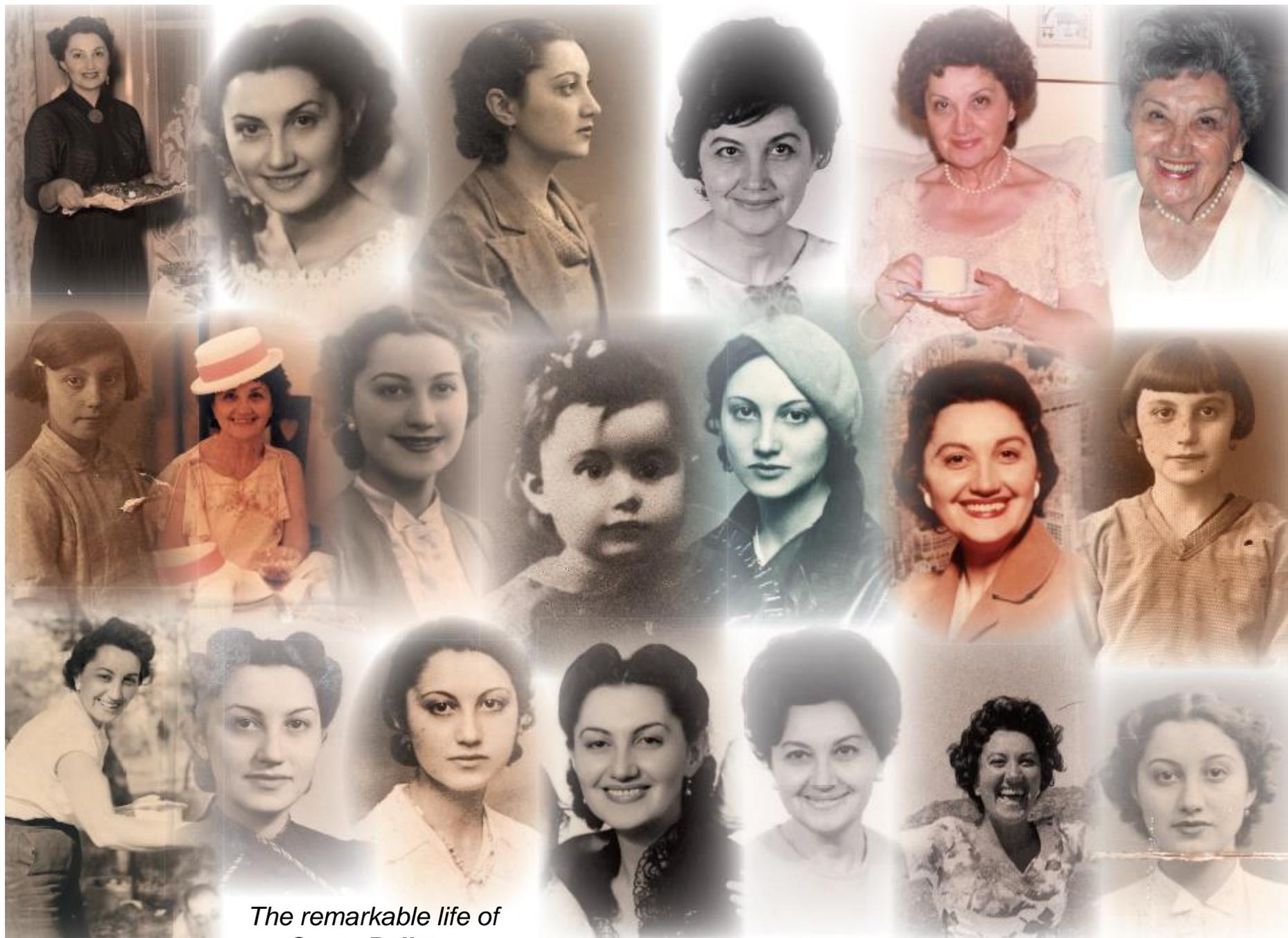


AVIVA PELHAM

SANTA'S STORY



SON AND



The remarkable life of
Santa Pelham

Stage production of Santa's Story

Created by and featuring award winning performer Aviva Pelham

When 90 year old Santa Pelham was persuaded to write her fascinating life story, it was intended so that her memoir would be there for future generations.

