

## When a Flamingo Meets a Seagull: Eb & Flo and the Future of Great Salt Lake

### Description

**Salt Lake City, UT** Plan-B Theatre's newest premiere, *Eb & Flo* by Elaine Jarvik, is as purposeful as it is playful. Jarvik wrote the piece with a clear intention: to spark conversations among Utah's youngest audiences about the shrinking Great Salt Lake, and to show that small actions can ripple outward into real change. The play, designed for grades K-3 and presented through the company's Free Elementary School Tour (FEST), lands lightly on the stage and yet leaves the audience with important questions about water, care, and responsibility. The lake is getting smaller. Eb's line signals the ecological heart of the play.

### Plot

*Eb & Flo* follows a contemplative gull and a runaway flamingo from Tracy Aviary who meet at Great Salt Lake. As Eb worries about the receding water, Flo coaxes her and the audience into listening, laughing, and doing. With catchy songs and interactive moments, the 35-minute FEST tour for grades K-3 turns migration, habitat, and empathy into kid-friendly lessons, ending with simple takeaways: notice the lake, pick up trash, conserve water, and talk to your grown-ups about how to help.

### Birds as Teachers

For many kids, this is a first play and the first lesson lands off the script: how to listen to a friend's worry and stay in the conversation. Flo starts in teacher mode: It's important to show interest in the other person. You need to be excited, he tells Eb, turning a joke into a lesson in care. Then he notices her faraway focus. What kind of worry is it? A big worry, she says. The lake is getting smaller. Then Eb teaches Flo **why Great Salt Lake is receding**, and in the end they agree: Let's remind people that the lake is our friend. And when a friend is sick or in trouble, what do we do? We check up on them. We try to help them. Against the trend of downplaying empathy, the play offers a firm counter: when a society frames empathy as optional or, worse, as a weakness it erodes our humanity and invites tragedy.

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*Eb & Flo (Taylor Wallace)* ?? Photo credit: Sharah Meservy

## Ecological Teaching

What follows is both an ecological primer and a rehearsal for collective action. Migration becomes metaphor??The Bird Highway is a highway in the sky??garbage is not just food for birds but a lesson, and song becomes archive, an embodied memory of what the lake gives and what it needs.

As the study guide reminds students, ??Great Salt Lake is one of the most diverse places on the planet.?? That context reframes the lake not just as a backdrop for two birds but as a hemispheric crossroads for millions of shorebirds and as a fragile ecosystem in crisis.

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*Eb & Flo (Amona Faatau and Taylor Wallace)* ?? Photo credit: Sharah Meservy

## Performance as Archive

As I watched, I was reminded that performance itself is an archive??of relationship, care, and possibility. *Eb & Flo* braids scientific fact (with expertise of Jaimi Butler, Coordinator of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College) and Indigenous ecological knowledge of land-as-pedagogy (with consultation noted to Darren Parry, Elder of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, in the study guide), and the embodied silliness of birds teaching each other to march or balance on one leg. The result isn??t a didactic lecture but a living record of how to care for a vanishing ecosystem.

Plan-B has long practiced this counter-archival work: taking ephemeral performance and turning it into community memory. Here, the performance archives Great Salt Lake not as a statistic or policy crisis but as a place where birds, children, and artists meet.

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*Eb & Flo (Benjamin Young)* ?? Photo credit: Kallie Filanda

## Pedagogical Intentionality

The [study guide](#) (by Jaimi Butler, Penelope Caywood, and Sharah Meservy, reviewed by Darren Parry, Shoshone Elder) centers empathy, relationship-building, and student agency through concrete, age-appropriate activities. Representation here isn??t only about seeing yourself onstage; it??s about recognizing your capacity to act??by conserving water, picking up trash, or talking to ??your grown-ups?? about the lake.

### USBE Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) outcomes, as modeled in *Eb & Flo*:

- 1. Understand & Manage Emotions:** Flo helps Eb name and externalize **her** worry about the lake.
- 2. Set & Achieve Positive Goals:** They identify actions within their control, make a simple plan, and take concrete steps.

3. **Feel & Show Empathy for Others:** Students practice perspective-taking; Flo listens to and validates Ebâ??s worry.
4. **Establish & Maintain Positive Relationships:** They model meeting someone different from you, listening well, and brainstorming together.
5. **Make Responsible Decisions:** They consider how emotions shape choices and how decisions affect self and community.
6. **Self-Advocacy:** They ask for help and clarification when needed and celebrate their strengths.

