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Death-Defying Acts

"Well, you know there's nothing more horrifying sounding than a solo show by a lesbian about the Holocaust," quips Lisa Kron, a founding member of the Obie and Bessie Award-winning New York-based theater company The Five Lesbian Brothers and author of the play *2.5 Minute Ride*, which opens Saturday night at the Tiffany Theater. Kron always wanted to write a play about her father, a serious student of history and a German-born Jew who escaped the Holocaust on the Kindertransport and became a lawyer, ultimately settling in Michigan. But when she told his stories, they rang false. Kron says: "They were too full of myth and an awestruck tone that didn't seem right. There was something suspect about it. There was a need for me to tell them in a way that was separate. There was a piece missing, and I couldn't supply it because I wasn't there."

After taking a trip to Auschwitz with her father, she began to generate her own stories. "They seemed more grounded in reality. There was something too heroic — not in my dad's stories — but in how I told his stories. And that's not how life works. That's not a human story. On the trip, I could see things refracted off my own experiences. I thought I was going to make a document that detailed my dad's experiences, but I had to come to grips with the fact that, that world is gone. By meshing it with who I am, I could create something new. And that's what the show is." The first time her father saw the show, she says, he commented: "Nice eulogy, but I'm not dead yet." Though David Sedaris has said that there's nothing more dangerous for a parent than a kid with a typewriter, she laughs, her father ultimately liked the play, even if it was strange to see himself disembodied in a work of art, "almost like a hologram of himself."

2.5 Minute Ride takes its name from a roller coaster at an Ohio amusement park that Kron's family used to go to when she was a child. The work integrates three different stories: the trip with her father to his hometown and the concentration camp, her extended family in the Midwest, and her brother's engagement and marriage to a woman he met in a Jewish singles chat room on AOL.

The play begins with a slide show of family pictures, but the images are blank squares of colored light, enabling viewers to project their own content onto what Kron describes as "this template, dealing with universal issues of the impending death of a parent, our relationship to history, a lot of different things.... While I talk specifically about my own family, inevitably people see

their own experiences and families. It's important, in a solo show, to address issues that are universal."

Kron's father always talked freely about his life. "He considers himself a German," she points out, "and is very affectionate about the town where he grew up." The central lesson and the centerpiece of the show, she says, revolves around her father's experience as an American army officer interrogating a German prisoner. If he did not have the good fortune to have been born a Jew, her father ironically reflects, he might have been a Nazi. "Our assumption that we would always act on the right side is not to be assumed," she says.

"It sounds like a totally self-indulgent enterprise. Playwright Paul Rudnick said, 'Six million and one 'cause they're not the only ones who suffered.' But it's not that; it's something I've had a lot of very diverse audiences come to see, and people relate to it on a personal level. It's entertaining. Tragedy and comedy are, after all, flip sides of the same thing, and gallows



Lisa Kron in her solo show, *2.5 Minute Ride*.

humor is a natural response to tragedy. In fact, I'll make a money-back guarantee there won't be a self-indulgent moment!"

— Elana Roston

Lisa Kron performs *2.5 Minute Ride* at the Tiffany Theater Jan. 15-March 5, Wed.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3, 7:30 p.m.; Wed., \$25; Thu., Fri., both Sun. shows, \$28.50; Sat., \$32.50, 8532 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood, 310-289-2999.