

# Searing History Fodder For Play

By **HARRY SALTZGAVER**  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

International City Theatre has become known for tackling tough topics with serious, respectful treatment.

That reputation got stronger last Friday with the presentation of "A Splintered Soul." The story of Holocaust survivors transplanted to post-war San Francisco is written by Long Beach resident Alan L. Brooks.

But this production is no sop to localism. Artistic Director/producer Caryn Desai knew the drama was quality theater, on a par with much of the newer work ICT has presented over the last few years.

Director Marya Mazor (also a Long Beach resident) was unrelenting in bringing out the trauma of World War II, particularly for Jews. Post-traumatic stress syndrome is not adequate to express what these people experienced.

"A Splintered Soul" tells the tale of a Rabbi turned freedom fighter trying to return to being a Rabbi. Stephen Rockwell was on stage for virtually the entire play as Rabbi Simon Kroeller, and sings the audience's conscience with the portrayal of a conflicted man.

Kroeller survived by escaping and fighting in the underground, attempting to avenge the murder of his family by the Nazis. When he turns again to what helped him survive during the war, it is understandable, and tragic. That

return to survival techniques is a thread running through the little group of survivors the rabbi attempts to counsel and console.

Jon Weinberg's (Sol/Leo) anger stems from the knowledge he helped kill his own people in the concentration camps. He expresses that anger by lashing out at others — and doing things he still despises himself for doing. Weinberg brings the inner torture to life with every line, every change of expression.

The rest of the cast is strong as well, with Louis A. Latorto particularly strong as the American Jew who has become a judge — both literally and metaphorically.

"A Splintered Soul" threatens in the first act to become a clichéd, if powerful, recitation of what the Jewish people suffered during and after the Holocaust. It is redeemed with the exploration

of the ways survivor's syndrome plays out in each character. As Koeller says, the real victims are the survivors, at least from their perspective.

A wrenching twist of plot in the second act ensures that the audience cannot think of this as a "typical" Holocaust play, if there is such a thing. No spoilers here, but suffice it to say that stories about Holocaust victims seldom have happy endings. Powerful, yes; happy, no.

"A Splintered Soul" continues at the Beverly O'Neill Theater through Nov. 4, with an 8 p.m. curtain Thursday through Saturday and a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday. Tickets are \$49. Call (562) 436-4610 or go to [InternationalCityTheatre.org](http://InternationalCityTheatre.org). The O'Neill Theater is part of the Long Beach Performing Arts Center, 330 E. Seaside Way.