A granddaughter’s captivating tale of a remarkable woman

The internationally acclaimed one-woman show, Lilia!, about the extraordinary life of Oscar-nominated actress Lilia Skala, written and performed by her granddaughter Libby Skala, will be presented by [PRESENTING ORGANIZATION] at [LOCATION and ADDRESS] on [DATE and TIME].

Lilia Skala was Austria’s first female architect, and went on to become a stage star in Max Reinhardt’s theatre and all over the German speaking world. In 1939 when Hitler invaded her home country, she fled to America as a penniless political refugee, not speaking a word of English, and started life again as a humble zipper factory worker to support her family. She attended night school and within two years she was cast in a Broadway show. Her career on stage, in TV and film, continued for five decades, culminating with Oscar-nominated Hollywood fame in “Lilies of the Field”, in 1963, acting alongside Sidney Poitier.

Tracing their intimate relationship over 20 years, in which Lilia served as mentor, teacher and role model, Libby plays both her indomitable grandmother and herself. It’s a tale of two spirits so alike they often suffer the ironic personal conflict that comes with deep love. In this creative way, Libby relates the story of her Austrian grandmother’s escape from war-torn Europe, and the shame she suffers in this “demotion” to refugee and factory worker, to the final, victorious stardom on the Silver Screen. She also humorously portrays a grande dame reaching into her own experience to aid her granddaughter pursue a career in film and on stage.

“As a teenager, when I began studying acting, my grandmother passionately worked with me on the different scenes and monologues I needed to perform for class,” says Libby. “When she ‘demonstrated’ how to perform the ingénue roles, she transformed so completely that I believed she was 16 years old more than I’d ever believed anyone was 16. To this day, she is the greatest actress I’ve seen.”

Playwright/Actress Libby Skala has performed Lilia! to sold-out houses across North America, in London, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and in Berlin and Dresden, Germany. Her second play A Time to Dance, has toured North America and she appeared in the film “Birth” with Nicole Kidman.

www.LibbySkala.com

“Libby Skala’s ability to transform herself from her 90-year old grandmother into herself as a young child, moving right through being a mature woman, is absolutely magical and alchemical. A riveting performance. A brilliant play.” - Robert Enright, CBC RADIO, Canada
“One actor, cloaked in magic...Ms. Skala does a marvelous rendition, in an evocative Middle European patois, of her grandmother’s velveteen old world charm that sheaths a steel will. An adoring portrait...deliciously poignant...Libby Skala is magnetic in a part that clearly means the world to her.”
- Bruce Weber, THE NEW YORK TIMES

“The real winner for me was Lilia! Absolutely dazzling acting. Libby Skala’s ability to transform herself from her 90-year old grandmother into herself as a young child, moving right through being a mature woman, is absolutely magical and alchemical. A riveting performance. Go and see this. It’s an opportunity you won’t get often. Brilliant play.”
- Robert Enright, CBC RADIO, Canada

“This is a unique and spellbinding production. The story sweeps across the dramatic events which shaped Lilia Skala’s life, and uses the intimate conversations between grandmother and granddaughter to reveal how experience forges the mind. A play of tremendous candour which is at once appealing and a privilege to view.
- Jonathan Wilson, THE SCOTSMAN, Edinburgh

“The exclamation mark is entirely appropriate, since Lilia Skala was very much the kind of person who lived! Life! Libby Skala wraps herself in a colorful scarf and rich Austrian accent to become her grandmother. The effect is electric. Lilia’s adventures are so interesting that the solo show could consist entirely of her stories and still come in a winner.”
- Peter Birnie, THE VANCOUVER SUN

“[The] high bar of performing excellence is more than met by Libby Skala who enacts her own grandmother, Viennese actress Lilia Skala, with a blend of transformative force and ravishing charm that is nothing less than uncanny. On a bare stage, the actress creates her grandmother’s entire world through the chimerical power of her voice and facial expressions. The audience is enthralled.”
- David Noh, THE NEW YORK BLADE

“Libby Skala’s heartfelt tribute to her grandmother and mentor never hits a false note...Almost all the play’s scenes are drawn from Lilia’s principled but remarkable life. After fleeing the Nazis in Austria, Lilia, a trained architect and promising actress, escaped to New York, worked in factories, learned a new language and was on a Broadway stage inside two years... The writing is superb.”
- K. Connolly, EYE WEEKLY, Toronto

“Truly one of the most riveting of such plays one is likely to see; indeed the only similar play that equals it is The Syringa Tree. Beautifully written and marvelously acted. Lilia! demands to be seen!”
- Alan Charlton, THE B.C. CATHOLIC

“Heaven-sent: The stories are so riveting...it’s hard not to be inspired.”
- Kathleen Oliver, THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT, Vancouver

“A charming and surprisingly moving piece. More than just a memoir. For anyone in the theater, the show is a paean to the seriousness and importance of the art. For “civilians,” it’s a reminder that patience, fortitude and tenacity will usually, in the long run, win out against misfortune. I highly recommend Lilia!”
- D.L. Lepidus, CHELSEA CLINTON NEWS, THE WESTSIDER, New York

“It’s been said that all theatre needs are two barrels, a board, and an actor. This one-woman show gives eloquent testimony to that maxim...Libby Skala conjures up [85 minutes] of riveting theatre. Lilia Skala felt destined to share her humanity so as to enrich the lives of others through her art. Hers was a set of unshakable principles that forged her artistic posture and that, in some measure, set her apart from the conveniences of American pragmatism...Libby Skala succeeds in painting a portrait of rare plasticity.
- Bruno Koch, PORT FOLIO WEEKLY, Virginia Beach, VA

“Best Show out of 118 shows at the 2000 Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival.”
- UMFM RADIO, CJUM RADIO, Canada
Lilia Skala was educated at the University of Dresden in architecture, and was the first female architect in Austria, before launching her stage career in her hometown of Vienna, where she briefly worked with the celebrated Max Reinhardt, starring in his celebrated theatre company. She fled the Nazis in 1939, along with her husband and two sons, eventually moving to America, where she contributed to supporting her family by working in a zipper factory. Shortly thereafter, this formidable woman was taking her bows on Broadway, in Letters to Lucerne in 1941. Dedicating her professional life to film and stage, her efforts were formally rewarded in 1963 with an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of the strong-willed Mother Maria in Lilies of the Field, starring alongside Sidney Poitier. Television fanatics of the 1960s may remember her in GREEN ACRES and the eighties generation in the movie Flashdance. Lilia lived until the age of 98.

