

MegilLA

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Anne Frank at 90, She still has our ear

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How do you keep Anne Frank relevant? In 2013, a video game was released that allowed users to relive a day in her life. Helping us to imagine a day in her life that she very likely yearned for is “Anne, A new Play,” at the Museum of Tolerance. Coming to use at what would have been her 90th birthday in June, the play imagines a scene in her could-have-been post-war life, to help us to dig more deeply into what we know and feel about what happened to her.



Timothy P. Brown and Ava Lalezarzadeh in a scene from “Anne, A New Play.”
Photo by Michael Lamont

In the opening scene we see Anne, played with touches of charm and humor by Ava Lalezarzadeh, sitting at an outdoor café in Paris. She meets a man who turns out to be a publisher, and slowly begins to tell him the story burned into our memories from “The Diary of a Young Girl.”

In the moments before the scene changes to Nazi-occupied Holland, I felt like I was having one of those dreams of nether-worldly logic; the kind where you once again see someone who was close, but died. In a dream like this, and in the theater as well, I always want to know: How have you come to me? And why?

As to the how, the play premiered in Amsterdam in 2014, and it is no surprise that Anne Frank, still speaks to us, like the precocious, pushy, and lonely teenage girl we imagined from the book.

She has never been far from our sight. Her diary remains stocked in book stores, both new and used, and schools continue to assign it, as evidenced by the numerous copies available at L.A.’s public libraries.

The international tourist can visit her house in Amsterdam, and peer into her unblinking eyes at Madame Tussauds in Amsterdam and Berlin. If like an actress on the stage, you would like to be Anne Frank, you can even order an “Evacuee Girl Costume” on Amazon.com.

As to the why, the story of Anne Frank, more than at any time in recent memory speaks to our fears. Even before Trump and the rise of white nationalism and anti-Semitism in California and the U.S., Jews were playing Max Englander’s (What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank) somewhat morose parlor game of “Would You Hide Me.”

With the image of young white men carrying tiki-torches in Charlottesville while chanting “Jews will not replace us,” still burning in our minds, it doesn’t take much of a leap, to feel our own anxieties about our futures and those of our children, being expressed on the stage. (Adding to the vibe, there’s an immersive exhibit on Anne Frank upstairs in the museum with separate admission.)

Adding to our angst, during the majority of the play, we watch Anne’s family and others in hiding. We see their plight through a teenager’s point of view. She doesn’t understand why her existence has been threatened in this way, and today, we don’t get it either. Why us?

As the story progresses to its well-known conclusion, and we hear the sound of the gestapo’s siren and the pounding on the door, the question shifts from “would you hide me,” to how can we stop this from ever happening again?

“Anne, A New Play,” Museum of Tolerance, 9786 W. Pico Blvd, through July 22, Sundays, at 3 and 8 p.m., Mondays at 8 p.m. Tix.