

Gender fluidity as seen in the concentration camp at Buchenwald

'WALKING TO BUCHENWALD' FORCES YOU TO EXPERIENCE CHANGE

By LENI FELICE

Tom Jacobson, one of LA's most acclaimed gay playwrights, loves to play with theatrical form.

His newest play, which he calls a "shattering comedy," tackles questions of gender, cultural and national identity, as well as politics, marriage death — and the mutability of theater.

Titled "Walking to Buchenwald," it begins previews on Sept. 9 at the Atwater Village Theatre in Los Angeles, where it is being presented by Open Fist Theatre Company.

"Walking to Buchenwald" introduces us to a couple named Schiller and Arjay, who have taken Schiller's parents on their first trip to Europe. There, Schiller and Arjay plan to tell the parents that they are planning to marry.

Jacobson has written the younger couple's characters in such a way that they can be played by either men or women. The Open Fist production will feature two alternating casts, one featuring two women and the other featuring two men. The possibility also exists to mix and match those to arrive at two heterosexual couples.

How does the play change depending on which cast is viewed?

"Theater is a mutable thing, which is what makes it living and unique," Jacobson said. "Every night of a production is different, and every production of the same play is different. I love the idea that who you cast changes the way you feel about both the character and the situation. That's something I always like to play with in my work."

As the four travel through England, France and, finally, Germany, they discover what it means to be American in a world that no longer admires the U.S. According to the press notes, "Guinea pigs playing cricket, dead bodies that talk and an



MANDY SCHNEIDER and AMIELYNN ABELLERA alternate with CHRISTOPHER CAPIELLO and JUSTIN HUEN in the roles of Schiller and Arjay.

PHOTOS BY RODERICK MENZIES

unexpected trip to a concentration camp lead to a shocking yet poignant conclusion."

Jacobson is one of LA's most important writers. He has written over 70 plays, and has had more than 90 productions, winning multiple awards. This is not the first time he has experimented with gender and form in his work. His solo play, "The Captain of the

Bible Quiz Team," recently premiered in L.A. using four alternating actors of different genders and ethnicities. His play "Ouroboros" consists of five scenes that, when, presented in chronological order play as a comedy, but, when reversed, turn the play into a tragedy. He has also written plays under a non-gender specific pseudonym using similar techniques.

"Walking To Buchenwald" begins previews on Sept. 9. All four preview performances are "Pay-What-You-Want." Opening night is Sept. 15, and performances continue through Oct. 21 with all tickets priced at \$30.

Atwater Village Theatre is located at **3269 Casitas Ave in Los Angeles, CA 90039**. On-site parking is free. For reservations and information, call **(323) 882-6912** or go to www.openfist.org.