

"Berlin, Berlin" play by Oana-Maria Hock, graduate theatre student to open

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"BERLIN, BERLIN" TO OPEN AT UCSD FEB. 6

The Berlin Wall was the inspiration for "Berlin, Berlin," a provocative play about real and imagined barriers, by Oana-Maria Hock, a graduate theatre student at the University of California, San Diego.

The new play will be presented by the UCSD Department of Theatre Feb. 6-8 and Feb. 11-14 at the Mandell Weiss Center for the Performing Arts. Curtain time is 8 p.m.; 7 p.m. on Sunday.

Hock, a naturalized American citizen born in Rumania, knew she wanted to write a play based on the symbolism of the Berlin Wall. To collect impressions for her collaborative piece, the playwright traveled to Berlin last summer with director Ross S. Wassermann and set designer Lucie Lortie.

Returning to San Diego, she wrote a dark comedy about an international group of people traveling to Berlin. The people--a motley, eccentric crew--are strangers, each with a deep yearning to get to "the promised land." One hopes to find her sister, another has always dreamed about going to Berlin, a third feels his deceased wife would want him to return to Berlin.

But to get there, they have to cross a lake, and this proves problematical. A soldier on strict orders from his superiors forces them to wait in a nearby forest until a new set of orders comes through.

The play deals with the walls--barriers of fear, mistrust or prejudice--each traveler has built between himself and the others, preventing meaningful communication. Without communication, they cannot act as a group. Day-to-day, banal concerns--shoe sizes, hunger, the urge to urinate or have sex--threaten to consume their initial goal and all other goals of consequence.

In staging the dreamlike piece, director Wassermann uses music by La Jolla Playhouse composer-in-residence Michael Roth and a stark, impressionistic set designed by Lortie. His direction of the play stresses the work of the actors as an ensemble.

On their real-life trip to Berlin, Hock and her artistic collaborators crossed into East Berlin. "We realized at one point that we were taking pictures of the wall and of each other in front of the wall. It was weird."

It hit her that the Berlin Wall--the formidable barrier that divides East from West--had become a tourist attraction.

That such a wall should exist in the first place struck the young playwright as absurd. "When the wall went up 25 years ago, people believed it was temporary. But it's still there. The fact is that people learn to live with this type of situation," Hock said.

"Berlin, Berlin" is the second of a trilogy of transcultural theatre that Hock is writing. The first, "East European Tetralogy," staged at UCSD and directed by Wassermann last year, was nominated by the San Diego Critics Circle for Best New Play of the year. The third play, "Exchange at Cafe Mimosa," is in process.

"I'm very interested in the concept of transcultural theatre because my experience is transcultural—I belong to both the East and the West. This is where my power and understanding is," she said.

Hock worked at the National Theatre of Bucharest as a dramaturge for three years after receiving a master's of art degree in theatre criticism at the Institute of Theatre in Bucharest. With the help of an American critic who befriended her during a visit to the National Theatre, she immigrated to the United States in 1980. She entered the Professional Theatre Training Program at UCSD in 1983.

Wassermann was born and raised in New York City. He received a bachelor's degree at Brown University in history and theatre. Prior to entering UCSD's program, he worked in New York theatre as an actor, stage manager and director.

The travelers in the cast are played by theatre students Randy Braunberger, Julie Briskman, Deryl Caitlyn, Brad Cottrill, Shishir Kurup, Patrick Miller, Maria Porter, and Maggie Stewart. Sean Whitesell portrays the soldier. Mark Lerman and Elaine Vescovi 'lay camera-toting tourists, underscoring the absurdity of what is taking place.

Richard Riddell, chairman of the UCSD Department of Theatre, designed the lighting for the production. Graduate student Lori Catlin designed costumes and David Leyton designed sound. Linda M. Funsten is stage manager.

Tickets for "Berlin, Berlin" are \$5 (student) and \$9 (public), available at the Mandell Weiss Center Ticket Office, the UCSD Student Center Box Office, the ARTS/TIX booth in downtown San Diego and all TicketMaster outlets. For information and to charge-by-phone, call 534-4574.

UCSD Theatre presents:

BERLIN, BERLIN

By Oana-Maria Hock

Directed by Ross S. Wassermann

Original music composed by Michael S. Roth

Scenic Design by Lucie Lortie

Costume Design by Lori S. Catlin

Lighting Design by Richard Riddell

Sound Design by David Leyton

Stage Manager: Linda M. Funsten

CAST:

THE OPERA SINGER - Randy Braunberger

ELEONORA - Julie Briskman

MR. HARTE - Deryl Caitlyn

LANCELOT - Brad Cottrill

MOHAMED - Shishir Kurup

VASILE - Patrick Miller

MARGARETE - Maria Porter

CHERIE - Maggie Stewart

THE SOLDIER - Sean Whitesell

THE NUN- Sheila Macdougall

THE AMERICAN COUPLE - Mark Lerman, Elaine Vescovi

The play takes place in a forest by a lake near Berlin.

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