But Santa's story became something much more: a cathartic experience, an inspiration for song and recently, a one-woman show performed by her daughter, Opera Diva, Aviva Pelham. Aviva brings the moving text to life detailing her mother's journey from Germany, to Spain, to France and then to Africa - punctuated by wonderful live *Klesmer* music.

Santa's Story is directed by multi-award winning Janice Honeyman with designs by the acclaimed Mannie Manim and Dicky Longhurst who round up a heavy-weight artistic and creative team.

Santa's Story has run to capacity audiences so far in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Helsinki, London, Hürth and Cologne. In 2015, *Santa's Story* was staged in Cape Town, New York and Durban with Australia confirmed for November 2017 and a number of other locations currently being considered.



Aviva and Santa Pelham

(Opening performance, Cape Town, August 2012)



Televised preview of Santa's Story (Simcha Episode 14)

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qg8brwcjeCo>)

Aviva Pelham



Aviva is one of South Africa's most gifted and loved artists. She sings an exceptionally wide range of music from the repertoire of opera, musicals, operetta, oratorio and cabaret.

In a career spanning almost 40 years, Aviva has enchanted her audiences, brightened stages and spread the love of song in South Africa and abroad. She is a highly sought after singer, director and lecturer.

Born into an extremely musical family in Zimbabwe, her home was filled with music and every member of the family sang. Since making her debut in the role of Norina from "Don Pasquale" she performed extensively on local and international stages, television and radio.

Aviva has dominated the stage as Violetta in "La Traviata", Rosina in "Barber of Seville" and is equally at home as Musetta in "La Boheme", Susanna in "Marriage of Figaro", Gilda in "Rigoletto", Norina in "Don Pasquale", Marcellina in "Fidelio", Adina in "L'Elisir D'Amore", Zerlina in "Don Giovanni", and Oscar in "Un Ballo in Maschera"

In addition, she has starred in the leading roles in operettas including "Die Fledermaus", "La Belle Helene", "La Perichole", "Night in Venice", "Student Prince", "Great Waltz", "Merry Widow" as well as countless musicals such as "My Fair Lady", "Sound of Music", "The King & I", "Fiddler on the Roof", "Man of La Mancha", "Kiss Me Kate", "Into the Woods" and "Kismet" notching up over two thousand performances and delighting audiences all over the world.



**Santa's Story
productions**

2012

Cape Town

2013

Johannesburg

Cape Town

Helsinki

London

2014

Hürth

Cologne

2015

Cape Town

New York

2016

Cape Town

2017

Cape Town

Melbourne

Sydney

2019

Herzliya

AVIVA PELHAM
SANTA'S STORY

FRANCE
SPAIN
POLAND
GERMANY

DIRECTED BY JANICE HONEYMAN LIGHTING BY MANNIE MANIM DESIGN BY DICKY LONG

29 AUG-9 SEP

THE FUGARD STUDIO

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SANTA'S STORY

A few years ago, we decided it was time to record my mother, Santa's, amazing life story. Using tape recordings and endless conversations, my daughter, Gabi, put text to page and Santa's fascinating journey from Germany, to Spain, France, and finally, Africa, came to life. Santa's Story still resonates today; people in desperate situations, racism, xenophobia, lost years and broken dreams are all around us. Her's is a story of adversity, courage, hope and triumph. Transforming it into a one woman show, interspersed with music, is a personal milestone and a tribute to my phenomenal 94 year old mother.

Aviva Pelham

CREATIVE TEAM

Santa's Story was scripted by Aviva Pelham and Janice Honeyman from the original memoir written by Gabi Sulcas.

Director: Janice Honeyman

Designer: Dicky Longhurst

Lighting Design: Mannie Manim

MUSIC

Matthew Reid: MD and arranger - clarinet, sax, keyboard.

Petri Salonen: Violin

Nicky Jansen: Keyboard, guitar, accordion, flute.

All the songs chosen have special significance in Santa's life.