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*Eb & Flo (Amona Faatau) â?? Photo credit: Sharah Meservy*

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## A Civic Gesture

The tour itself is a civic act. By traveling across Utah schools free of charge, FEST reimagines theatre not as a commodity but as a public good. The free public performances at The Rose, ASL interpreted and ADA accessible, extend that ethic of access. And the digital version, available statewide, amplifies it further.

Under Rapierâ??s thoughtful direction, the ensemble embraces improvisatory energy, holding space for laughter and reflection in equal measure. Arika Schockmelâ??s props (a fanny pack of â??treasures,â?• a found hat) anchor the playâ??s whimsy while pointing to the debris of human presence at the lakeâ??s edge.

## Performer Highlights

**Estephani Cerros (Eb)** delivers physical comedy and an easy rapport with young audiences. Cerros as Eb voices crisp, animated reactions and turns small discoveries into shared momentsâ??inviting kids to lean in and participate.

**Taylor Wallace (Eb)** grounds the piece with warmth and clarity. Whether voicing worry about the receding lake or puzzling through a new idea, Wallaceâ??s active, visible listening models curiosity without shame.

**Amona Faatau (Flo)** radiates buoyant ease and sharp comic timing. Faatauâ??s call-and-response play keeps the room elastic, nudging shy students into giggles and bolder voices while keeping the stakes in view.

**Ben Young (Flo)** threads the scenes with gentle authority. Youngâ??s clean articulation and easy musicality lift refrains and facts alike, helping complex ideasâ??migration, habitat, stewardshipâ??land at kid-height.

Together, the quartet rotates roles with playful elasticity; you can feel them teaching the room how to watchâ??not just how to follow a plot.

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*Eb & Flo (Estephani Cerros) â?? Photo credit: Sharah Meservy*

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## Highlights & Critiques

I was deeply impressed by the thought, care, and preparation Plan-B brings to every school performance. I attended two shows at different schools and saw the same intentionality each time. Rapier and the team clearly prioritize making each child's experience feel special: they arrive early to greet students, invite questions after the show, and then circle up to debrief. Did the questions land? Do they need tweaks for this age group? How can tomorrow be even clearer or more welcoming? That iterative practice shows.

- **Framing the experience.** Kallie Filanda opens by introducing herself, the actors, and the basics—what actors do, what a play/playwright is—then asks, “How many of you is this your first play?” At one school, 180 of 200 (Willow Elementary in Grantsville) attendees were first-timers and at another, 190 out of 385 (Eastlake Elementary) attendees were experiencing their first play, according to Jerry Rapier. That context-setting is gold for young first-time audiences.
- **Access & reach.** FEST is visiting schools across the state, including in San Juan County on the reservation—meeting kids where they are and lowering every barrier to entry.
- **Script construction.** The text is cleverly laced with local touchpoints (Tracy Aviary and fourth-grade field-trip opportunities at Great Salt Lake (plus the Every Kid Outdoors pass for national parks), which helps information stick.
- **Participatory songs.** The songs are catchy and prompt audience participation without derailing momentum, **deepening engagement**.
- **Adaptive facilitation.** I saw performances for K-2 at one school and a mixed K-3 with sixth-graders at another; the team adjusted timing and questions to fit the room.

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*Eb & Flo (Taylor Wallace and Benjamin Young)* Photo Credit: Kallie Filanda

## Suggestions

- It's a language-forward, script-dense show. For the age it is performed for, especially, I wondered if a few visual breathers—(micro-movement beats, gesture-based call-and-response) to punctuate denser informational passages, would help keep the kids more engaged.
- **Costume readability.** I personally loved the bright and clever costumes designed by Arika Schockmel but I did hear a few kids whisper, “They don't look like birds.” Adding small, lightweight **wings** could help early-elementary audiences instantly map character-to-species—especially for students experiencing theatre for the first time.

**Bottom line:** It's really well done. Plan Theatre clearly cares about meaningful interactions with the littles, many of whom are meeting actors—and live theatre—for the first time. The show's craft and the team's care make that first encounter feel welcoming, memorable, and worth building on.

## Conclusion

*Eb & Flo* is small in scale—two actors, 35 minutes, minimal props—but expansive in reach. It is a children's play, yes, but also a pedagogy of care: an invitation to imagine, to feel, to act. Jarvik gives us a flamingo who celebrates and a gull who worries, and together they model the balance we all need:

joy tethered to responsibility.

