



Arts & Entertainment

Shoah play: help for Darfur D.C. woman's hope for her one-person show

by Aaron Leibel
Arts Editor

Laura Zam's one-woman show involves much more than her mother's Holocaust experiences.

Collaterally Damaged, which Zam wrote and will perform in the Capital Fringe Festival this week, deals in part with her trip to Poland and Germany to retrace her mother's journey during the Shoah.

One aspect of the play is that the 2005 journey itself was "motivated by my desire to respond to war, to create a piece of art that would help to stop the genocide in Darfur," says the District resident, who plays some 20 characters during the performance.

Two other story lines are "my mother's story, what happened to her, and many flashbacks reflecting upon my mother as I experienced her growing up and showing how the war affected her."

She initially had no plans to write a play but only wanted to visit the places her

mother had lived during the Holocaust. However, "as an artist, I tend to turn my experiences into art," she says.

Zam, 43, says her mother often would talk to her about what had happened during the Holocaust. "She talked about it a lot, but not in great depth," the playwright-actress says. "She would refer to it, but wouldn't tell her story chronologically.

"She would say things like, 'Why can't you clean your room? When I was your age, I was sewing buttons on Nazi uniforms.' Then, she would go into details about the buttons." She used her Holocaust experiences to engender "Jewish guilt," Zam says.

Her mother, who died 11 years ago, also would relate her experiences as an entertainer — singer, actor, dancer — in the camps. She believed that her performances are one reason she survived, as the kapos, the Jewish guards in the camps, would, as a result, look after her. She also said she felt she was doing a service by

keeping up the spirits of the other prisoners, Zam says.

In the Lodz ghetto until 1944, her mother was sent to the Auschwitz and Stuffhof camps and began a death march before being liberated by British soldiers.

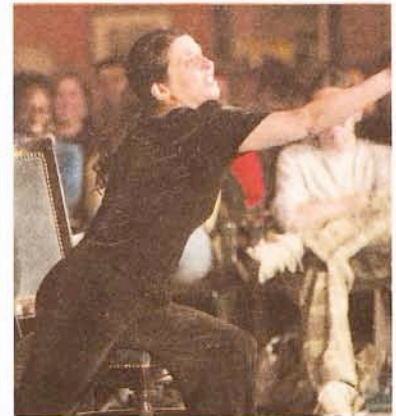
Zam has been a playwright, performer and director since graduating from Brooklyn College in 1985.

Originally, she had wanted to be an actor, but, beginning in 1989, she "spontaneously" started writing monologues.

They "took over and I began acting in my own monologues," she says. The monologues grew into full-length pieces, which, she says, she began thinking of "as stories for the stage."

She enjoys that art form because "I like the purity of the form, it is a theatrical form. ... Storytelling is the origin of theater, literature and education," she says.

In New York, her plays and solo performances have been onstage at The Public Theater, Dixon Place, New Dramatists, Ensemble Studio Theatre and elsewhere.



Laura Zam performs in her one-person play, *Stupid Frailty*, at the National Theatre in March.

She lived in Prague in the Czech Republic from 1994 to 1999 ("I wanted to live abroad for a time and might have been subconsciously trying to get at my roots by living in the area where my mother lived," she says), where she had four plays produced, including her one-person play *Circles, Holes, and Arches*.

She has performed *Stupid Frailty*, another of her one-person plays, at the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, the National Theater in Washington and elsewhere.

Collaterally Damaged has been presented as a staged reading at Theater J at the Washington DC Jewish Community Center, the Kennedy Center and Woolly Mammoth Theater and was performed at a high school drama festival in Howard County.

Collaterally Damaged will be onstage at the Warehouse arts theater in the District on Saturday at 9:30 p.m. and Sunday at 5:00 p.m. Tickets, at \$15, are available at www.theatermania.com or at the door.