La Vie en Rose and *This is my Lovely Day* sung by Santa Pelham

DEDICATION

I dedicate my memoir to the memory of my beloved parents and brother who perished during the Holocaust. My hope is that it may serve as a legacy to my children, grand children and great grand children as well as many generations to come. I am proud to be part of a people who have endured thousands of years of persecution, discrimination and hardship. Yet we remain a strong and vibrant nation - a light and example to the world.

Santa Pelham

AVIVA PELHAM

Award winning Aviva Pelham is one of South Africa's foremost performing artists, having distinguished herself in countless starring roles in opera, operetta, and musicals and concert. Her vibrant personality and outstanding voice have shone on the stages of major theatres locally as well as in London, Paris and Israel. Aviva has a passion for uplifting programmes and mentors fresh talent from all walks of life. She has directed galas, concerts, fundraisers and has a Master's Degree in Music.

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Fugard Theatre, Artscape, Susan Danford, Jason Tozy, Roy Hunter and Graham Weir. Also to Richard Freedman for the loan of the banners from the "Holocaust - Lesson for Humanity" exhibition developed by the Cape Town Holocaust Centre.

Santa's Story on sale: R150
Aviva's CDs on sale: R75
www.avivapelham.co.za

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Aviva Pelham's astonishing story

Celebrated opera singer Aviva Pelham recounts an astonishing story of how her mother, Santa, survived the Holocaust.

Peter Feldman – 8 February 2013

It creates an extraordinary entertaining slice of theatre.

In this rare theatrical gem, Pelham gives shape and form to her mother in a touching and emotional journey, given a poignant edge by songs sung in Yiddish, German, English, Hebrew, and Spanish.

Santa married a man from Rhodesia, whom she only wrote to a few times through a friend's introduction. She decided to give up everything and moved out of war-torn Europe and headed for a dark, unknown Continent and a totally new life.

The ebb and flow of Santa's existence is brought beautifully to life by the stylish and enchanting Pelham, whose songs, which have a special significance in Santa's life, add tone and texture to the story. She is complemented by a three-piece klezmer band comprising Matthew Reid (clarinet, sax, keyboards), Petri Salonen (violin) and Nicky Jansen (piano, guitar, accordion and flute).

Directed by the renowned Janice Honeyman, "Santa's Story" captures the turbulent time in which Santa lived and her intense desire to survive. She moved from Germany to Spain and to France before her African adventure. This cleverly structured work is based on an original memoir by Gabi Sulcas with a script by Pelham and Honeyman.

The show is enhanced by the use of slides depicting Hitler's Germany, pictures from the family album and the words of some of the songs.

A packed opening night audience were given a wonderful surprise at the end of the performance when Santa herself, a sprightly 94-year-old, was helped on stage from her front row seat and engaged with her daughter in song. This lifted the roof and the prolonged applause was a justification of how much the audience had enjoyed her tale.

Two songs, "La Vie en Rose" and "This is my Lovely Day," were recorded for the show by Santa at the age of 89.

In her programme notes, Santa Pelham dedicates her memoir to the memory of her beloved parents and brother who perished during the Holocaust. "My hope is that it may serve as a legacy to my children, grandchildren and great grand-children as well as many generations to come," she writes.

The story is not only about Santa. It enshrines a universal theme about life and living and mirrors the horrors of racism and xenophobia, of people in desperate search for hope, of broken dreams and shattered lives.

It will resonate, as true theatre often does, with everyone who sees it.

"Santa's Story" is on at Old Mutual Theatre on the Square until 17 February.

Santa's Story: Of heroes and of heartbreak

Genevieve Vieira – 8 February 2013

Masked behind her sweet and gentle smile, though, lies a dark and painful past.

The story starts in Germany 1918. Santa is one of the lucky ones who survived Hitler's campaign against the Jews.

Holocaust stories are always upsetting. Historically, they remind of grave injustices, in which normal people were persecuted, discriminated against and put to death. However, they need to continue to be shared so that future generations do not travel down the same path.

Pelham is an award-winning opera performer, and she narrates her mother's heroic life story, interspersing her monologues with song in this one-woman show.

Recounting the extraordinary events of Santa's life, Pelham tells of how, in Thirties Europe, Jews were forced to hide their religion and culture for fear of being persecuted.

"Don't play with her," says a young German boy to his friends during a game of hopscotch.

