

AJR Journal (The Association of Jewish refugees)

York Theatre Royal Studio:

KAREN'S WAY: A KINDERTRANSPORT LIFE by Vanessa Rosenthal

It is tradition in this York theatre to perform with small casts and minimalist props. In this 'dramatisation with live music', two fine actors (one of them the author) and two accomplished musicians, together with a bench, two suitcases and a box, sufficed to provide a searching performance depicting the life of the middle-class Loewenthal family in Germany before and during the rise of Hitler and the need for parents to send their children to safety by the only means available to them, the Kindertransport.

The emphasis was on the problems encountered by Karen Gershon, a lone young refugee girl in England, problems similar to those experienced by thousands of youngsters. The radical difference was that this girl wanted passionately, from early youth into adulthood, to become a writer, a poet, of renown. Language was the main difficulty: German was out of the question – it had to be English. Mastering a language in sufficient depth to pass muster in a literary setting takes much longer than gaining an everyday working knowledge. The burning desire of the young Loewenthal to emigrate to Israel had to be pushed into the background – yet another language was unthinkable.

Karen was beautifully played by two actors – Lindesay Mace as a young girl and Vanessa Rosenthal as a mature woman. This device allowed the author to verbalise the conflicts within Karen, although it, and the heavy German accent adopted by Ms Rosenthal, made unusual demands on the audience.

Throughout, David Riley, playing an 18th-century Italian violin, and Marion Raper, piano, movingly played an ingenious selection of music appropriate to the mood of the moment. George Gershwin needed a piano and an entire orchestra to express the hustle and bustle of New York in his *Rhapsody in Blue*, while Marion Raper and her piano managed to evoke a train journey all by herself.

After the performance the cast, together with Professor Nigel Mace in the chair and Chris Wilkinson, Director, formed a panel and held an interesting discussion with the audience. This production of *Karen's Way* was staged on 17-18 April 2012. The performance on 18 April was sold out due to some schools making extensive bookings. Further performances will follow at 7 Arts in Leeds on 27-28 July and at the Edinburgh Fringe on 13-25 August at theSpace@Venue45. A visit to this event is highly recommended.

Marc Schatzberger