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A very different type of play

A haunting family story becomes inspiration



Marcia Kash Marcia Kash's play is based on a story told to her by her father.

John Rennison/The Hamilton Spectator

"This play comes from a very personal place."

Playwright Marcia Kash is speaking about her latest play. About to have its world première at Theatre Aquarius, it's a work of family, redemption and, above all, hope.

Based on a story told in her family, Kash's play is set in Toronto in 1948. Joe Aarons has searched for any trace of family members alive in the displaced persons camps in Europe following the Holocaust.

They borrow heavily to bring their nephew Freddy to Canada. When he arrives, things are not as they should be.

"This story was told to me by my father in the mid-1990s," Kash says. "It's haunted me ever since. That's why I just had to write it down."

A successful actress, director and playwright, Kash is particularly known for comedies that make audiences laugh out loud. For *This Moment Alone* is a very different kind of play.

"That's not to say it doesn't have humour," Kash is quick to note. "Like life itself, it will sometimes make you laugh and sometimes make you cry."

An attractive woman with expressive eyes, Kash reminds you of those popular 1960s paintings. You know the ones — waifish young women with large haunting eyes. They follow you round the room and won't let you go.

"It's amazing to me, but some of the people who lived this story will actually see it opening night," Kash says. "That gives me immense responsibility to tell their story well."

For *This Moment Alone* may come out of the Holocaust, but Kash insists it's not a Holocaust tale.

"It asks some pertinent questions about how you survive such a horrific event," she concedes. "That's true. I know, too, every time I went back to the play, I had to return to a pretty dark place. But this is a play essentially about forgiveness. It's about how you make yourself go on, how you continue to live. It's universal, really. It's not tied to one time or place."

"Joe in the play was my grandfather. He managed to get one of his nieces into Canada before the door slammed shut. You know, anti-Semitism was pretty rampant here back then, though we've managed to shove that under the rug."

The conflict at the heart of Kash's story is whether you take someone in or chuck him out. After the war, the family brings a man to Canada they believe to be their nephew. That causes them to face certain issues. Finally, a big decision must be made. The play's about that decision.

"I wrote a radio version for the CBC in 1998 called *Thicker Than Water*. In that script, my father, actor Murray Kash, played himself."

"As time went on, I felt I hadn't really dealt fully with the story. I knew I hadn't finished what I started."

Kash went to Poland and to Auschwitz. She did a lot of research.

"I came to the place where I understood what it means to know you have to let go. You can hate what happened, but you can't transfer that hatred to a race of people."

Later, looking at Kash buried in the corner of a cold rehearsal hall as she watches director Sarah Garton Stanley shape her play, I wonder how she remains still. If she has comments to make, she bites her playwright's tongue.

"I trust Sarah," she says with a shrug.

"She's worked on this project with me for five years. For me, it's about stepping back I suppose. I mean, I chose not to direct my own play."

"The good thing is," Kash continues, "I don't have attachments to my words. I'm not precious about that. The play's had five drafts. Words come and go. You expect that when you write."

Kash studied in London, England, at the Drama Centre, along with Colin Firth. She worked at the prestigious Royal Court Theatre, a London hotbed of iconic work. She's acted on Broadway with the likes of Frank Langella. Her comedy, *Who's Under Where?*, written with Doug Hughes, is a staple of regional theatre. It's had more than 100 productions worldwide and been translated into five languages. It will be performed at the Drayton Festival this summer.

This summer, Kash will direct *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical* at the Charlottetown Festival in Prince Edward Island.

For This Moment Alone is a Talmudic reference to the hope that exists for humanity. When a person does a good deed that he doesn't need to do, God looks down and says, "For this moment alone, it was worth creating the world."

Gary Smith has written on theatre and dance for The Hamilton Spectator for more than 30 years

Need to know

Who: Marcia Kash

What: For This Moment Alone

Where: Theatre Aquarius, Dofasco Centre for the Arts, 190 King William St.,

When: March 23 to April 9

(Pay what you can March 22)

Tickets: 905-522-PLAY