"She killed Jesus."

Five-year-old Santa is left distraught, thinking, "But I didn't kill anyone!"

Fleeing from Germany, Santa travelled to Spain, then on to France and finally to Africa (after she agreed to marry a man she'd never met), living the life of refugees all the while. Heartbreakingly, she was unable to help her family escape and they perished in the gas chamber.

The tears now running down Pelham's face are no mere stage prop, but honest emotion stirred by her mother's courage and heartbreak.

This very personal storytelling accompanied by a trio of musicians, who juggle between them clarinet, saxophone, keyboard, violin, piano and accordion. Pelham sings in Hebrew, Spanish, French and Yiddish, showing great variety and range in her performance.

This is a heart-warming story of life and love in which Santa underlines this fact: "Hitler didn't win.

Something of my family and heritage still remained."

A tragic story that still resonates

Santa's Story is a powerful condemnation of behaviour that's barely changed.

Lesley Stones – 8 February 2013

On the way home the words of an old pop song were looping through my head: "I can't understand what makes a man hate another man."

The tune was nothing like the traditional Jewish and European songs I'd just listened to in Santa's Story, but they were the most fitting words as you question why humans inflict such suffering on others.

Santa's Story isn't some jolly fairytale about Christmas, it's about two decades of horror for the Jews in Europe. Yet despite the dreadful memories revived on stage, it's a captivating and often humorous tale focusing on Santa Pelham, an ordinary woman who lived an extraordinary life.

Santa's daughter is opera singer Aviva Pelham, who co-wrote the autobiography and poignantly plays the role of her mother in this one-woman show.

It's a traumatic tale to be sure, and made me realise that the persecution of the Jews in German didn't begin with the war, but was already going strong throughout the 1930s. The family was hounded from Germany into Spain, then hounded from one war zone to another as a hatred for Jews not only blazed from the Nazis, but from ordinary citizens too and spread like a cancer across Europe.

For me the most striking line came near the end, when Santa says: "Hitler didn't have his way." Yet the frightening thing was seeing how his insane fury against another race had cascaded down to poison the thoughts of everyone. The similarities with xenophobia in South Africa are remarkable - ordinary people can be turned so easily by a bit of hardship and angry rhetoric to inflame blind fury with unspeakable results.

Santa's Story also shows how not all the whites who washed up in South Africa came to pillage, plunder and subjugate. Santa came for safety, driven out of Europe and willing to marry a stranger in another land as a lifeline.

Sombre issues of starvation and isolation, the separation of families and the loss of her parents and brother to the death camps are recounted vividly by Pelham in a perfect pitch of sorrow and hope, stoicism and resignation. Her voice is beautiful as she sings songs from the different times in different countries, in German, Spanish, French, Yiddish, Hebrew and English while a screen translates the words so none of the impact is lost.

She's backed by Matthew Reid on Clarinet, Petri Salonen on violin and Nicky Jansen on the accordion, a melancholy looking trio that also adds some lighter touches before the tale becomes too sad to bear.

Director Janice Honeyman also helped to craft the script, which was drawn together from some original taped memoirs augmented by impeccable research. The stage set features a few chairs that Pelham moves between as she recalls the rich history of her mother, a feisty woman whose life was dictated by the actions of others but saved by her own reactions to the unbelievable brutality inflicted on a nation.

Santa is 94 now, but walked on stage to take a bow and sing along with her daughter. It's an emotional evening, and - sadly - quite perfect for South Africa today as this nation also turns on itself with racism, misogyny, crime and violence.

Santa's Story rings clear and true

Jennifer de Klerk – 9 February 2013

If you don't end up with tears in your eyes, you come very close as you experience this poignant and beautifully told story.

It is candid and honest, a tale of loss and pain, heartbreak and unexpected joy that rings as clear and true as a bell; small wonder as this is Santa's Story, as told to her granddaughter and narrated with effortless professionalism and charm by her daughter, opera star Aviva Pelham.

The exhibition in the foyer gives you an idea what to expect with its informative and graphic details of the Holocaust, but the story itself starts in 1918, when Santa is born in Germany in the shadow of the First World War.