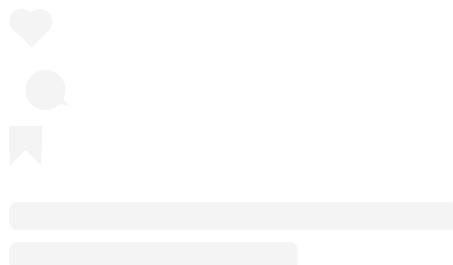
As Eb and Flo realize late in the play, "Worrying doesn't help unless you do something about it." That line lingers as a challenge to audiences of all ages.

If Great Salt Lake is to survive, it will be because of both because we can celebrate its beauty and mourn its diminishment, because we can sing and worry, because we can act.



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## MORE INFO

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## Public Performances of *Eb & Flo*

**VENUE:** Studio Theatre at The Rose, 138 Broadway, Salt Lake City, UT 84101

**TIME:** Saturdays at 1:00 pm

**COST:** Free (all patrons require a ticket, regardless of age)

**Accessibility:** All performances are ASL interpreted; The Rose is fully ADA accessible.

- **October 4, 2025** ?? Sold Out
- **October 11, 2025** ?? Free
- **October 18, 2025** ?? Free
- **February 14, 2026** ?? Free
- **February 21, 2026** ?? Free
- **February 28, 2026** ?? Free

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## School Tour (FEST) Performances

**DATES:** September 2025 ?? May 2026

**COST:** Free to schools statewide (grades K??3)

**FORMAT:** In-person assemblies or digital (video-on-demand) access

**BOOKING:** [Schedule a live performance or register for digital access.](#)

## RESOURCES

Accessibility Large Print Script: [Here](#)

Free Elementary School Tour (Live Performance): [Schedule here](#)

[Register for Digital Access to the Free Elementary School Tour of ??EB & FLO??](#)

Plan B Theatre Study Guide Written by Jaimi Butler, Penelope Caywood, and Sharah Meservy, Reviewed by Darren Parry, Shoshone Elder: [here](#)

Wilsonâ??s Phalarope Coloring pages: [here](#)

WHSRNâ??s Migration Mania Lesson Plan: [here](#)

## From Stage to Shore: How to Get Involved

Theatre can plant the seed, but the work continues offstage. *Eb & Flo* is one branch of a larger movement to imagine and secure the future of the Great Salt Lake. For those ready to turn worry into action, there are many ways to contribute:

- **Contact Great Salt Lake Audubon** ?? at [darkskies@greatsaltlakeaudubon.org](mailto:darkskies@greatsaltlakeaudubon.org) with questions.
- **Volunteer with the Snowy Plover Project (April??August):** Help monitor nests, install cameras, or engage with visitors along the South Shore, where recreation pressures meet fragile

breeding grounds. Questions: [chelsea.cameron@audubon.org](mailto:chelsea.cameron@audubon.org).

- **Join the Intermountain West Shorebird Survey:** Work with Sageland Collaborative and partners to track migratory shorebird populations at over 200 sites.
- **Habitat Restoration Projects at Gillmor Sanctuary:** Seasonal workdays remove invasive plants, replace signage, and restore wetlands at this critical bird refuge.
- **International Coastal Cleanup:** Since 2019, volunteers have removed more than 13,500 pounds of trash from Great Salt Lake's shores. Each fall, FRIENDS of Great Salt Lake leads Utah's contribution to this global initiative.
- **Discover Gillmor Sanctuary:** Explore wetlands through guided hikes, naturalist talks, and hands-on learning.
- **Join an Audubon Chapter in Utah:** Four local chapters and one sanctuary connect bird lovers and advocates across the state.

## About the Playwright

Elaine Jarvik is a Salt Lake City-based playwright and journalist whose work spans intimate family dramas, social satires, and youth-centered ecological plays. A longtime collaborator with Plan-B Theatre, her premieres include *Two Stories, Marry Christmas, River.Swamp.Cave.Mountain.* (for FEST), and *The Coming Ice Age*. Across genres and audiences, Jarvik blends humor with urgency, crafting stories that invite reflection on how personal lives intersect with broader cultural and ecological crises. With *Eb & Flo*, she extends that commitment to Utah's youngest audiences—offering them both joy and responsibility. As she puts it: "That they will have conversations with their grown-ups and will grow up trying to keep the lake alive."•

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cast of eb and flo

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