



OREGON PERFORMING ARTS

Theater, dance and classical music in Portland and throughout Oregon

[Performance Top Stories](#), [Theater Reviews](#) »

Theater review: 'Kindertransport' at Jewish Theatre Collaborative probes the depths of a traumatic past

By [Richard Wattenberg](#), Special to The Orego...

February 28, 2010, 2:15PM



Aaron Pearlman A scene from "Kindertransport."

As its first ever fully mounted stage production, Portland's [Jewish Theatre Collaborative](#) presents a psychologically riveting interpretation of [Diane Samuels'](#) "Kindertransport," a heart-rending drama about disturbing events and their shattering repercussions.

Set in the 1980s, "Kindertransport" focuses on a woman's efforts to come to terms with her childhood experiences as one of the 10,000 German-Jewish children whose parents sent them to England in late 1938 and early 1939. These parents, unable to leave their German homeland, put their children on trains and shipped them out to what they hoped would be a better life away from [Hitler's Third Reich](#).

These parents' actions seem reasonable given a Germany which was rapidly becoming more and more inhospitable to Jews and perhaps even more reasonable given what we know about the holocaust that would befall German as well as other European Jews over the next half-dozen years.

Still, the trauma of being uprooted from everything they knew surely did irreparable harm to children who likely felt abandoned by those they most needed and loved. Generally, these children were never reunited with their German families, and while some may have been fortunate enough (as is Evelyn's younger self, Eva, in "Kindertransport") to be adopted by caring parents in their new country, these young ones would inevitably have been emotionally scarred. As is true in this play, these scars affect the ways these children would relate to their own children.

“Kinder-transport”

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, through March 21

Where: Artists Repertory Theatre, 1515 S.W. Morrison St.

Tickets: \$15-\$25, 503-512-9582 or www.jewishtheatrecollaborative.org

Director Sacha Reich's solid cast skillfully probes the chilling psychological depths plummeted by the play. As Evelyn, Patricia Hunter initially appears as an unflappable, strong somewhat rigid woman, who compulsively strives to keep her life ordered and tidy -- a character aspect that Mark Loring's set reinforces with its many neatly piled and labeled boxes, giving the stage the look more of a well-regulated warehouse than of an attic in a suburban home.

Though at first a bit brusque in her relations with her daughter, Evelyn is not without affection for her. As this mother is forced to face her past, which we see dramatized in scenes intermixed with those of the present, her severe façade cracks and Hunter lets us see Evelyn's vulnerable, insecure inner self.

Heidi Hunter adeptly traces the young Eva's transition from a crumpled, frightened German 9-year-old to a more grounded, emotionally restrained English 17-year-old. In her portrayal of Evelyn's daughter, Faith, Jack Wells appropriately conveys both the unrelenting stubborn impetuousness and innocent idealism of a college-age adult.

While Kate Mura portrays Helga, Eva/Evelyn's mother, as a devoted and loving but disciplined mother, Michele Mariana ably blends an earthy sturdiness with a gentle sweetness in her presentation of Evelyn's English mother, Lil.

Doren Elias creates a number of characters, including a Nazi border guard, an English "organizer," a postman and a station guard. He gives each a particular stamp but with his deeply resonant voice he conveys the ominous authority underlying all of them.

Additionally, Elias takes on the role of the Ratcatcher. A frightening version of the **Pied Piper who abducted and destroyed the children of Hamelin** in the 13th century, the Ratcatcher here is a figure of Eva/Evelyn's imagination -- threatening to carry off Hamburg native Eva and her contemporaries in the 20th century. Through expressively menacing movement, Elias and later Kate Mura, as a Helga who in sending her child away briefly becomes in Eva/Evelyn's mind one with the Ratcatcher, convey the nightmarish dimensions of this mythic character.

Unquestionably, the older Evelyn, her adoptive mother, Lil, Evelyn's daughter, Faith, the young Eva and her mother, Helga, all seek to do the right thing, but emotional pain is unavoidable. Samuels offers no easy remedy for this suffering. Even as Evelyn tries to put the past behind her, the production's eerie final tableau reminds us that no matter how much we try to bury or lock away our past, it remains alive within us.

-- **Richard Wattenberg**