Her close-knit family battles through the years that follow, building a comfortable and prosperous lifestyle – too prosperous as Hitler rises to power. Forced to flee the Gestapo they try to rebuild their lives in Spain, only to be caught in the middle of the Spanish civil war.

The family ends up in Paris, living a fearful, hand-to-mouth existence as refugees.

Aviva tells the story simply and vividly, aided by a versatile set, a few well-chosen props and evocative mood music from the trio of musicians behind her who accompany her on snatches of song – lullabies and Jewish songs, dance rhythms from Spain and France – most of them translated on screens on each side of the stage.

Projected family pictures and snippets of war footage add immediacy and authenticity.

When she is 20, on the basis of a friend's recommendation and seven letters, Santa leaves for darkest Africa to marry a (short) man she has never seen – Jack Pelham, a Polish Jew who had landed up in Rhodesia via Palestine.

Although she is bitterly homesick for her family, by all accounts, and the projected montage of family pictures, accompanied by Santa herself singing This is my Lovely Day, recorded when she was 89, it is a surprisingly successful and happy marriage.

But Santa's grief is not over. War breaks out, she loses contact with her family and finally learns that her parents and younger brother have died in the Holocaust ... but for Jack Pelham and his letters, she would have been with them.

It's a remarkable story and Santa emerges as a woman of charm and character, with an irrepressible streak of humour.

As a piece of theatre, this is a gem, impeccably staged, acted and sung.

On the night I was there, Santa herself, aged 94, was in the audience and joined her daughter on stage for the final number. In the end, there is joy ...

Santa's Story is directed by Janice Honeyman and scripted by Aviva Pelham and Janice Honeyman. It stars Aviva Pelham and runs at the Old Mutual Theatre on the Square until February 17.



A Review of Santas Story at the Fugard Theatre

Cape Town Magazine

A review of the evocative one-woman show that focuses on upliftment and perseverance in the face of the Holocaust and its devastating effects on individual lives.

Holocaust stories are always harrowing. Historically, there is nothing 'lovely' about a story set against the backdrop of 1930s Europe and the rise and fall of Hitler. Yet, from within the context of this historical horror and with great tenderness, Aviva Pelham, both the daughter of the play's living protagonist and a renowned South African opera diva, exacts a beautiful and resonating performance.

Santa's Story is a one-woman show recounting the extraordinary and true facts of how Santa Erder, Aviva's mother, narrowly and repeatedly escaped the Nazi onslaught across Europe, only to find herself eventually landed in Southern Africa, a survivor of the Holocaust. Her inadvertent journey to Africa starts in Germany in 1933 as the family flees to Spain. When the Spanish civil war makes life unbearable they flee to France, living in a single room like true refugees. Eventually, a series of letters leads to the arranged marriage that saves Santa's life. Heartbreakingly, she is unable to help her family escape one last time, and they perish in the concentration camps.

A trio of Klezmer musicians, scattered around the stage behind Aviva, accompany her storytelling. The very personal narrative is interspersed with songs sung in English, Yiddish, Hebrew, Spanish and French, and each song choice is deeply meaningful. As if it weren't personal enough to witness a daughter telling her mother's story, two of the songs in the show are recordings of Santa herself singing.

Original black and white family photographs, as well as one of Santa's handwritten letters, projected onto the backdrop, further personalise an already intimate production. However, the quick succession of songs, and the dignified, even way in which disturbing facts are delivered (without outrage or venom), keep the production from slipping into pathos. Bolstered by elements of humour, grace and poignant music, the strength of this show lies in its depiction of the rise of anti-semitism and the Holocaust through the portrayal of one extraordinary woman. However, the performance's tone is also kept surprisingly light as the horrors of the war unfold. Santa Erder (now Pelham) is lovingly portrayed as a woman of Chutzpah, charm and great emotional resilience. While Santa easily wraps the audience around her finger, stories of her own mother feature prominently in the show, and by all accounts, Aviva Pelham's grandmother deserves a show of her own.

At a time when most audiences fear 'heavy' stories and prefer light entertainment, Santa's Story manages to deal with a very serious subject in a palatable and enjoyable way. The production is a celebration of life and love – the only way to counteract the hatred and fear spread by the Nazis in the past, and the generalised xenophobia that has taken hold in our day. Unfortunately, its themes are no less relevant today than they were in the 1930s.