**European Stage**

- DAS GLUECK (Vienna, 1938)
- FRAUEN VON NEW YORK (Bruebn, 1937-38)
- DER VERSCHWERDER (Vienna, 1937)
- NATHAN DER WEISE, GENTLEMEN (Euro. Tour, 1937)
- AXEL AN DER HIMMESTUER (Austrian tour, 1937)
- FRL. ELSE (Vienna, 1936)
- DIE ERSTE FRAU SELBY (Bruebn, 1936)
- JURISTEN (Vienna, 1932)
- SECHS PERSONEN SUCHEN EINEN AUTHOR (Euro. Tour, 1934)
- MANN MIT DEN GRAUEN SCHLAEFEN, FESTGefaHREN (ON THE ROCKS) (Munich Kammerspiele, 1934)
- IN JEDE EHE (Vienna, 1932)
- DER ENTZUEKEN DE MENSCH (Vienna, 1931.32)
- ELISABETH VON ENGLAND (Euro. Tour, 1931)
- SEPTEMBER (Vienna, 1930)
- VERSCHIEDENE (Vienna, 1930-31)
- HERR LAMBERTHIER (Tour to Czech., 1930)
- MADONNA IM SCHLAFCOUPEE (Buehne, 1929)
- OLYMPIA, GRAND HOTEL, HERR LAMBERTHIER (Euro. Tour, 1929)
- TWELVE THOUSAND (Marienbad, 1928)

**European Filmography**

- UNEXCUSED HOUR (1937)
- FLOWERS FROM NICE (1936)
- GIRL'S DORMATORY (1936)
- MADAME WANTS NO CHILDREN (1933)
- HIS MAJESTY, KING BALLYHOO (1931)
- PURPUR UND WASCHBLAUR (1931)

**American Filmography**

- MEN OF RESPECT (1991)
- HOUSE OF GAMES (1987)
- FLASHDANCE (1983)
- TESTAMENT (1983)
- THE END OF AUGUST (1982)
- HEARTLAND (1980)
- SOONER OR LATER (1978)
- ROSELAND (1977)
- ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN (1976)
- DEADLY HERO (1975)
- PROBE (1972)
- SPLIT SECOND TO AN EPITAPH (1970)
- CHARLY (1968)
- THE SUNSHINE PATRIOT (1968)
- CAPRICE (1967)
- IRONSIDE (1967)
- SHIP OF FOOLS (1965)
- LILIES OF THE FIELD (1963)
- CALL ME MADAM (1953)

**Broadway Stage**

- THE SURVIVOR (Morosco, 1981)
- MEDEA AND JASON (Little Theatre, 1974)
- FORTY CARATS (Morosco, 1970)
- ZELDA (Ethel Barrymore, 1969)
- THREE PENNY OPERA (City Center, 1965)
- DIARY OF ANNE FRANK (Cort, 1955)
- CALL ME MADAM (Imperial, 1958)
- WITH A SILK THREAD (Lyceum, 1950)
- LETTERS TO LUCERNE (Cort, 1941)
As a child, I would listen for hours as my grandmother told remarkable stories of her life, always emphasizing that with God all things are possible. She had become the first female architect in Austria, and then a stage star, touring with Max Reinhardt throughout Europe.

In 1939, she was forced to flee Austria from Hitler's onslaught, and became a political refugee in America. She arrived in New York penniless and without a knowledge of the English language. There she began attending night school while working in a zipper factory by day. Convinced that she had a God-given talent to share with the world, within two years she was cast in her first Broadway show. For the next five decades, her acting flourished.

As a teenager, when I began studying acting, my grandmother passionately worked with me on the different scenes and monologues I needed to perform for class. When she "demonstrated" how to perform the ingénue roles, she transformed so completely that I believed she was sixteen years old more than I'd ever believed anyone was sixteen. She transformed completely. To this day, she is the greatest actress I've seen.

In 1995, while living in Seattle, I came upon a wonderful improvisation and acting workshop taught by Gary Austin. During the improvisational work in class, Gary asked each student to talk for five minutes about someone either real or fictitious who we find interesting, compelling or fascinating. I spoke of my grandmother, and he put me in a scene in which I played her as a refugee working in the factory. In that moment, the "Lilia" character based on my grandmother was born. When Mr. Austin learned who my grandmother was, and about her remarkable life, he told me, "You've got to write a one-woman show about this woman!" Over the next couple of years, Mr. Austin involved my "Lilia" character in improvised class scenes, and this character continued to evolve within me.

Several individuals were instrumental towards the growth of Lilia!. Gary Austin's belief in the project inspired its development. He directed early works-in-progress excerpts of the show sponsored by Artistic New Directions. Carol Fox Prescott, a wondrous acting teacher, helped to move me to the heart and essence of the material. Playwright/teacher Jeffrey Sweet was also of great help in illumining the show. Artistic New Directions provided a community of artists who supported and inspired my process.

