



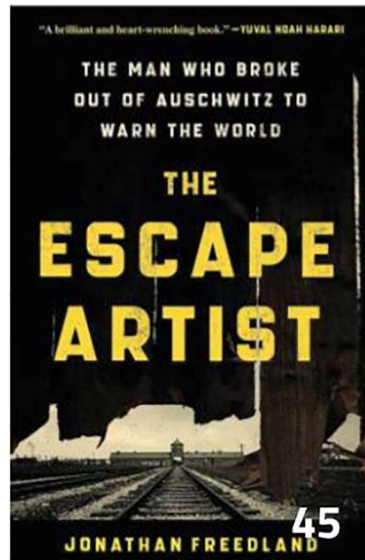
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INSIDE THE JOURNAL

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8 >> COLUMNISTS Tabby Refael on the dilemma of homelessness; Dan Schnur on clashing rights; Elizabeth Danziger on healing breached walls; Kylie Ora Lobell on power of charity; and Morton Schapiro on sacred texts and meaning.

14 >> THE GIFT OF JOY After the last few anxious and isolated years, Rabbi Dr. Bradley Shavit Artson writes that we should remember that Judaism commands us to rejoice.

19 >> DISCOVERY OF A "POSTCARD" In Anne Berest's new novel, "The Postcard," the discovery of a postcard listing the names of family members lost in the Holocaust sends the author on a trip to find out about her family history. Helene Siegel compares it to Art Spiegelman's "Maus" and Irène Némirovsky's "Suite Française."

20 >> TOUR OF THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS Last month, a dozen rabbis from the Zionist Rabbinic Coalition traveled to Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates — three signatories of the Abraham Accords. Rabbis Nolan Lebovitz and David Woznica report on what they saw.

21 >> NEW PEOPLE None of the Jews who were liberated from Egypt set foot in Israel. Matthew Schultz writes the lesson is that for a new nation, new people are required. And babies, in addition to being cute and loving are the "new people" who can change our perspective.

24 >> STORIES AND THE TALMUD For many people, the Talmud is the formal codification of the law. But why are there so many stories? Paul Socken asks. He argues that they are there to demonstrate the difference between the law and its application.

25 >> DOES VIOLENCE AWAIT ISRAEL? With the demonstrations against judicial reforms reaching a fever pitch, Israel Political Editor Shmuel Rosner examines how the crisis can unravel into violence.

31 >> TABLE FOR FIVE: MATOT-MASEI Rabbis Michael Barclay, Avraham Greenstein, Brett Kopin, Rebecca Schatz and Rabbi/Cantor Eva Robbins share their insights on this week's Torah portion.

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39 >> THE MOTHER OF INVENTION Tikken Olam Makers (TOM) is an Israeli/Jewish movement that connects inventors and engineers and people with disabilities. At USC, the TOM chapter made a detachable wheelchair motor pack. Debra Eckerling reports.

42 >> ALLA'S GARDEN OF ALLAH Alla Nazimova was a Jewish movie idol of the silent era, but is all but forgotten today. A new play, "Garden of Alla: The Alla Nazimova Story" aims to rectify that. Brian Fishbach talks to playwright and actress Romy Nordlinger.

45 >> "THE ESCAPE ARTIST" Jonathan Freedland's "The Escape Artist" tells the story of Walter Rosenberg and Fred Wetzler, two inmates who escaped from Auschwitz in 1944 and tried to warn the world of the Nazi's plans. Karen E. H. Skinazi calls it "essential reading."

50 >> FROM THE BARRACKS TO THE BIMA Rabbi Josh Knobel, the director of the Center for Youth Engagement at Stephen Wise Temple, served 12 years in the U.S. Army before deciding to become a rabbi. In this week's Rabbis of LA, he tells Ari L. Noonan how his time in the service impacts his rabbinate.



SHABBAT CANDLE LIGHTING
Fri July 14, 7:48 p.m.
Shabbat ends Sat July 15, 8:48 p.m.

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Romy Nordlinger as Alla Nazimova

Photo by David Wayne Fox

Unknown Story of Silent Era Superstar Comes to Stage

» by Brian Fishbach

Photo: David Wayne Fox

WHEN PLAYWRIGHT AND performer Romy Nordlinger learned the story of Alla Nazimova, she wondered why so few people knew her name. But now that Nordlinger has written and starred in a one-woman show about Nazimova, that is certain to change. The show, titled, "Garden of Alla: The Alla Nazimova Story" has been seen all over the country and is now making its West Coast debut at Theatre West near Universal City, where it runs through July 23. "Nazimova is one of the greatest Jewish artists of all time, and yet her story is unsung," Nordlinger told the Journal. "Although she fled Czarist Russia, it is unheard of that this exotic 'other,' in a sense, would become a superstar."

To call Nazimova ahead of her time is an understatement. As a bisexual woman, she had to live under the radar while staying married to her British ne'er-do-well husband. She wrote her screenplays under the pseudonym Peter M. Winters. Born in 1879 in the Russian city of Yalta, by the turn of the 20th century, Nazimova was a well-known actress throughout Europe. She moved to New York's Lower East Side in 1905, becoming a star in Yiddish theater and performing to sold out houses on Broadway. Famed producer Lee Shubert even built a theater on West 39th Street and named it after Nazimova.

