

## **BWW Review: THE SUITCASE Centers on a Dream Held by Many Holocaust Survivors**

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by Shari Barrett [BroadwayWorld.com](http://BroadwayWorld.com) Aug. 11, 2016

The American Premiere of **THE SUITCASE** written by Ma?gorzata Sikorska-Miszcuk and translated by Artur Zapalowski, is a darkly surrealistic yet surprisingly humorous drama set somewhere between dreams and reality, centering on what many Holocaust survivors hope will happen for them someday. The 50-minute play was inspired by the true story of Michel Leleu, the son of a French Jew murdered at Auschwitz who recognized his father's suitcase at an exhibition on the Shoah.

Written by one of Poland's foremost contemporary playwrights, **THE SUITCASE** at first seems to be nothing more than a fluff piece with things such as balloons being popped and silly songs being sung. But it will surprise you when the story takes hold with the rather comical singing Narrator ([Jeff Alan-Lee](#)) and Jackleen (Claire Kaplan) sharing the tale of Franswa Jackoh (Vincent Catellanos) who, while in the process of figuring out his life, wanders into a café and meets The Poet ([Sigute Miller](#)) who in turn guides him to a Holocaust Museum to seek the truth.



There he meets a rather miserable Tour Guide (Alexandra Freeman) who begrudgingly points out a suitcase retrieved from one of the German "work camps." Her tune changes when Jackoh realizes the name on the case is that of his own father from whom he was separated during the Holocaust.

When Jackoh finally opens the suitcase, the ghost of his young father ([Eric Keitel](#)) appears behind him dressed in a striped uniform from the camps. What ensues is a look deep into the hearts of a father and son who ask us to consider what we are responsible for in the wake of enormous national tragedy. Certainly there is no laughter during this incredibly moving portion of the play. So it was a relief during the curtain call that all the actors encouraged the audience to join them in a well-known French song (often sung throughout the show) by reading the phonically written lyrics held up on cue cards.

Creatively directed by Samuel Hunter with a wink and a nod which often breaks the fourth wall, we are shown both the absurdity of life and how harsh realities can lead us on a path to redemption when we least expect it. His signature stylistic choices were perfect in both their comical content and heart-wrenching focus with characters always onstage in freeze frame when not speaking.

In speaking with several audience and cast members after the show, I learned that like me, many were from surviving generations of those lost during the Holocaust. Certainly all of us wish something of our unknown family members had survived so we could somehow get to know those lost to us and future

generations.

The play reminded me personally to always thank my own four grandparents for getting out of Eastern Europe in time to secure their futures in America and create a better life for their own children. I can never forget what they went through, leaving friends and family behind, never to see or hear from them again. What a joy it would have been for any of them to discover a lost, treasured family memento that had survived.

As a way to bring that message home, [Audience members](#) were encouraged to leave a personal note on the set-piece which held the suitcase, leaving it for those visiting next to pay it forward, whatever that may mean for us. I certainly did, leaving behind the same message I had inserted into the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Yes, this play is extremely thought-provoking and exceedingly well done by all involved.

**THE SUITCASE** presented by The Echo Theater Company continues on Wednesday and Thursday nights at 8pm through August 18 at the [Atwater Village Theatre](#), 3269 Casitas Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90039. Free parking in the lot adjacent to the theater and in the Atwater Xing lot one block south of the theater. Tickets are \$15 and may be pre-ordered by calling 310-307-3753 or online at [www.EchoTheaterCompany.com](http://www.EchoTheaterCompany.com)



Photos by [Spencer Howard](#)



Alexandra Freeman and Claire Kaplan



Jeff Alan-Lee and Claire Kaplan



Vincent Castellanos, Alexandra Freeman, Claire Kaplan (in shadow)



The suitcase is discovered at a Holocaust museum. Alexandra Freeman and Vincent Castellanos



Vincent Castellanos





Eric Keitel (standing), Vincent Castellanos

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