

# Twins share acting ambition, empathy

['My Sister,' from E1]

shadow of Nazi persecution gathers at their doorstep. It slowly becomes clear that the Nazis will no more tolerate Matilde and her disability than they will the Jews.

Although the story is set more than 80 years ago, the Hinkler sisters are quick to point out that it remains relevant today because it trades currency in rich themes including human rights, freedom of expression and disability awareness.

"The audience doesn't see her as having a disability," Emily says of Matilde. "They see her for who she really is because her sister does — a smart, intelligent writer who is passionate about the world."

The play was written for the Hinklers by Janet Schlapkohl while she was a student at the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, a master's program at the University of Iowa, while the sisters were juniors at the school.

Schlapkohl is also the founder of Combined Efforts Theatre, which practices inclusion by making all roles available to actors with disabilities. At the time of the company's founding in 2002, Schlapkohl was a special-education instructor at a high school in Iowa City.

Schlapkohl worked closely with the Hinklers, a process that resulted in 75 drafts of the play before the sisters first performed it at the university in 2013. "My Sister" was so successful that it soon moved from a 60-seat theater to a 200-seat theater and later toured the state.

When the Hinklers decided to move to Los Angeles about a year ago, they came across an ad for the Hollywood Fringe Festival, which champions emerging artists each summer.

"My Sister" became one of the most talked-about shows of the festival, and the Hinklers won the Duende Distinction award for acting and an Encore Producers Award, which resulted in their current run at the Odyssey.

"As artists we realize that we can't wait for opportunities to come to us," Elizabeth says of the sisters' decision to play the Fringe Festival despite being new to town and having few connections. "It's about creating our own opportunities."

They produced the show themselves, and director Paul David Story came onboard. While Story helped them to bring the world of the play to life, the Hinklers made it their mission to reach out to audiences who might take a special interest in the show and its message, including the United Cerebral Palsy of Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, retirement homes and organizations for Holocaust survivors and twins.

The Hinklers are petite, standing 4 feet 11, with striking eyes and short-cropped brown hair. They were born three months premature and were each only 2 pounds when they entered the world, raised in the Chicago suburbs by math-minded parents who also placed great value on the arts. The sisters said their time in L.A. has encouraged their impulse to have more empathy for others, especially in a city where it can be so easy to lose.

Sitting backstage at the Odyssey after a recent matinee, the women tuck their legs up on a couch, finishing each others' sentences as they recall a chance encounter that they can't seem to shake.

## 'My Sister'

Where: Odyssey Theatre, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles

When: 8 p.m. some Wednesdays, some Thursdays, all Fridays and all Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays. Ends March 13.

Tickets: \$15-\$34  
Info: (310) 477-2055 or [www.odysseytheatre.com](http://www.odysseytheatre.com)  
Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

nee, the women tuck their legs up on a couch, finishing each others' sentences as they recall a chance encounter that they can't seem to shake.

They were driving to the theater a few nights back when they passed an intersection near Sepulveda and Olympic boulevards that is often frequented by homeless panhandlers. On this particular night, however, the corner's occupant wasn't a homeless man. It was a man with a cane and glasses who looked as if he could have been their father. He was holding a sign announcing that his daughter had a terminal illness and he could not afford her medication.

The Hinklers drove past him in silence, but when they got to the theater, even though they were late preparing for that evening's performance, they decided to go back.

They had no cash on them but Emily urged Elizabeth to get out of the car and talk to the man to hear his story and take one of his slips of paper with information on how to help.

"We get nervous for shows, but that was one of the most fearful things I've ever done," recalls Elizabeth, who gave the man a hug, which nearly brought him to tears. "I was heartbroken."

They dedicated that night's performance — and the next day's too — to the man and his family.

"Our goal is to give a voice to people who don't have one, especially in L.A.," says Emily, adding that they are working to develop "My Sister" into a feature film. "So people can see others for who they really are and do something to make this world better."

[jessica.gelt@latimes.com](mailto:jessica.gelt@latimes.com)

Los Angeles Times

# CALENDAR

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2016 • [LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR](http://LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR)

## 'Sister' act puts twins into 1930s Germany

Emily and Elizabeth Hinkler star in a tale of cabaret, cerebral palsy and Nazis.

By JESSICA GELT

Identical twins Emily and Elizabeth Hinkler were born an hour apart. They attended the same college, grew up to be actresses and live together in Los Angeles. They are both getting married this year. To hear them tell it, these similarities are merely the serendipitous re-

sult of knowing each other intimately throughout life, not the kind of cosmic identical-twin connection that people often ask about.

Whether such a connection exists or not, the idea of it is partially responsible for the allure of watching them perform in a two-woman show, "My Sister," playing at the Odyssey Theatre through March 13. Set at the bitter end of the decadent Weimar era in Berlin, just as Hitler is cementing his rise to power, the play explores the lives of twin sisters living in a one-room flat, struggling to survive on dreams and meager rations of sa-

sage and cheese.

The twins, Magda (played by Emily) and Matilde (played by Elizabeth), are identical in every way except for one: Matilde is afflicted with cerebral palsy that has drastically impaired her speech and rendered her left side dysfunctional. A whip-smart cynic with a knack for political satire, Matilde writes material for Magda to perform at a local cabaret. Although her disability makes it nearly impossible to leave their flat, Matilde lives vicariously through Magda's stories of the theater while the dark

[See 'My Sister,' E10]



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

THE HINKLER TWINS, Emily, left, and Elizabeth, are starring in "My Sister."