

FreeTime

THE BEST IN THIS WEEK'S ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

GO&DO

WHAT: One-woman show "Lilia!" — kicking off Colorado Mesa University 2013-14 theatre season

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Sat., Sept. 7

WHERE: Moss Performing Arts Center, Robinson Theatre

COST: \$10 adults, \$8 seniors, \$6 students; season tickets for \$65 adults; \$50 seniors and \$18 students

INFO: 970-248-1604 or coloradomesa.edu/mosstickets

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'Lilia!'

kicks off Colo. Mesa Univ. theatre season

One-woman play a tribute to actress, refugee once given keys to the City of Grand Junction

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The late Broadway star Lilia Skala was a good friend of Colorado Mesa University's theatre department founder Bill Robinson. The two worked together in New York for the Children's World Theater.

Robinson will attend the internationally acclaimed one-woman show "Lilia!," a play about Lilia Skala, written and performed by her granddaughter Libby Skala, when it comes to the Robinson Theatre Saturday, Sept. 7.

Skala was an actress in Germany where she often performed leading roles, when she and her family were forced to escape Nazi Germany. Her husband was Jewish and had been imprisoned by the Nazis. They left the country after Skala bribed one of the guards for his release.

Their assets were frozen by the Nazis; thus, the family arrived in the United States practically penniless and not speaking English.

Skala went to work in a garment factory but never abandoned her dream of acting, and within two years had learned English and was working on Broadway. At the age of 60, Skala was given the leading role opposite Sidney Poitier in the 1963 film "Lilies of the Field" — a part that won her Oscar and Golden Globe nominations. She also won Golden Globe and Emmy nominations for "Roseland" and "Eleanor and Franklin," respectively.

"Lilia!" is about her extraordinary life, as well as the mentoring relationship between grandmother and granddaughter.

"She took me under her wing; she shared her stories and lessons to inspire and educate me on the way of the world," Libby said.

Skala was pleased that her granddaughter, Libby, was interested in the craft of acting, because in Germany during that era the profession was looked down upon — even considered akin to



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Libby Skala as a child, and her grandmother, Lilia Skala.

prostitution, Libby said.

The idea for "Lilia!" came to Libby during a 1997 improvisation class after she was asked to talk about someone compelling, or fascinating. Libby spoke about her grandmother's experience as an immigrant and fleeing the Third Reich.

The instructor was particularly intrigued after learning about Skala's successful acting career in the U.S. He encouraged Libby to write a one-woman show about her grandmother.

"I had no idea how to encapsulate 98 years into an hour and a half," Libby said.

She began writing down her memories and with the help of her improv coach, Gary Austin, developed and completed the script. In 2000, Libby began touring and performing the show — a moving account of a woman who overcame extraordinary odds.

Libby said she especially wanted to come to Grand Junction because Robinson had never seen the production and "he was a very



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Libby Skala performs the one-woman show "Lilia!" about her grandmother Lilia Skala, a refugee of Nazi Germany who went on to star in "Lilies of the Field" with Sidney Poitier.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lilia Skala, the subject of a play to be performed at Colorado Mesa University Sept. 7, starred with Sidney Poitier in the 1963 film "Lilies of the Field."

significant person in my grandmother's life."

As former director of then-Mesa College's theater department, Robinson contacted Skala in New York, inviting her to perform in Grand Junction where she also worked with a number of his theater students.

"I was able to persuade her to come out and perform in 'I Remember Mama' in 1965," Robinson said.

"It was very interesting. Mesa Theater on Main Street was



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showing movies and they brought in a special showing of 'Lilies of the Field.'

After the film screening, Skala spoke to the audience, and the "city father" at the time presented her with a key to the city, Robinson said.

Skala traveled to Grand Junction to perform at the college on four other occasions up until 1981.

"It was an exciting time," said Robinson, who attributes the actress' performance and presence locally to convincing the college president to construct a building for the theatre department.

Libby has performed "Lilia!"

across the nation and abroad including England, Germany, Scotland, the Republic of Georgia and Canada.

She received a "Best Solo Performer Award" at the London Fringe Theatre Festival for her second show "A Time to Dance" about her great-aunt, Austrian modern dancer and dance therapy pioneer Elizabeth Polk.

Libby third show "Felicitas" was performed at Emerging Artists Theatre One Woman Standing Festival in New York City. She has also performed in a number of non-solo theater productions and has appeared in two films.