In 1999, Molly Lyons invited me to perform Lilia! in full-length as a work-in-progress at the Greenwood Studio in Seattle. Until then, it had only been performed in 10-15 minute increments. In 2000, Lilia! received additional direction from mime artist/director/teacher Gregg Goldstein in New York. In 2001, Gabriel Barre began directing Lilia!. Together, we took a fresh look at the material which prompted many rewrites that eventually led me back to a clearer and deeper sense of the original text.

As Lilia! moves forward, I continued to plumb the depths of each nuance and life lesson to be gleaned from my grandmother's experiences. Lilia often said, "I've barely scratched the surface in terms of what's inside me - what I can give of myself to mankind." She was constantly trying to teach and guide me, but I wasn't always receptive. Well, it's never too late.

The lessons continue as I have the privilege of performing this play - not only as a tribute to my grandmother, but as an ever-evolving experience between actor and audience.
LIBBY SKALA (Playwright / Actress)
Libby has charmed audiences internationally with her critically-acclaimed solo plays LiLiA!, about her Oscar-nominated actress grandmother Lilia Skala and A Time to Dance, about her great aunt, Austrian modern dancer and award-winning dance therapy pioneer Elizabeth "Lisl" Polk and Felicitas, about her great aunt Felicitas "Lizi" Sofer, a tough-love Austrian baby nurse.

Libby performed LiLiA! in a successful Off-Broadway run at The Arclight Theatre, produced by Mirror Repertory Company; at The Groundlings Theatre in Los Angeles; and has toured North America and Europe, including to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland, to Tbilisi, Berlin, Dresden, Leeds, Manchester, Toronto, Calgary; and enjoyed three-week-runs at Pacific Theatre in Vancouver and in London, sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Forum.

Libby's play A Time to Dance won her a “Best Solo Performer Award” at The London Fringe Theatre Festival. It was performed at The St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival in Ontario; it ran for three weeks at Vancouver’s Pacific Theatre and toured to Calgary, Toronto, Berlin and Dresden. Felicitas has also toured North America and Europe. Libby’s newest show Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer premiered at the London Fringe Festival.

Libby appeared at The Jewish Museum of New York with Rosemary Harris, Marian Seldes, Elizabeth Ashley, Jayne Atkinson, Ronald Rand and David Margulies, reading from books published by The Feminist Press. She played Viola in the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival's production of Twelfth Night. In Washington, D.C., she appeared in Jeffrey Sweet's Value of Names at Theatre J. Film credits include Jonathan Glazer's Birth, starring Nicole Kidman. A graduate of Oberlin College, she is an award recipient of The Pandella Cultural Fund.

GABRIEL BARRE (Additional Direction)
Gabriel Barre directed the new musical Amazing Grace which debuted on Broadway in 2015 at the Nederlander Theatre. Other work includes the Off-Broadway production of the The Wild Party by Andrew Lippa at the Manhattan Theatre Club which was nominated for numerous awards, including five Outer Critics Circle Awards and thirteen Drama Desk Awards, both including Best Direction of a Musical, and for which he won the Calloway Award for Best Direction. He directed the US national tour of Rodger's and Hammerstein's, Cinderella, starring Eartha Kitt, which toured the country for three years, including a stint at Madison Square Garden. He also directed the national tour of Pippin, which originated at the Goodspeed Opera House and played throughout the US and Canada. He was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance in Starmites and won a Bistro Award as an original cast member in Forever Plaid.

GREGG GOLDSTON Additional Direction)
Gregg directed NYC and L.A./HBO Work-space productions of Victoria Labalme's Icebergs in Africa. He is Artistic Director and Dramaturg for A Christmas Carol scheduled for L.A. production next year, and is Artistic Director of The Invisible People Mime Theatre. As a performer, Goldston has toured his one-man show internationally for 20 years and has performed with Marcel Marceau. Gregg founded The Goldston & Johnson School for Mime Theatre where M. Marceau serves as Artistic Advisor. Currently he teaches mime and physical comedy in NYC and works as a consulting director for plays, solo performances, and films. www.goldmime.com

GARY AUSTIN (Director of Works-in-Progress)
Gary performed with the improv company, THE COMMITTEE, in San Francisco, and created THE GROUNDLINGS, an improvisational theatre company in Los Angeles. Gary conducts workshops in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Chicago, and Nashville. Gary Austin has formed an alliance with award winning Deaf West Theatre in North Hollywood, California, “The Gary Austin Workshops in Association with Deaf West Theatre,” composed of both deaf and hearing actors. Gary directs Works in Progress for Artistic New Directions in New York, and produces and directs Works in Progress in Los Angeles and Seattle. Gary has performed his solo show, Church, in New York at various venues, including Center Stage/NY and The 78th Street Lab Theatre, Los Angeles at various venues, including The Groundling Theatre, Santa Fe, Seattle, and in Fort Collins, Colorado at Bas Bleu Theatre. Gary’s students include: Lindsay Crouse, Megan Follows, Jennifer Grey, Helen Hunt, Lisa Kudrow, Pat Morita, Paul Reubens, Helen Slater and Lillias White.
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<tr>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson Market Library</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tubac Center for the Arts</td>
<td>Tubac, AZ</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>NewBridge on the Charles</td>
<td>Dedham, MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Groundlings Theatre</td>
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<td>The Theatre at Raritan Valley Community College</td>
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<td>Van Nostrand Theatre, Suffolk Community College</td>
<td>Brentwood, NY</td>
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<td>The Lyric Theatre, Virginia Tech, IAWA</td>
<td>Blacksburg, VA</td>
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<td>Freight &amp; Salvage Coffeehouse</td>
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<td>Brownson Country Club</td>
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<td>Lapham Community Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riverfront Community Center</td>
<td>Glastonbury, CT</td>
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<td>Bas Bleu Theatre</td>
<td>Fort Collins, CO</td>
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<td>Polk State Lake Wales Arts Center</td>
<td>Lake Wales, FL</td>
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<td>Jewish Family Services of the Lehigh Valley</td>
<td>Allentown, PA</td>
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<td>Colorado Mesa University</td>
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<td>Olympic College</td>
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<td>Triplex Theatre</td>
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<td>Princpia College</td>
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<td>St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival</td>
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<td>Longyear Museum</td>
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<td>Westover School</td>
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<td>Princpia Upper School</td>
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<td>The Shantigar Foundation</td>
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<td>New York, NY</td>
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<td>Episcopal Actors Guild</td>
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<td>Kimball Theatre</td>
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<td>Tenacre Foundation</td>
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<td>Saltmarsh Center</td>
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<td>Wichita Art Museum</td>
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<td>Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northwest Actors Studio</td>
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<td>Gilded Balloon - Edinburgh Fringe Festival</td>
<td>Edinburgh, Scotland</td>
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<td>Cape Cod Theatre Project</td>
<td>Falmouth, MA</td>
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“Pacific Theatre presented Libby Skala’s one-woman show, Lilia!, as the opening to our 23rd season [for a three-week, 15-performance run]. The show was a tremendous success. Audience response was extremely positive, Lilia! met critical acclaim from all the major newspapers in Vancouver. It drew considerably more radio and television attention than we are accustomed to, and exceeded our revenue projections. Ms. Skala was a delightful contribution to the atmosphere around our theatre company and the administrative staff and I are grateful for her involvement in our season. I recommend both Libby and her show without reservation.”
- Ron Reed, Founding Artistic Director, PACIFIC THEATRE, Vancouver, BC

