

Haunting Return

David Ira Goldstein comes back to town to stage 'The Diary of Anne Frank'

BY DAVID M. BROWN

David Ira Goldstein always wanted to stage *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

After wrapping a 26-year run as artistic director at the Arizona Theatre Company (ATC) in June 2017, he opened a production of the show at the Geva Theater Center in Rochester, New York. Now he's returning to the ATC as artistic director emeritus with *The Diary of Anne Frank* from April 21 to May 12 at the Temple of Music & Art in Tucson.

"I have always wanted to do this play, and it is one of a number of projects I have been able to pursue in the last year," says Goldstein, who recently visited the haunting Anne Frank House on Prinsengracht 267 in Amsterdam, where a reconstructed bookcase marks the hidden entrance to the annex.

"I was gratified to see so many young people visiting it."

He is also gratified to be working again with many of the people he's admired at ATC. These include Jessica Andrews, managing director emeritus; Glenn Bruner, production stage manager; Tim Toothman, artistic associate; David Ivers, artis-



David Ira Goldstein returns to the Arizona Theatre Company to direct *The Diary of Anne Frank* in April.

tic director; and Billy Russo, managing director.

The *Anne Frank* cast features six Arizonans, including Harold Dixon, a Tucsonan who plays Mr. Kraler, a trusted Frank business employee, and Tempean, Brenda Jean Foley, as Miep Gies, another family friend who protects the secret of those in the annex and safeguards the diary until turning it over to Otto Frank after the war.

Devon Prokopek, a Cave Creek native and graduate of Pinnacle High School, Paradise Valley, and the University of Arizona, plays Margot, Anne's elder sister. She is returning to ATC in her first role as a professional after appearing as a student in *Fiddler on the Roof*, also directed by Goldstein.

Intern actors from UA and ASU also participate. Brooklyn, New York, native Anna Lentz is Anne.

Another well-known ATC-er, Minneapolis resident Steve Hendrickson, is Otto, whose heroic postwar efforts (he was the sole surviving family member from the Holocaust) made possible the publication of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (originally published in 1947 as *Het Achterhuis, The Secret Annex*), in which Anne eloquently documents her two years in hiding. The book appeared in the United States five years later and is now in 60-plus languages. In 1959, the movie followed.

The story's appeal is strong and universal: "For all of the pain we experience in these characters, we see a fountain of hope, joy and longing, too," Goldstein says. "Even as we face this tragedy as an audience, knowing its outcome, we see some of the best in people, such as Anne's first kiss with Peter (Van Daan)."

A play to capture the conscience

The Rochester and ATC versions follow the original Frances Go-

odrich and Albert Hackett play, which premiered in New York City October 5, 1955, later winning a Pulitzer Prize for drama. This version debuted in 1997 at the Music Box Theatre in New York, adapted by Wendy Kesselman. Fifteen-year-old Natalie Portman was Anne.

Some of these updates resulted from replacing original passages Otto removed. He died in 1980. Others have since been revealed.

Changes to the play reveal Anne's pubescent coming-of-age and her often strained relationship with her mom, Edith, played in Rochester and Arizona by New York resident, Naama Potok, daughter of author Chaim Potok.

"I love her," she says of Edith, noting that she visited the Anne Frank House as a girl and, in preparation for the role, researched Edith's life online.

"She was a proper private German Jewish woman whose life was dedicated to her children and her husband. She loved to go dancing, enjoyed the beach; she was a vibrant social being.

"I found in my research that Edith felt how difficult it was to raise her daughters in such close quarters, in the presence of other adults who are not their parents. I have a great deal of respect for her," adds Potok, whose family lost 102 members during the Holocaust.

The last searing vision of her is through Otto at the end of the play, recalling Westerbork, an internment center where the family had been sent on the final train, September 3, 1944: "Edith worrying about her children, washing underclothing in murky water."

The Bells: They toll for thee

Anne's final diary entry is August 1, 1944, days before the Gestapo, tipped by an unidentified collaborator, breaks into the annex at the end of the play. As the allies liberate Paris, Brussels, Antwerp in the summer of 1944, the Franks are transported from Westerbork to Auschwitz, in



Anna Lentz is Anne Frank in the Arizona Theatre Company's *The Diary of Anne Frank*. (Photos courtesy Goat Factory Media Entertainment)

Poland, where Otto perseveres and survives.

In October or November, Anne and Margot are transferred to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, where they died, probably of typhus, a month, perhaps two, before the liberation of the camp by the British army on April 15.

The Diary of Anne Frank comes to Arizona as Holocaust survivors and World War II veterans are dying quickly. Living memories must now be transformed into a communal memory of the tragedy of those dark times and the triumph of light and life.

For Prokopek, the role has reaffirmed her career direction and the importance of remembrance: "By being immersed in the story, I realize how beautiful and sad it is and how relevant it is today," she says. "It's so important to practice tolerance and to work together."

The play summons vigilance, self-evaluation and affirmation. "Hatred is a choice; we can choose a different path," Potok says.

"We have tried to honor both the horror and inspiration of the Anne Frank story," Goldstein says, "and we have dedicated it to the survivors in awe of their willingness to share the darkest part of their lives in a continuing message of faith and hope." ■

FOR MORE INFO

What: *The Diary of Anne Frank*

When: Various times Saturday, April 21, to Saturday, May 12

Where: Temple of Music & Art, 330 S. Scott Avenue

Cost: \$25-\$73

Info: 622.2823, arizonatheatre.org