

# The Island TODAY

YOUR GUIDE TO THE ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND DINING

## AND ALL THAT CHAZZ

BY DAVID HINCKLEY

When Peter Fogel returns home to Long Island with another brutally frank dissection of human relationships, at least he'll be bringing a friend.

Comedian Fogel comes to the Landmark in Port Washington on Feb. 7 with *"Til Death Do Us Part . . . You First,"* a theatrical exploration of romance whose one is set when his girlfriend dumps him on Valentine's Day.

No, the friend he'll bring to the Landmark isn't his ex-girlfriend. It's Chazz Palminteri, the Oscar-nominated actor who knows something about one-man shows from creating the movie/Broadway show *A Bronx Tale*.

Palminteri caught *"Til Death Do Us Part"* at a theater in Florida and thought it was so entertaining he offered to direct.

Fogel said uh, yes.

"We have a mutual acquaintance who told me he was bringing a friend to the show that night," says Fogel. "I had no idea it was Chazz. I was selling merchandise in the lobby when they came over, and of course, I recognized him from his movies.

"He told me how much he liked the show, and we started talking. I said I was looking for a director, because I'd been directing the show myself, and you know that old line about a lawyer who represents himself having a fool for a client.

"Then he offered to direct, which was credible. I'm so fortunate."

"[Robert] DeNiro helped me years ago," says Palminteri, by getting *"A Bronx Tale"* made into a movie. "So when I see talented people, I like to try to help them."

*"Til Death Do Us Part"* approaches the tragedies, comedies and absurdities of life somewhat differently than Fogel's last

show, *"My Mother's Italian, My Father's Jewish and I'm in Therapy."*

It's still autobiographical, focusing on how a 55-year-old man who has never been married looks at the world of relationships – successful, unsuccessful and amorphous, like in the netherworld of Internet dating.

"When I saw Peter's show, I said man, this is funny," says Palminteri. "You'd like to take this guy home and introduce him to somebody.

"It's got great humor and it's got heart. I told him I'd like to help him take the show to the next level.

"What I'm doing is helping to streamline and shape it. It's a story, with a beginning, middle and an end. I'll say this works, do more on that. Cut this back.

"It's what you do with every show. It's what I did with *"A Bronx Tale."* When I was creating it, I'd write a five-minute part, try it out, get a response, cut it down to 2-3 minutes. It took me a year before I had my 90-minute show, and all these years later I'm still making little tweaks."

"When Chazz makes suggestions, I listen," says Fogel. "Does a peasant argue with Zeus?"

"You always need another pair of eyes. I'd say things to Chazz like, 'Do you think I'm being too hard on women?' and he'd say no, as long as you're funny, it's good."

"You can get away with talking about anything in comedy," says Palminteri. "If you're funny. You can joke about cancer if you're funny. But the closer you get to the edge, the funnier you have to be."

Perhaps in keeping with the confessional nature of *"Til Death Do Us Part,"* which Fogel says is firmly rooted in autobiography, he and Palminteri will come on-stage after the performance for a question-and-answer session.

"I want the show to resonate with the audience on that very personal level,"

