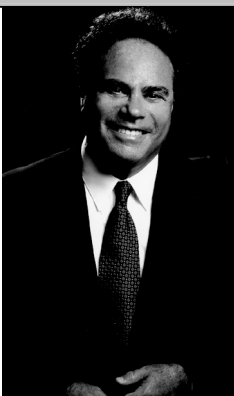


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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Keeping the Faith — Even Another's — on Broadway Stage

Tovah Feldshuh wows all in 'Irena's Vow'

ON STAGE

BY MICHAEL ELKIN

Helena ... Irena. Irena ... Helena. David Letterman at the Oscars? No, but maybe Tovah at the Tonys.

Much-honored actress Tovah Feldshuh, who starred in TV's "Holocaust" more than 30 years ago, essaying the role of Czech partisan Helena Slomova, may very well have the part of her life on stage now as a Holocaust hero and Polish patriot in "Irena's Vow."

As good as Golda in "Golda's Balcony" — in the prime of her theatrical life as the late Israeli prime minister — Feldshuh has audiences vowing victory again now in an amazing portrayal of the Jewish mother of all mother roles who just happened to be Polish Catholic.

When others witnessed Holocaust horrors and took a vow of silence, the genteel and gentle



Irena Gut let her actions speak for her, saving a dozen Jews, hiding them right under the noxious noses of the Nazis in the cellar of an officer's home for whom she worked as housekeeper.

From Golda's balcony to Irena's basement, Feldshuh specializes in a pantheon of powerful players, including the girlish "boy" she became in "Yentl" and the hard-edged, sometimes indefensible defense attorney

Danielle Melnick she portrays on TV's "Law & Order."

Such role-playing is the order of the day for the New Yorker whose private story is one of being a happily and longtime married marvel of a mother of two. Her story on stage, of Irene Gut Opdyke — the latter her married name later on in life — is now at Broadway's Walter Kerr Theatre, in Dan Gordon's play based on Gut's memoir, *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*.

She comes off well, faults and all, in Feldshuh's holistic hands. "I've never considered myself a religious Jew," considers Feldshuh, whose many honors span stages across the world, including the Israel Peace Medal and mettle-enhancing awards from Broadway, on and off.

"I was brought up Conservative, with no intimate acknowledgment of the Hashem, like the Orthodox have."

But as time marches on, Feldshuh has become one of the parade's dynamic drummers, culling comfort from her Conserva-

See 'VOW' next page

'DREAM' from previous page

Is it real or Memorex? "My father sees himself and the family as they are on screen, but in a way also as created characters."

You don't have to be the Orlons to ask where did all the hippies meet. South Street is a character itself in the street theater that is this boulevard of "Dreams."

It is not just a street, but pieces of my home," says Jeremiah of the many bejeweled buildings festooned by his father's art.

The South shall rise again? "My parents built that street 30 years ago." Architects as archetypes of old ideals and ideas? "Theirs was an immigrant philosophy," he explains, a Jewish revolt against oppression, repression, and the instigation of "community built on a Jewish ideal and unending work ethic. And the Jewish need to believe in yourself."

Believe it, Judaism has been a Jerusalem stone of a building block in their lives as well.

"Culturally, my parents are as Jewish as it gets," coming from Orthodox ancestry that stressed education and understanding.

Jeremiah got both at Akiba Hebrew Academy (now the Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy) — where he also got the underpinnings of his mo-

tion-picture career; that is where he met fellow student Jeremy Yaches, and forged a decades-long friendship and artistic ardor and vision. Yaches is the picture's producer: "We share the 'Dream,'" relates the filmmaker of his everything-but-blood brother, who "probably had more input into this film than the relationship I had with my parents."

His move to movies was in his blood early on; Jeremiah's journey as filmmaker took its focus at Akiba. "My love is storytelling, and Judaism is such a rich, wonderful story," he says of its tales and their telling influence on him.

Fade in, but not out on family: The film has had its own impact. "My parents are doing very well," he says of the quarreling Zagars, back "together; they just graduated from couples' therapy."

Coupled with his brother's ongoing improvements and achievements, after drug rehab, the zany Zagars paint a picture of ... normalcy?

Well, normalcy with a South Street quirk paved into the cemented relationships. But then, maybe for the first time in their furious and now filmed lives, the first family of mosaics — once splintered, jagged, cracked — is now getting the big picture. ♦

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