Passionate Story Of Survival Against The Odds Soars

Peter Tromp – 6 September 2012

2012 as a theatre year is finally gathering steam. For the most part it has been an uneven, slightly underwhelming annum, but in the past week alone I have seen 'Murderer' at the Intimate Theatre (it is still running at the Intimate Theatre until September 8; book at www.webtickets.co.za), Magnet Theatre's impressive 'Kragbox' (that just finished its run at the Artscoae Arena) and now 'Santa's Story', which would be a highlight in any theatrical year.

Honeyman has always been at her best when helming a story with an authentic, humanistic core. She displayed this to magnificent effect in plays like 'Vatmaar' and 'Shirley, Goodness and Mercy' and with 'Santa's Story', opera diva Aviva Pelham's absorbing account of her mother's escape from Nazi occupied Europe and subsequent stationing in Africa, she is back to her brilliant best.

Nobody tells a story quite like Honeyman and when she has a good one to work with, as she does here, the results are usually spellbinding.

There's not a lot going on stage; at least not anything that shouts "direction!"

There is however not a misplaced second in this play. It doesn't feel directed so much as lovingly sculpted.

People usually associate good direction with obvious visual cues like moving stage parts and props and commotion, but Honeyman shows that paying attention to the finer details, like rhythm and pacing, can count for even more.

She utilizes Pelham marvellously and the performer forms such an intimate bond with the audience that it is difficult to detach after the show is over.

Stories of survival against overwhelming odds aren't new, but when they are presented with such clarity of vision and with such focused passion, they can be very special indeed.

Review Santa's Story

Fugard Theatre Studio 29 August to 9 September 2012

Clifford Graham

Lest we forget...

Santa's Story is a thought provoking and compelling new work. It seems especially timely because of its subject matter. After all, it touches on many of the issues now preoccupying people around the world today. The Jewish holocaust of World War II is as relevant a piece of history now, as it was in the early post war years. Recently as more and more information has come to light, we are made more aware of the underlying reasons, however unfounded, for its insidious rise and the inevitable effects on individuals.

Yad Vashem, the Worldwide Centre for Holocaust Research has undertaken to record as many individual stories from this period as possible. From this initiative the remarkable story of Santa Erder's life has been published in book form. Her , well known opera singer Aviva Pelham, collaborated with director Janice Honeyman to adapt Santa's Story for the stage.

While Santa's Story deals with an escape from the holocausts' clutches, she, like most Jews who managed to flee Europe at the time, did not escape its horrors entirely. Santa Erder, with her family, fled Germany as early as 1933 settling first in Spain. Later, as a result of the civil war which raged through that country in 1936, the Erders were forced to head north to France just before the German occupation. Santa, age 20, was fortunate to be taken up in a (via correspondence) with Jack Pelham, a Polish Jew living in Rhodesia and as a result of this paper romance, was able to leave Europe as the Nazi's began their horrific anti-Jewish pogrom in France. Sadly, which happened so frequently as countries closed their borders to Jewish refugees, she had to leave her family behind. Their escape was at an end.

This adaptation begins as a trio of Klezmer musicians take to the stage followed by Aviva Pelham as Santa Erder. It takes a great deal of heartfelt courage to take on a role so deeply personal, especially, as was the case on opening night, with Santa Erder (now Pelham) being seated in the front row of The Fugard Theatre Studio witnessing her daughter taking on the person of the mother to tell this tale of hardship, love and devotion.

Interspersing the text with music and song in Yiddish, French and English, Aviva Pelham delivers a compelling and captivating narrative. Dicky Longhurst's design is simple, of the period, and serves to reinforce the fluidity of Santa Erder's existence in Europe.

The music as accompaniment to Aviva Pelham is provided by Matthew Reid (clarinet, saxophone and keyboard), Petri Salonen (violin) and Nicky Jansen (keyboard, guitar and flute).

The collaboration of Aviva Pelham and Janice Honeyman has created a poignant and resounding piece of theatre which tests our reaction to our own prejudices and xenophobia. Quoting from the piece, a young Santa remembers a little German girl who once said; "Don't play with Santa, she killed Jesus".

