

THEATER AND FILM IN ISRAEL

BY JAMES LEWIN

Entering through the massive stone archway of the 16th Century Turkish built walls of David's Citadel, next to Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, we find

ourselves in a gutted ruin, with flames flaring up here and there. The audience, who have bought tickets to The Wars of the Jews by Yehoshua Sobol, find their entrance to the auditorium inside the

citadel blocked. In the crisp evening air, everyone comes to a stop, hypnotized by the eerie mood of the ancient rocks all around. A deathly pall hangs over the enclosure. Suddenly, something begins to stir in the shadows.

As from nowhere actors appear from all over, under, around and through the historic fortifications. Returning from the grave, these victims of the Roman conquest and destruction of the Holy City, begin softly and rhythmically mumbling and grumbling slowly, their voices build into a frightening lament of oppression and reproach, leading to the apocalyptic condemnation of the High Priest of the Temple and the dire warnings of the wise Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakai. If the Jews respect and care for each other, the millennium may yet arrive.

The outstanding theatrical production of the year, the spectacle portrays the polarization and division of the people of Jerusalem into two factions, the "fanatics" and the "moderates" with the eventual victory of the extremists and

bloody elimination of any voices appealing for compromise. Closing following recorded history of the revolt against Rome which led to the destruction of the Jewish State, the intended parallel to contemporary events, though unstated, couldn't be more obvious.

The recently opened Habimah National Theater production of The Workroom, by French playwright Jean - Claude Grumberg, directed by Israeli - born Michal Guvrin revolves around the more recent tragedy of the Holocaust. It tells the story of survivors attempting to return to normal life and represents an effort to forge a new sense of Jewish identity in the aftermath of unspeakable horror.

On a less serious note, the Habimah's hit of the year was an adaptation of Beaumarchais' The Marriage of Figaro, a parody of grand opera in which all the female parts are played by bearded gentlemen. Another box - office success was the Cameri Theater's adaptation of Yentl, based on a story written by I. B. Singer, the moral of which is that "mistake are made in Heaven, too."

Another adaptation, A Simple Story produced by Habimah, based on a novelette by Agnon portrayed the conflict between a spiritually inclined young man and his materialistic environment.

For comedy fans, the year left something to be desired. All in all, it turned out to be a rich and impressive year for the Israeli stage and screen. Competing on a level which compares favorably with the best Western cultural standards, Israeli theater and film offered historical and contemporary fare, original and translated, which seems to prove the vitality of our cultural scene.

SS OFFICER GOES ON TRIAL

BONN (WNS) -- Gustav Richter, 69, accused of complicity in the deportation and murder of Rumanian Jews during World War II has gone on trial in Frankfurt, it was re-

ported here. Richter contributed to the "final solution" when he served as an aide to the official responsible for the "Jewish question" in Rumania, according to the State Prosecutor.

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