

## Eve Brandstein Again Helming Barra Grant's Show Of Growing Up As Bess Myerson's 'Ugly Daughter'

By Steve Simmons

Director Eve Brandstein is a big fan of Barra Grant's story of growing up in the shadow of her famous mother, the first Jewish Miss America and trailblazer Bess Myerson.

She directed the premiere and sold-out run of *Miss America's Ugly Daughter: Bess Myerson & Me* last summer at The Edye at The Broad Stage in Santa Monica and is helming the return run, back by popular demand, Feb. 8-March 24 at the Greenway Court Theatre, 544 N. Fairfax Ave., L.A.

"Growing up in the Bronx, I had always heard about Bess Myerson," says Brandstein. "She was an icon of our immigrant family and I found her fascinating. And I remembered the scandal."

Myerson was an accomplished pianist, television personality, New York City's first commissioner of Consumer Affairs, a close advisor to Mayor Ed Koch, and a national spokesperson against anti-Semitism — until she fell in love with the wrong man and went down with her Mafia boyfriend in a judge-bribing scandal.

"Bess was a formidable force when a lot of women didn't step into those areas," says Brandstein. "She was at the vanguard in that way; she was a beauty queen who cared about the world, politics and history."

Brandstein met Grant when the daughter/writer took part in Brandstein's Poetry In Motion group at Beyond Baroque. "Barra wanted to do an evening of stories and I told her I had a better idea," recalls Brandstein, "we could do a



Eve Brandstein

one-woman show."

Brandstein worked with Grant over the course of a year to develop the piece, which features Monica Piper (*Not That Jewish*) as the voice of Myerson, a constant presence throughout the play, heard in persistent phone calls.

The play takes Grant, from an awkward, chubby kid with frizzy hair, buck teeth "and no obvious talent," on the journey of her life as she tries to fit in at school, meet the right man, find a career and forge her own way in the world.

"Although not all of us have been raised by beauty queens, we're all seeking to understand how we came to be who we are," says Grant. "This is a story for any daughter who has had to maneuver her way around the potholes left by her mother while trying to forge her own path."

"I was drawn to this story about the love/hate relationship between Barra and her mother," says Brandstein, "and of a wounded mother (Myerson was always trying to mold her daughter in her



Barra Grant

own image) Barra trying to raise a child without the skills and realizing she would have to the opposite of what her mother did."

Brandstein was also moved by Grant's relationship with her daughter and late husband. "I like the concept of grieving and coming through loss and finding yourself and becoming the person you want to be. A good play should take you through a sense of transformation, and that's what this play does."

Brandstein, a Beverly Hills resident since 1997, also directed Rain Pryor's solo show *Fried Chicken & Latkes* at the Jewish Women's Theatre's Braid, and is an executive producer of the TV series based on the show now in development.

She hoping to take *Ugly Daughter* to New York. "A lot of people there still remember Bess Myerson."

Tickets, \$40, Friday-Sunday, \$25 Monday are available by calling 323-285-2078 or online at [MissAmericasUglyDaughter.com](http://MissAmericasUglyDaughter.com).