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Open Your Community

“Survivors” Premiere



Ryan Torok

Inspired by the lives and words
of ten Holocaust survivors.



The cast of “Survivors.” From left: Sheer Aviram, Seth Keller, Yahm Steinberg, Almany Narula, Michael Boose, Nyani Totty, Casey Adler and Andrew Abaria. Photo by Kathrine Kohl

“Survivors,” a touring Holocaust play attempting to teach about the dangers of prejudice, had its West Coast premiere at the Museum of Tolerance, on Sept. 10.

Playwright **Wendy Kout’s** moving, educational drama draws from eyewitness testimony and features a diverse cast of six young actors portraying ten Holocaust survivors.

“The cast was just so raw, real and passionate in the performance,” Kout told the Journal after the MOT show. “It was thrilling. We’re very honored to be part of that.”

The program drew a sold-out crowd. Partners were Arts for Change, Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles, Shepher Foundation, Holocaust Museum LA, the StandWithUs Holocaust Education Center, BJE March of the Living, Teev Events and Keshet Chaim.

The hourlong show, a chronological retelling of historical events of the Holocaust through a humanistic lens, proceeds with rapid-fire dialogue and action. Each of the six actors are constantly shifting into numerous roles. Costumes changes occur onstage with the actors’ backs to the audience. Minimal stage props and backdrops are more an opportunity than a hindrance: At one point, the actors knock on the sides of their suitcases to recreate the ominous sound of approaching Nazi soldiers’ boots.

“Survivors” was conceived in 2017, with the CenterStage Theatre at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Rochester, NY commissioning Kout to craft a play based on the lives of ten survivors who’d immigrated to Rochester.

For **Genie Benson**, co-founder of Arts for Change, becoming involved with the play has helped her process the loss of her late mother, Holocaust survivor Sidonia Lax, who died in Dec. 2022.

“It’s helped me grieve, because I feel like I’m doing this for her,” Benson told the Journal. “This is something that feels good to be doing. The most important thing to my mom was to keep these stories alive.”

At the Museum of Tolerance, a post-performance talkback featured Kout and the cast in discussion with MOT Director **Liebe Geft**. The cast, which includes both Jews and non-Jews—one actor is African American, and another identifies as Indian-Thai—said the themes of the show resonated with each of them differently.

“They all have their own stories, and they all connect in their own way,” Benson said.

Upcoming “Survivors” performances are scheduled for Oct. 15 at the Ronald Reagan Public Library as well as on Oct. 19 at the Marjorie Luke Theatre in Santa Barbara. For additional information, visit reaganfoundation.org/programs-events/events-calendar/survivors-an-auschwitz-exhibit-program or teev-e.simpletix.com.