“...Excellent performance. Your drama definitely added something special to the Festival resulting in extremely positive and moving feedback from audiences with a strong desire to see more Jewish-related drama. You certainly deserved your standing ovation.”
- Ellie Ruhan, Director, THE LEEDS JEWISH INTERNATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL

“We continue to be grateful for your performance at The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity – it is the strength, courage and achievements of women like your grandmother that have inspired the growing interest in women’s “untold stories,” and your show contributed something so special to our efforts to foster greater awareness of women’s accomplishments and their vital role in leadership. All the best to you as you continue to introduce Lilia! to captivated audiences!
- Virginia Harris, Chairman, Board of Trustees
THE MARY BAKER EDDY LIBRARY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF HUMANITY, Boston, MA

“We had a performance event here last week that included one of the finest performances I have ever seen anywhere. Libby Skala made the Guild shine that night.”
- Mart Hulswit, Executive Director, THE EPISCOPAL ACTORS GUILD OF AMERICA, NYC

“It was a honour and joy to have Libby Skala as a guest artist in our community. Lilia! was a truly captivating story, so sensitively and truly told. As a teacher of European history, I am enthusiastic about the concept of presenting this true adventure to students – what a way to make history come alive! Libby Skala is an outstanding actor. In her moving presentation of Lilia! her acting ability is immeasurably enhanced by her demeanor, appearance and her love for her grandmother. I recommend Libby Skala as an absolute delight for any group of young people with an interest in life’s challenges, successes and tragedies.”
- Robert Lawn, Mayor of Prescott, Ontario, Canada and Board Member of ST. LAWRENCE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

“Lilia! was a great hit with both the conference attendees, who tend to be a picky crowd, and the local community. My technical director said she was the easiest person he worked with the entire week, which features seven shows in seven days. She also taught two well-received workshops for us. In short, I give my whole-hearted recommendation for Libby and Lilia!. They are a good addition to any company’s season.”
- Dawson Moore, Coordinator, LAST FRONTIER THEATRE CONFERENCE, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA, Valdez, Alaska

“Thanks again so much for the captivating performance and the great working atmosphere you’ve brought to our theatre. On behalf of all of our staff, I would like to once more state that you’ll always be welcome here at die buehne.”
- Hannah Stoffer, Executive Committee, DIE BUEHNE THEATER, Dresden, Germany

“We received glowing reports from the audience and members of the theatre community on the sensitivity, performance craft, and over-all presentation of which Libby Skala is both the author and actress. We have asked her to return next year. On behalf of the Executive and Production Team, we recommend her highly!”
- John O. Powell, KELOWNA & DISTRIC ARTS COUNCIL, Kelowna, BC
Enter One Actor, Cloaked In Magic

By BRUCE WEBER

In the category of theater writing, we have two one-actor shows, "Lilia!" and "That Play," both entries in the Midtown International Theater Festival now unobtrusively going on at the Abingdon Theater Arts Complex on the second floor of 312 West 36th Street in Manhattan.

The black-box space at the Abingdon is about the size of a walk-in closet, with the audience seated on three sides of the floor. The wonderful thing about both these shows, neither of which employs more than a painted black cube or two as a prop, is how much is accomplished with so little. You can tell a good story compellingly with little more than a few square feet of space and a little ingenuity.

"That Play" is a brisk, one-man "Macbeth," adapted by Tom Gualtieri with Heather Hill and performed by Mr. Gualtieri, a slightly built young man with a subtly flexible set of facial expressions and a mischievous, conspiratorial manner. He does all the parts and even mimes some of the action, including a sword fight or two (though he balks at producing Macbeth's severed head). His witches are entertaining, and his Lady Macbeth is especially creepy.

The sections of the play that have been cut are nicely summarized in offhand asides. ("This being Shakespeare, the fact of Banquo being dead doesn't keep him from showing up on time for dinner.") And even if some of it gets a little cartoonish toward the end, Mr. Gualtieri's achievement is that of a highly entertaining and very effective English teacher. He's informative, clear on the rudimentary themes and plot points — and great fun.