When she moved to Hollywood, Nazimova became a massive force in silent films, with starring roles in "Camille" and "The Lantern." Later in her career starred in

“I Googled Alla, started to read about her and thought, how in the heck did this woman exist? And how have I not heard of her? And wow, she's also a Russian Jew like I am.” — Romy Nordlinger

"Blood and Sand" alongside Rita Hayworth. The title of the stage show refers to the building Nazimova bought in 1919 at the corner of what is now Crescent Heights and Sunset Boulevard. Over the next six years, Nazimova converted the property into the Garden of Allah Hotel. It was a celebrity hangout, with the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Humphrey Bogart and Frank Sinatra

amongst its guests and performers before the building was demolished in 1959.

"She was a superstar like Madonna or Lady Gaga," Nordlinger said. Though it hasn't been confirmed, many people (including Nordlinger) suspect that Lady Gaga's blonde wig [on the album cover "The Fame Monster"], was modeled after Nazimova hairstyle in 1923's "Salomé."

"Nazimova was certainly one of the earliest Jewish superstars," Nordlinger said. "And whether or not she was religious, she certainly was Jewish, and she did flee the Czarists and she was coming from the Pale of Settlement to Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater and having to do a lot of hiding of her Jewishness in order to work. And then finally, establishing herself in the Lower East Side in Vaudeville and doing Jewish theater at a place called the Chosen People. So she didn't have to hide that she was a Jew anymore."

Nordlinger spoke to the Journal about the "Garden of Alla." This conversation was edited for length and clarity.

Jewish Journal: How did you first learn of Alla Nazimova?

Romy Nordlinger: One of my mentors asked me to write for a showcase where she's trying to draw attention to actresses in history that people should have heard of. She suggested different people to me, I would start to read about them, and I thought that they just didn't feel simpatico. They all seemed sort of blonde and consumptive. And then she said, "I know: Alla Nazimova!" I went down the rabbit hole, Googled Alla, started to read about her and thought, how in the heck did this woman

exist? And how have I not heard of her? And wow, she's also a Russian Jew like I am. Her story defies all stories. It really does. I read her biography by Gavin Lambert and it's fascinating. I read a lot of her journals and fell in love with her story.

JJ: Why do you think that even today, there's such a romanticization of the culture of the 1920s?

RN: I always admired the 1920s, I've always liked F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda. It was such a great time of shaking up things and liking the look, liking Art Deco. When you think about it, there was a great deal of freedom. There were things that people were fighting for which were achieving more popularity in a covert way. Then there's the pendulum that is always swinging. My mother was a famous feminist in Richmond, Virginia, of all places. She was just sort of into fighting and being the underdog. And Nazimova was too. But she always would say, "when things go too far in one direction, the pendulum will swing back." And they went very far in one direction in the 1920s, with cutting hair, and parties, and norms feeling looser. We're now in this new age of staunch conservatism in many ways. Fascism coming back into style — that's not the kind of 20's we want — but it's happening worldwide. Isn't it terrifying?

JJ: What can the audience of "Garden of Alla" expect?

RN: We wanted the show to be like a live silent film. So video is a constant backdrop. It never stops, which sounds like it could get sort of confusing when you're watching a film and a piece of theater, but it's been

really carefully honed. It's taken much calibration to make it a seamless piece where the performer works with the background and it just becomes one. Could Alla's story be told without this media behind me? Yes. It's such a rich story, and it's absolutely beyond unspeakable. People who see the show say, 'how have I not heard of this person?' Not just because of LGBTQIA history, but because of theater history, Jewish history, women's history and film history.



“She was one of the first female writers, directors and producers in Hollywood, yet she was an underdog.”

JJ: Without revealing the end of the story, how would you describe the journey that Nazimova goes on?

RN: Many people who have seen this show relate to her story. She was one of the first female writers, directors and producers in Hollywood, yet she was an underdog. It was when I read the biography and then her journal letters where I saw this is a story of a survivor. What interests me more than just that success is how she believed so much in her inner life and herself. Even when she found herself as a guest inside the Garden of Allah — which was perhaps the greatest party of any of our time — she said, "Life is what you make of it. If you can't bend, you will break." This woman is a force to be reckoned with. This is a human being that inspires. It's through her adversity that I know I can continue, because it ain't easy to be in the performing arts or to follow the arts, or to even try to be your own person, particularly in a world where everything is bought and sold. She really inspired me and I really feel that's why her story is so important. It's not just that, oh, hey, this was somebody who was the first woman to do this or that — yeah, it's who she is at the very essence. It gives me the courage to keep on going, even when I'm terribly frightened to get up on stage and do a solo show, because that ain't easy. ■

"Garden of Alla: The Alla Nazimova Story" plays Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through July 23rd at Theatre West 3333 Cahuenga Blvd. West Los Angeles, CA (across the street from Universal CityWalk, between Barham and Lankershim).