

# DAILY NEWS

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## Home theater goes live

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In David Wise's nostalgic one-man show "Momma's Knishes," the Dodgers are still playing in Brooklyn, the Nazis are rising in Europe, actual knishes are baking in the oven.

And Wise is performing in an audience member's apartment.

Similar to such recent productions as Jonathan Reynolds' "Dinner with Demons" and Ed Schmidt's "The Last Supper," "Momma's Knishes" uses the onstage preparation of food as a plot device.

But Wise kicks the theatrical food-show trend up a notch by bringing his 90-minute work to someone's home.

Playing the character of a Jewish housewife and mother in 1938 Brooklyn, Wise, 26, does his shtick before a dozen or so of the host's invited guests — who also take turns helping Wise prepare the knishes.

"I've been interested for a long time in doing theater that involves everyone in the created world, rather than on a stage in that world," says Wise, who originated "Momma's Knishes" in Philadelphia a year ago.

"There's a different dynamic when

everyone in the audience is a part of [the show]."

Wise, who performs in New York one to three times a week (he charges \$600 for a weeknight show and \$800 on weekends), recently took his act to the upper West Side apartment of Janice Meyerson.

"We just thought it was so unique," says Meyerson. "We'd never heard of anything like this before."

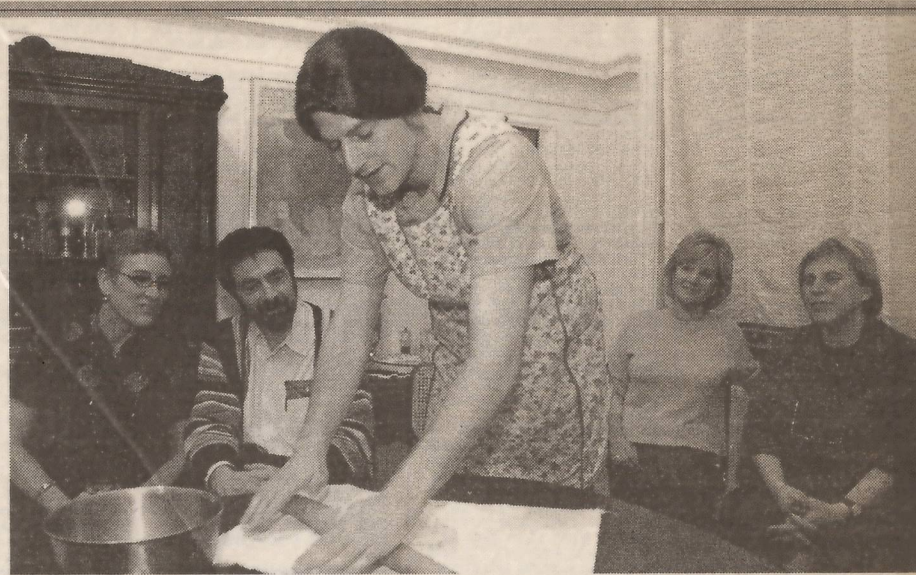
As Meyerson's guests sit around the dining room table sipping wine and waiting, Wise makes his 7:30 p.m. entrance from the kitchen in a wig and flowered apron.

The look is reminiscent of Norman Bates' mother, except Wise wields a rolling pin rather than a butcher knife — and speaks with a Polish accent.

The audience is asked to pretend they are 13-year-old schoolkids visiting the Brooklyn home of their classmate Molly (played by Meyerson) on a weekday afternoon in 1938.

Wise is Molly's mother, Mrs. Grabel, who emigrated to the city from Poland as a young woman, leaving her mother and other family members behind.

The audience is encouraged to interact with Mrs. Grabel as she shows them how



JAMES KEIVOM DAILY NEWS

**CHEWING THE SCENERY?** In Janice Meyerson's West Side apartment, David Wise (c.) plays Mrs. Grabel in his "Momma's Knishes," a show he performs in people's kitchens.

to make homemade knishes — as long as they stay in character, too.

"I'm actually portraying my great-great grandmother," says Wise, who based much of the narrative on his family history.

Wise used an old family recipe for the knishes he serves at the end of the performance.

While they bake — filling the apartment with a mouth-watering aroma — Mrs. Grabel recounts her life as a Jewish immigrant and broadly hints at the impending

horror of World War II.

Although most the people who hire Wise are Jewish, "Momma's Knishes" has a universal flavor that appeals to everyone, says audience member Ted Lazarus.

"All families have the same traditions," says Lazarus, a Manhattan businessman.

"Everybody has a mother who gave them something special to eat, and [the show] makes you remember the great smells coming from the kitchen and everyone sitting around chatting."