Even better is "Lilia!," Libby Skala's tribute to her grandmother, Lilia Skala, the Viennese actress who escaped Hitler and eventually won an Academy Award for her role as a nun in the 1963 film, "Lilies of the Field," which also won an Oscar for Sidney Poitier. Ms. Skala (Libby, that is) does a marvelous rendition, in an evocative Middle European patois, of her grandmother's velveteens, old world charm that sheaths a steel will. Rather briskly she gets across the drama of a life that includes some serious brushes with the Nazis (Lilia's husband was Jewish), an immigrant's tough introduction to America and some surprising attitudes toward art and love.

But mostly this show could be titled "A Granddaughter's Education," for Ms. Skala tells most of the story through a series of dialogues between herself and her loving but imperious grandmother. These begin when Libby is a child being chided for sucking her thumb (later she's ridiculed for picking her nose), continue through Libby's teenage years when she is seeking solace (and not really finding it) for the woes of growing up, and finishing when her grandmother is in a nursing home (she died in 1994, at 97), urging Libby to write a part for her.

Ms. Skala's script hits many of the expected melodramatic notes, but because they are true to life, they ring especially true and poignant. Over all an adoring portrait is created here, though it is to the grand-daughter's credit that with the exception of some whininess about Hollywood, Lilia Skala comes across as a singular and interesting woman. Libby Skala is a composed actress who handles the tiny stage floor at the Abingdon with great comfort, and she is magnetic in a part that clearly means the world to her.

The final performance of "Lilia!" is today at 4 p.m. "That Play" can be seen tomorrow at 4:20 p.m. and Saturday at 2:50 p.m. The festival itself, which includes a couple dozen other shows on two stages, continues through Sunday. For information: www.midtownfestival.org.
October 2, 2013

Libby Skala
Solo Performances
80 Winthrop St., Apt. K2
Brooklyn, NY 11225

Dear Libby,

What a wonderful and deserving honor to have bestowed on your grandmother, Lilia Skala, in appreciation of her remarkable accomplishments as an American film actor, whose revered gifts have inspired so many—myself among them.

Lilia was a charming, immensely talented artist whose magnificence on film resonated a pure and seamless delivery of character. I was privileged to have worked beside her so many years ago on “Lilies of the Field,” and that experience gifted me with the opportunity to observe her craftsmanship up close and receive a level of brilliance in acting that can only be deemed a gift from the heavens. I was inspired by that gift and consider it a great loss that the world did not get to see her earlier in her creative life. She was indeed an absolute gem.

While I am unable to be there in person to share this day with you, I send my heartfelt congratulations to you and all of Lilia’s family and loved ones. My heart is there right beside you all and I share your pride as this recognition is placed in your hands for work so brilliantly done by your grandmother.

Lilia’s creative impact has left its indelible mark on the profession she loved. May God continue to bless you all.

With love,

Sidney Poitier
Tribute to grandmother
a lovely, warm memory

REVIEW | Simple props electrify transformation

LILIA!
Pacific Theatre,
12th and Hemlock, to Oct. 7
Tickets $16 to $32,
Call 604-731-5518

BY PETER BIRNIE
VANCOUVER SUN

Libby Skala does a lovely job of honouring her grandmother in LILIA! The exclamation mark is entirely appropriate, since Lilia Skala was very much the kind of person who lived her life!

She was the first female architect in Austria, and a first lady of the stage until the Nazis stormed in. Fleeing to the U.S. without two words of English to rub together, Skala was acting on Broadway within two years and a fixture on television when that medium was still in its infancy. We knew her best as the unstoppable mother superior who leads her nuns in browbeating Sidney Poitier's character in Lilies of the Field.

Granddaughter Libby spent the start of Rosh Hashanah on Friday doing what's appropriate for the Jewish new year — resolving to honour her amazing grandmother with the Vancouver debut of LILIA! On a stage set only with two facing chairs atop cozy woven rugs, Libby bounces back and forth between herself at various ages and the woman whose towering ego both helped Libby grow and kept her in check.

The younger Skala wraps herself in a colourful scarf and rich Austrian accent to become her grandmother. The effect is electric, as Lilia acts with all the grande dame mannerisms of any diva. She swans and swoops and dispenses advice to little Libby with the confidence of someone who is absolutely convinced anyone can do anything if they put their mind to it.

Lilia's adventures are so interesting that the 90-minute solo show could consist entirely of her stories and still come in a winner. Libby chooses, however, to temper the tales with contrapuntal criticism of Lilia's enormous ego, which is shown in gentle ways to be something that stands in the way of happiness for the aging actress.

Lilia's marriage, for instance, is shown to be a hollow vessel. And when Libby grows to be old enough to act herself, Lilia is horrified to learn that the girl will be touring in a puppet troupe — and sharing her flophouse hotel rooms with a man! The resulting assault by Skala Senior on poor Libby's fragile sense of self is only meant to help the girl avoid artistic disaster, but still smacks of snobbery from the aristocratic, autocratic Austrian.

Obviously Libby holds no grudge, for Lilia is filled with a strong sense of the deep bond that existed between the two women before Lilia passed away in 1994. The result of this lovely tribute piece is a simply satisfying sense of warmth and remembrance.

Libby Skala stars in LILIA! at Pacific Theatre to Oct. 7.

Sun Theatre Critic
pbirnie@png.canwest.com
OSCAR-nominated Lilia Skala was a formidable actress and a formidable woman as demonstrated by her granddaughter Libby in her splendid one-woman play.

Despite being Austria’s first female architect, Lilia became an actress, playing leading roles in Max Reinhardt’s company until 1938 when her life changed completely. Hitler invaded Austria and her Jewish husband was taken prisoner. She arranged his release by bribing one of the guards with a golden cigarette case and he was able to escape across the border and make his way to New York.