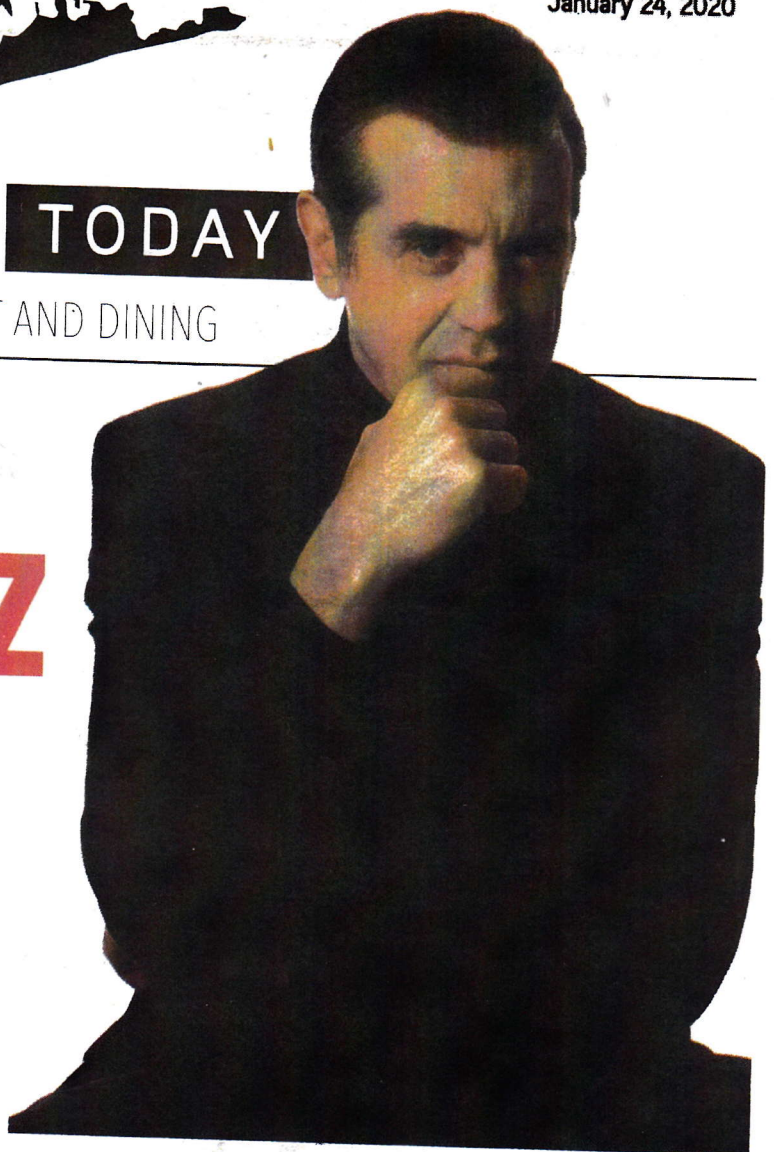


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says Fogel. "I want everyone to find something in it – people like me who have never been married, people who are divorced, people who are happily married.

"The show isn't just about me never finding someone. It's about me, in my 50s, understanding why. It's because in my 20s when my friends were getting married, I chose my career instead.

"In the comedy world, you have a few guys at the top, like Jerry Seinfeld or Ray Romano. Then there are guys like me, who are kind of middle management. I do standup, I do shows, I do voiceovers, I do corporate events. I make a living, but it's constant work. It's hard to maintain a relationship when you keep having to say, sorry, I have to go Cincinnati for an event this weekend."

Even successful performers rarely leave the road completely behind. Palminteri is currently touring the country with *"A Bronx Tale"* – though he still lives in the New York area, which makes a Port Washington show almost like playing next door.

"Being from the Bronx, the Island feels close to home," he says. "I've done a lot of shows there, like at the Paramount

in Huntington."

"Don't forget," says Fogel, "that when Chazz was growing up in the Bronx, getting to The Island was the sign that you'd made it. Even if it was only 10 minutes away."

Fogel himself has pure Long Island roots. "I was born and bred in Baldwin," he says. "In a kinder and gentler time." He laughs. "I did a month at the Landmark a couple of years ago with *My Mother's Italian*. So this is like my homecoming premiere for *"Til Death Do Us Part."*

The long game here, says Fogel, is to take the show to bigger venues or maybe even TV. "I talk about how crazy relationships can get," he says. "I talk about how crazy men can make women. My greatest pleasure is to see a woman who's been happily married for 40 years nude the husband sitting next to her after I make a joke and say to him, 'See?'"

*"Til Death Do Us Part . . . You First"* at 8 p.m. Feb. 7 at the Jeanne Rimsky Theater at the Landmark, 232 Main St., Port Washington. Phone 516-767-6444. Tickets \$28-\$38. Web: [www.landmarkonmainstreet.org](http://www.landmarkonmainstreet.org).