

EAST OF BERLIN

Reviewed Saturday 7th September 2013 by Barry Lenny for Broadway World

Seventy years on, and with falling educational standards, the War and, more so, the details of the years after, with the hunting down of war criminals, is probably not as well known to many younger people as it should be. Many of those responsible for the worst war crimes managed to escape to South America, a story in its own right, where their money was welcome and its source unquestioned. This play, by Canadian playwright, Hannah Moscovitch, brings those events to mind once again but the focus, this time, is on the children of those escapees.

East of Berlin opens with Rudi at the door of his father's house in Paraguay, returning after seven years studying medicine in Germany. He takes us back to the time shortly before he left, explaining why he did so, and how that trip changed him. His blissfully naïve childhood crashes in around him when his schoolmate, Hermann, mentions Rudi's father's work during the war in connection with their current task, dissecting frogs.

Rudi had accepted that his father was a Wehrmacht doctor, treating wounded soldiers at the front, then being moved to a safer location after being wounded. He now realises that the safer location was as an SS officer, a doctor at Auschwitz. It had never occurred to him that only those who were behind the greatest atrocities needed to flee to South America. He now realises the truth about the entire German community there.

With his life in turmoil Rudi leaves for Germany to study, where he meets Sarah, an American student who turns out to be Jewish, from a family of holocaust survivors. This, too, causes changes in Rudi, but the arrival of Hermann again leads to complications and his return to confront his father.

For Adam Carter, who plays Rudi, the work is a series of lengthy monologues, with short dramatised flashbacks with Hermann and Sarah. It is also a psychologically complex role, as we see his choices, from a sexual encounter with Hermann, his trip to Germany, from where his father had fled and can never return, his relationship with a Jewish daughter of a concentration camp survivor, all building a pattern of reacting to the knowledge of what his father is and, consciously or subconsciously, taking on the guilt for what his father did and doing all of the things that he knows his father will hate, whether or not his father is aware of them. It is a large and difficult role that Carter handles with great skill in a powerful performance.

Tom Cornwall is Hermann, the catalyst for the start of Rudi's journey and, after turning up in Germany, the catalyst for the tension between Rudi and Sarah, and for Rudi's return home to his journey's end. Cornwall creates Hermann as clearly a very different person to Rudi, because he is already armed with the knowledge of his own parents' background and has reconciled with it, and the advantages that it brings to him. Cornwall's performance leaves one thinking that, with his seemingly unconscious exposure of the truth about Rudi's father, and his artful manipulation of situations, that Rudi had inherited, or learned, much of his father's skill. Cornwall gives a multi level reading to the role.

Clare Mansfield plays Sarah, giving us a New York Jew with all of the self-assuredness and inner strength, coupled with a thirst for knowledge, to enable her to travel to the country that almost killed her parentS. **Mansfield** brings out all of the conflicts Sarah encounters with developing a relationship with a German boy, and the enormous emotional upheaval when she finds out the full story, too late. Some of the best moments in the play are when Mansfield and Carter are together.

This is a strong piece of theatre and definitely something that should be seen by those who do not know the history of those parts of the War that are not referred to as much as the various land, sea and air battles. This work highlights attempted genocide and other unpleasant aspects of the conflict that many would like to forget, yet it is happening to a greater or lesser degree in many of today's conflicts, which makes this work very relevant.

There are, incidentally, some parallels with the true life story of Brigitte, the daughter of Rudolf Höss, designer, builder, and Kommandant of Auschwitz, which can be read [here](#).