Left behind with two children, Lilia, by sheer determination and persistence, managed to get a ticket on a steamship to the USA. Unable to follow her profession because of her lack of English, she worked as a factory worker in order to keep herself and her children alive. “I was not educated to be a refugee,” she said. “I have a god-given talent and I want to give” – and so she did.

People who undergo great hardship seem to live so long – and Lilia lived until she was 98. They say “if it doesn’t kill you, it will make you strong” and Lilia’s story proves it.

Her last words to her granddaughter were “Write a part for me” and, of course, Libby did. And what a privilege it is for those of us lucky enough to witness Libby’s performance at the Pentameters after her rave reviews at the Edinburgh Festival.

Libby moves easily between various roles, predominantly those of herself and that of Lilia with her strong German accent. There are many amusing exchanges between the two characters. One is to do with an olive green sweater in Libby’s possession which Lilia lusted after and makes her granddaughter hand over, using the indomitable art of persuasion that had served her so well in escaping the Reich.

We are also treated to Lilia’s unusual and humorous theories about love and marriage. She was a woman of strength and courage – deserving of the homage paid by her granddaughter.

Until November 13.

ALINE WAITE
"Lilia!" tells an incredible story

Playwright pays homage to her grandmother in one-woman show

BY TED HOLTEN
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

I can’t speak to the quality of the one-woman play “Lilia!” I haven’t seen it.

But if the hour I spent speaking with the show’s playwright and star, Libby Skala, is any indication, I don’t want to miss a minute.

Skala’s play is a celebration of the life of her grandmother, Lilia Skala. And what a life it was.

Libby Skala will perform the play Sunday at James Ranch.

“She was so personally inspiring to me,” Skala said of Lilia from her Brooklyn, N.Y., home earlier this week. “A year after she died in 1984, I was doing an improv workshop in Seattle, and Gary Austin (of the famed Groundlings improv troupe) came to tell us to talk about someone fascinating, and when he got more interesting to talk about than my grandmother?”

That query is a stumper. Born in 1868 in Austria, Lilia became the first female architect in that nation’s history after leaving home to study in Dresden, Germany.

But even that is a side note in the career of this remarkable woman. Her true desire was to be an actress. Such a profession was beneath the station of her upper-middle-class Vienna upbringing, so she solicited a handwriting expert to help her find a suitable husband who would allow her the freedom she wanted. She found such a man and spent 11 years touring the playhouses of Europe.

By the late 1930s, the Nils had begun to show the party’s true colors. Married to a Jewish man, Lilia and her nascent family were forced to leave Europe for America.

Lilia Skala was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress nomination as Mother Maria in "Lilies of the Field." Sidney Poitier won Best Actor for his role as Homer Smith.

‘Lilia!’: Austrian came to America in 1939 with $2.50

Continued from 1C

(including Libby’s then-3-year-old father) fled Austria in 1939 for the United States.

As was customary under the Nazis, nearly all of the family’s possessions and money was confiscated. They landed in Queens, N.Y., speaking not a word of English.

Lilia took a job in a zipper factory but never abandoned her dream of acting.

“She was 43 years old, a grown woman, didn’t know English, and they could only bring $2.50 out of Austria,” Libby Skala said. “She went from having an upper-middle-class life in Vienna to coming here with nothing.

‘Show business is so tough to break into, especially when you’re not 18, but she was so convinced (that acting) was her past that she was tireless in her pursuit (to continue acting) and didn’t give up.’

Lilia had one friend in America, a dancer named Ila who had emigrated earlier. (In an interesting side note, Illa was married to John Banner, the actor who would go on to play Sgt. Schultz in “Hogan’s Heroes” two decades later.) Ila had an American agent and arranged a meeting for Lilia.

In 1941, she received a telegram while working at her factory machine; she was back in show biz with a role in the Broadway show “Letters to Lucerne.”

“She got on Broadway on her first audition, but it was several years before she’d get back,” Libby said.

The show was about girls and women in Switzerland striving for world peace, but when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor two weeks later, the government shut the show down because of its anti-war message.

Lilia spent the next several years setting mutual funds, waiting tables and working in a dress store. Her next turn of fortune came in 1951 when she was cast in Irving Berlin’s “Call Me Madam,” and she reprised her role as the Grand Duchess in the film version that marked her movie debut.

But it was another decade before Lilia would cement her place in history, and it came again from her personal resolve.

In 1963, Lilia got word that director Ralph Nelson was shooting a film version of “Lilies of the Field.” As a 60-something woman with an accent, agents weren’t flocking to Lilia at the time. She wrote a letter to Nelson inquiring if one of the nuns in the film “might have an accent.”

Nelson invited Lilia to come to Hollywood, and her friends scraped together the airfare to send her.

She met with Nelson, and by the time he left his office, he’d offered her the lead role opposite Sidney Poitier. Poitier won a Best Actor Oscar for the role, and Lilia was nominated for Supporting Actress, losing out to Margaret Rutherford for “The V.I.P.s.”

There’s still more, including Libby’s role in “Green Acres” and her show biz swan song in 1983 with an appearance in “Flashdance.” Libby Skala does all she can to tell her grandmother’s story in “Lilia!”, but it’s a daunting challenge.

“How do you encapsulate 98 years of life into an hour and a half?” Libby said.

It should be well worth the time to watch her try.

ted@durangoherald.com

IF YOU GO

"Lilia!," a play by Libby Skala, will be performed at 2 p.m. Sunday at James Ranch, 33846 U.S. Highway 550 north.

Advance tickets cost $20 for adults and $18 for students, available at James Ranch Market or online at www.LiliaThePlay.com. Tickets at the door cost $22 in cash or by check. A limited number of chairs will be provided.

Bringing a blanket or chair is recommended.