English translation

Cologne / Hürth – November 2014

Von Hanna Styrie

At many theaters in many countries Aviva Pelham "Santa's Story", the touching life story of her mother, already shown on stage. Now the Revue is finally available in Hürth - the birthplace of Holocaust survivors Santa Pelham.

HÜRTH -

In South Africa, in London and in Helsinki Santa Pelham-grounding has always sat in the front row when their poignant life story was listed on the theater stage. Ironically, in Hürth, the city where she was born in 1918 and from which she and her family were expelled by the Nazis, they could not be there because she has a few months ago broke her hip in a fall.

Santa Pelham-earth electrode youngest daughter Aviva, a very well-known in her native South Africa opera singer, has brought the moving fate of the Jewish girl from Berrenrath that survived miraculously the Holocaust in the form of a revue on stage. On the initiative of city archivist Dr. Manfred Faust and thanks to generous sponsors, visitors' Santa's Story "could now also experience at the community center.

Exclusion, flight, expulsion, new beginning

This in texts, songs and photographs a life is told, which is characterized by exclusion, flight, expulsion and a new beginning.

Santa wanted to have nothing more to do with the country where her parents and her younger brother had been killed by the Nazis. Reluctantly she did not enter into the contact attempts by Manfred Faust. Only when a street in the new development area in Berrenrath In 2003, her family name, at his suggestion, she traveled with a large entourage at the inauguration. Unforgettable Faust will remain the memorable day, as then in the village pub for piano accompaniment Hebrew songs were sung. Since then the connection is not torn down.

At Santas 90th birthday Aviva has published the eventful life of the mother in book form, with the support of her daughter. The parents Simcha and Maita grounding came to Germany during World War II Poland. The workers in the industry Knapsack they sold soap and washing powder, it is a thriving grocery trade developed, and the Jewish Couple built for themselves and their children Santa, Levy and Chaim a house in Berrenrath. In 1933 she had to leave the country under pressure from the Nazi regime. They went to Spain, where they built up a new existence. In 1936 she fled the fascists - mother and daughter went ahead on a coal steamer to France, the father and the sons followed. Again, the earth electrode were left with nothing.

The strikingly beautiful Santa said in 1938 about to enter an arranged marriage with Jack Pelham in Rhodesia - in the hope of being able to pick up their family there later. But it was already too late.

Maita and Simcha and her son Chaim were killed in Auschwitz. Santa and Jack Pelham, who meet only a week before the wedding, had to cope with yet more blows, but led a happy marriage, which produced the daughters Ruth, Naomi and Aviva.

Solo show impressed audiences

Aviva Pelham traces this adventurous life full of ups and downs, full of risks and hazards in 90 minutes in her solo show. It is assisted by the musicians Matthew Reid, Petri Salonen and Nicky Jansen that accompany the presentation of sensitive French chansons, Yiddish folk songs and Hebrew lamentations. The charismatic singer moved with her stage presence and her big voice, the audience in the packed town house immediately captivated.

On a screen in the background family photos were projected that emphasized the authenticity of the events. Unforgettable stay the memorable scenes where Santa has to take farewell of her family, and her cry when she learns of her death.

With all the tragedy, but "Santa's Story" is one thing above all: a commitment to life and a tribute to a strong, exceptional woman who has found the strength to forgive.

Additional references



PREVIEW 1

Televised profile of Santa's Story (Simcha Episode 14)
Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qg8brwcjeCo>



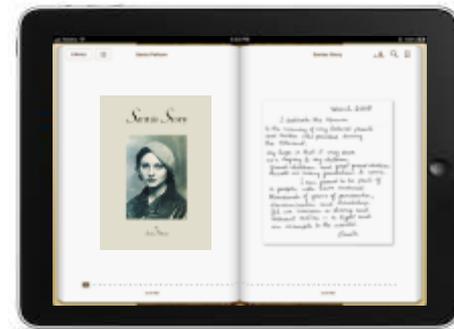
PREVIEW 2

Televised profile of Santa's Story (Espresso)
Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fg0zxCYt4uw>



Kindle book

Available at the Amazon store



iBooks

Available at the iBook store