

## Meet Canned Goods Director Charlotte Cohn

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# AMERICAN THEATER GROUP



*Canned Goods* Director Charlotte Cohn is a NY-based director, actor and producer who most recently starred in *This Is Not A Time of Peace* (New Light Theater) by Deb Margolin. Her directing highlights include *Church & State* (Berkshire Theatre Group), *The Whole Shebang* and *Baltimore in Black and White* (The Cell Theatre, NYC) and *Best Friends* (Jazz at Lincoln Center).

She has appeared on Broadway in *La Boheme* and *Coram Boy* and her producing credits include *Here Lies Love* (Broadway), *Without You* (starring Anthony Rapp) and *Handle with Care* and *Church and State* with Jason Odell Williams. Ms. Cohn is an Ovation Award Winner and a Bay Area Critics' Circle Award nominee. She is currently developing a musical called *The Sound* based on her father's true story of escaping from Denmark to Sweden in WWII.

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*How did you become involved with ATG and Canned Goods?*

I met (Producing Artistic Director) Jim Vagias at an industry reading of Sharyn

Rothstein's new play, *Hester Street*. He was there because ATG had previously produced Sharyn's plays, *Right to be Forgotten* and *A Good Farmer*, and a mutual acquaintance introduced us. She told Jim I would be a good candidate to direct *Canned Goods*. She was aware of my professional experience, and she knew I was the daughter of an Israeli mother and Danish-Jewish father, who escaped to Sweden during World War II. I was born in Denmark, but moved to Israel when I was 5 years old and lived there until I came to the US in my 20s after serving in the Israeli army.

Once I read the script and met with (playwright) Erik Kahn, I was immediately drawn to the parallels of my father's experience escaping to Sweden, and this incident that is explored in *Canned Goods*. Both were largely unknown occurrences during the war. The theatrics of politics appealed to me, and the opportunity to look at what is behind an event and the causes. This play examines people being treated like puppets on a string, with someone else controlling them, and putting on a show for others to see.

### *How does your background as an actor influence your directing style?*

All my acting experience informs my directing and vice versa. I always ask actors "does this work for you?" It's such a collaborative process and I'm thrilled when actors pose questions that I never thought of when examining the script. I believe I know how to effectively speak to actors as individuals, and not just talk "to the room." I always try to be mindful of their needs. And I firmly believe that a director must create trust with a cast – they must feel safe and feel they have creative input in the process.

### *Why should people see Canned Goods?*

This play is remarkably of our time. It is incredibly well-written, intelligent, precise and emotional and explores an important, obscure incident in history. It's also slightly tongue-in-check and there is an appropriate use of humor to make it very entertaining. There is a lot of interest in this play – people often overhear me discussing it and inquire about it. They are very intrigued. I believe audiences will connect with the play on a strong emotional level. I'm not a fan of "bitter pill" theater – this play doesn't tell you what to feel and think. And in today's techno-centric world, live theater allows an audience an experience like no other. Theater is a launchpad for conversation and discourse and *Canned Goods* will certainly spur many discussions.