

# MOTHER OF MURDERED ACTRESS PAYS TRIBUTE WITH 'YOU IN MIDAIR'

by KYLIE ORA LOBELL

**O**n July 18, 1989, Danna Schaeffer received the worst phone call of her life. A stranger called to tell her that her daughter, actress Rebecca Schaeffer, had been murdered. Rebecca, who was only 21 at the time, was a rising star who had been on the television series "My Sister Sam" and had an audition for "The Godfather Part III" on the same day she was shot and killed by a crazed fan on the doorstep of her West Hollywood home.

Now, nearly 30 years later, Danna is bringing her family's story to the stage with her new one-woman show, "You in Midair." She will be performing it at during the Hollywood Fringe at The Lounge Theatre throughout the month of June.

Danna, who is based in Portland, Ore., with her husband, Benson Schaeffer, said she first performed the play in January 2017. She's now bringing it to Los Angeles because it is was her daughter's home. "I had always wanted to take it to down to L.A. because that's where it happened and where Rebecca was a working actor," said Danna in a phone interview with the Journal. "It's in the spirit that she's not entirely gone."

The title "You in Midair" refers to the lyrics from "Send in the Clowns," from Stephen Sondheim's 1973 musical "A Little Nigh Music." Rebecca sang the song in a talent contest. During Danna's performance, she sings Yiddish songs, including "Unter Dayne Vayse Shtern (Under Your White Stars)," and tells stories about Rebecca's career, as well as their family life. One of those tales includes how, when Rebecca was a teenager, she was president at her temple's youth group and thought about becoming a rabbi. Instead, she decided to go into entertainment and moved to New York.

"That was such a crucial moment in her life and she chose acting," Danna said. "It was not easy. She left home when was 16, and it was horribly difficult. But we totally supported her."

Rebecca then went on to modeling and acting jobs, eventually getting cast on the soap opera "One Live to Life" and then landing a starring role on the CBS sitcom "My Sister Sam." She was riding high, and even landed a cover of Seventeen magazine.

"I was so proud of her, I was probably obnoxious," Danna said. "I would carry her Seventeen magazine around with me and show people."

Rebecca's life was cut short when her stalker, Robert John Bardo, who had obtained her information through a private investigator and the DMV, showed up at her door and murdered her. Today, Bardo is still in prison, serving a life sentence.

In 1994, the state of California enacted the Driver's Privacy Protection Act, which bars the DMV from giving out drivers' personal information. And, in 2002, Rebecca's boyfriend at the time of her death, Brad Silberling, wrote and directed "Moonlight Mile." The movie was based on his relationship with Rebecca's parents. Benson and Danna also lobbied for gun control, and started the Rebecca Schaeffer Memorial Scholarship for acting students at UCLA.

Through "You in Midair," Danna said she has been able to feel closer to her daughter, though it has also been re-traumatizing. "I'm not sure this helped with the grief, but I wanted to represent her well, and have fun because she was so effervescent. I didn't want to just fall apart."

The show also has helped give family members who never met Rebecca a glimpse into who she was. Danna's younger brother is taking his teenage daughters to the play, and his wife is producing the show. "[My nieces] have fallen in love with Rebecca and are huge fans," Danna said. "They want to hear stories about her."

Though she may be gone, Rebecca's story lives on in "You in Midair," and her family is healing from its enormous loss.

"It's been a powerful and positive experience for me," Benson said. "My sense is that the people who have seen it feel the same way. It brings the viewers into the heart of grief. Rebecca was a powerful and independent personality." ●

"You in Midair" runs June 3-17 at the Lounge Theatre, 6201 Santa Monica Blvd. Hollywood. For tickets, visit [www.hollywoodfringe.org](http://www.hollywoodfringe.org).

Danna Schaeffer (top) in "You in Midair." Inset: Benson (left), Rebecca and Danna Schaeffer.

JEWISHJOURNAL.COM