For more information visit www.LiliaThePlay.com or call 676-1023.

Courtesy of Libby Skala

Lilia Skala was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress nomination as Mother Maria in “Lilies of the Field.” Sidney Poitier won Best Actor for his role as Homer Smith.

See ‘LILIA,’ 4C

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PAGE 4C THE DURANGO HERALD FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 2013 ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT
Lilia Skala’s Hopes Kept Her Going for 25 Years

By Tania Osadca

When there was nothing else to live on during the long stretches between acting assignments, Lilia Skala, 1963 Academy Award nominee for best supporting actress, lived on hope.

Hope can be a frail thing if you have to spread it across 25 years of waiting, but Miss Skala is raking its rewards.

Her portrayal last year of the determined nun who realized her dream of building a chapel in Arizona in “Lilies of the Field” brought Miss Skala international acclaim as well as the Oscar nomination. Tonight she receives a belated award for her role during the National Catholic Theatre Conference at Molloy Catholic College in Rockville Centre.

But awards come and go, in Miss Skala’s opinion. What remains, she said as she sat behind a tea table in her small Elmhurst apartment is the joy of “doing something I love best,” and the confidence in her ability to act. “I’m not just a very good actress, I am tremendous.” She said it with pride, not vanity.

Vanity has no room in Miss Skala’s life. If there ever was any, it vanished 25 years ago when she abandoned her flourishing career in Austria to come to this country, a penniless refuge with no working knowledge of English.

There was no glamour in Miss Skala’s first job in this country when, with two young sons to support, she went to work as a zipper saleslady and was later transferred to the factory where, she recalled, “I was behind the machine 40 hours a week. It was almost killing to stand on your feet all day with your hands busy and your mind running with nothing to think about.”

With life reduced to a machine-like existence, Miss Skala worked all the harder to lift herself out of the rut. Her first thought was to fall back on her career as an architect.

“I did not start acting until after my marriage. My family had sent me to the best schools and I had picked architecture for my study because I didn’t dare tell my parents I wanted to act. I felt architecture was very close to acting because you have to slip into the part of the person who orders the house,” she explained.

Apprentice Bricklayer

“I received my degree from Dresden University and apprenticed as a bricklayer one summer as part of the course. But when I tried to find a job here, I found that I would have to relearn everything for the license examinations, including a whole new metric system. That was the greater barrier, as well as the language and the need to work to eat.” Miss Skala continued.

Rather than resign herself to the uncertainties of fate, Miss Skala decided to do something about her English. She took an evening course and her notebook became her constant companion during the weary subway trips home.

And it paid off. In the fall of 1941, she was given a role in “Letters to Lucerne.” The day of the dress rehearsal Pearl Harbor was attacked. The play folded.

With one foot stuck in the stage door, Miss Skala tried a variety of roles on radio, television and the Broadway stage, with a featured part in both the stage and screen versions of “Call Me Madam.”

But the 20-odd years before her award-winning film were disappointing to a woman who had been one of Austria’s most respected actresses.

To sustain herself and to put her sons through college, Miss Skala took any menial job offered her. She worked as a “bus boy” in Hollywood, operated machines, served tables and sold mutual funds.

When she was nominated for an Oscar, Miss Skala was working as a file clerk in Manhattan’s City Center Theatre.

Today the actress shuttles between the Elmhurst apartment which she shares with her younger son, an economist, and Hollywood, where she has just finished filming “Ship of Fools” and is currently working on a Hitchcock suspense drama.

Her apartment reflects her attachment to the country of her birth. There are framed florets of edelweiss on the shelves; a stately early Austrian baroque cupboard dominates the living room, and portraits of her ancestors hang on the walls.

Miss Skala herself possesses a regal bearing which could be called aloof if it were not broken so often by a wide smile.

Having experienced so many uncertainties in the past, she is reluctant to look too far ahead. “It’s part of our profession, the belief in utter uncertainty,” she says in a deep voice with only a hint of an accent.
LILIA SOFER SKALA

Lilia Sofer Skala, the first female architect in Austria, fled the Nazis in 1939 with personal belongings that included her student portfolio from graduate studies in architecture at the University of Dresden. Art and architecture historian Despina Stratigakos arranged for the donation of this remarkable portfolio containing 65 original watercolor, charcoal and ink drawings, sketches and plans. We are grateful to Lilia Skala’s sons Peter and Martin for this generous donation. Following are some thoughts and memories that Peter Skala shared with us about his mother.

Thank you so much for your letter of March 21st and your continuing interest in Lilia. As you know, she became well known as an actress rather than as an architect. I don’t really know why she chose architecture as a career except that she had a penchant for beauty, for drawing and probably more important than any of these, she wanted to leave the restraining discipline of her family’s home.

Rather early, and by that I suspect around the age of 14 or 15 years, she became fascinated by the theatre and when she finished her secondary education in a very traditional Austrian Gymnasium (languages Greek and Latin) she wanted to go on the stage. In Vienna at that time—approximately at the start of World War I—well brought up young women did not go on the stage. The stage was still considered to be a supply point for girlfriends of the aristocracy; also, Austria’s Emperor, Franz Joseph, had a well-known and well-entrenched relationship with one of Vienna’s most famous actresses. My grandfather, whom I remember well, and my grandmother were conservative, at least as far as the children were concerned, and although they were generous in their affections, going “on the stage” was just not done.

Getting out of a tightly disciplined parents’ home in Vienna was probably very much on Lilia’s mind when she decided to go to university. The University of Vienna did not accept women in its School of Architecture and probably did not accept women in any of its faculties. To get this ridiculous idea of becoming an actress out of her mind, her father decided to send her to finishing school in Dresden and, thereafter to the University of Dresden. That location was chosen because grandfather had close business friends in that town with whom Lilia could live and who would also look after her.

