filler's performance... evokes the emotional dualism of much great humour (Issac Bashshevis Singer, Woody Allen, among others), which implies that laughter is indispensable."