When she went off to Dresden to finishing school, World War I had already started. Grandfather’s business friends were well off and Lilia was immediately introduced into the society of a number of young women and, apparently, thoroughly enjoyed herself. Starting university was a continuation of finishing school, with the addition of young men. She was a beautiful young woman, vivacious, bright and probably spoilt. At the University at that time there were already young men who were war invalids. She became very attached to one of them. He had only one leg. I remember his name—she mentioned him to me. In the custom of the times they called each other only by their last names. His was Goedeke. I still have photos of them together, rather stilted and usually in a crowd with other young people. He was also an architecture student.

Lilia, as you know, finished with a Sum cum Laude. I am sure she was not an easy student, as she always had strong likes and dislikes and—particularly at that age—there were teachers whom she revered and others for whom she, apparently, had little respect.
After her degree, towards the end of World War I, she was back in Vienna. My grandfather had visited her at the University and she had been to Vienna on visits and any permanent (i.e., marriage) relationship with Goedeke was not in the cards. My grandfather would not permit his daughter to marry “a cripple.” Goedeke incidentally, stayed in touch with my family; he later married and had a son. I remember his visits to us in Vienna in the late 20s. Lilia returned to her family’s home and my guess would be that it was a rather galling experience. The freedom she had in Dresden was gone. She continued to live at home and specialized, as you know, in Innenarchitektur. Prior to her specialization, she also had to work as a builder’s apprentice which I imagine in conservative Vienna, created a certain amount of attention—a good-looking girl working with some rather rough types building a house!

Life for a young woman in Vienna in 1920 was reasonably subdued because the post-war years had made life in Austria difficult. On the other hand, my grandfather was a well-to-do man with business connections throughout Europe and even in the difficult economic circumstances of post-war Austria, the family’s standard of living did not seem to have suffered. For instance, Lilia continued to go to carnival balls. I have some of the programmes from that time. Eventually she met my father at a ball given by one of Vienna’s rowing clubs. If one asked in later life why she married him, she said, probably only somewhat flippantly, “Oh, he was such a beautiful dancer.” My own guess is that she wanted independence and, being the wife of a charming, easy-going and well-to-do young Viennese man gave her all of that. As a wedding present, my grandfather bought them a house in which they occupied one of three flats. Life in 1922/23 seemed to be fun. I came along about a year after they were married. My arrival was obviously very welcome as the first-born in the family and Lilia was an adoring and loving mother. At that time she had domestic help, a housekeeper, a baby nurse and later on a nanny. About a year after I was born, Lilia started acting lessons. I do not know to what extent this was planned but certainly the stage never seems to have left her mind. It became her abiding vocation; she felt this was where her creative talent could unfold and she stuck with it until the end of her life. She played her last part when she was 94. Nonetheless, her love of beauty and her interest in architecture continued its pervasive influence. One of the reasons it was so difficult for her to feel at home in the United States was because she felt there was a “lack of beauty.” I remember her first visit to Europe after World War II. It was to Paris where my family and I lived at that time and she became practically inebriated with the beauty of the city. She knew all the architectural details of the Renaissance houses and could explain to me why, for instance, there was an unequal spacing of the windows. When she returned to Vienna that same summer, it was the baroque architecture of the city which once again captivated her. Interestingly enough, during that visit I became aware of her insistence on being called by her title, Frau-Diplom Ingenieur. In the United States she was Lilia; in Austria it was different, even though she was a well-known actress.

I am most grateful to you and the ladies at Virginia Tech for keeping Lilia’s memory alive.

With best regards
Yours sincerely
Peter Skala

BEVERLY WILLIS: Computerized Approach to Residential Land Analysis (CARLA)

In this time when computers seem indispensable to daily life, indeed sometimes seem to dominate daily life, it is difficult to think back to their nascence. One of Beverly Willis’s generous donations to the archive allows us to look back to the time when computers were first used by architecture firms. In the early 1970s her firm, Willis and Associates Inc., was among the first three architecture firms in the country to program and use computers in design applications. Their program, Computerized Approach to Residential Land Analysis (CARLA) was used for environmental studies and land use planning.

Throughout her career, Beverly Willis has been especially concerned with the relationship between building and landscape. This concern for the landscape and her innovative spirit prompted Willis to seek a solution to the problem of damage wrought by large scale housing developments constructed in the late 1960s. These developments had caused such problems as erosion, flooding, mudslide and general damage to the natural environment. Sensing that the new computer technology of the time might offer a solution, Willis hired two computer programmers to create the CARLA program in house for Willis and Associates, Inc. The program succeeded in minimizing both construction costs and environmental disturbance by mapping
STAGE

The playing area should ideally be at least 15 feet by 20 feet, though *Lilia!* has been effectively performed in both smaller and larger spaces.

SET

The set consists of two simple chairs, preferably matching. One placed stage left. One placed stage right.

VIDEO

Video projections run using Keynote, the built in Powerpoint equivalent on a MacIntosh Computer and require a projector and screen set-up.

LIGHTS

The lighting plot requires five lighting areas.*

1. A blue light upstage center, focused straight down to the floor creating a pool of light in which to stand in silhouette;
2. A center spotlight;
3. Isolated area around Chair Stage Left;
4. Isolated area around Chair Stage Right (with a cool blue option in addition to a warm look); and
5. A general wash.

* When a lighting plot is not available, the show has been effectively performed in a general wash of light from beginning to end.

SOUND

There is one 90-second MP3 sound cue which opens the show and plays before the actor enters. This recording is excerpted from a 1964 archival interview with Lilia Skala on WOR radio.

There are two additional MP3 sound tracks: Approximately 30 minutes of pre-show music and 30 minutes of post-show music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

PROPS

There are no props used in the show.