

“My Name is Rachel Corrie:” Keeping a Young Person’s Passion Alive

By Abby Luby

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Rachel Corrie was 23 years old when she was tragically killed in the town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. It was 2003 and Corrie was part of the International Solidarity Movement, a group protesting the demolition of homes in Rafah by the Israeli military. As a young peace activist, Corrie’s goal was to start a sister city project between her home town, Olympia, Washington, and the beleaguered Rafah. On the last day of her life, Corrie stood in front of an Israel Defense Forces armored bulldozer, appealing to the driver’s sense of humanity to stop destroying a Palestinian home. But the Israeli soldier, who later claimed he didn’t see Corrie, kept going, crushing her to death.



Kathryn Silverstein

Three years after Corrie’s death, her journals and emails to friends and family were compiled and edited by famed British actor Alan Rickman (Snape in Harry Potter) and journalist Katharine Viner. Together they wrote the script for the well known play “My Name Is Rachel Corrie.” The play is being produced by the Mission Theatre Ensemble and will be performed on November 8,9,10 at the Cerebral Palsy Foundation Performance Space in Brewster. The star of this one-woman show is Kathryn Silverstein, who is 23, the same age as Corrie when she died. Silverstein said she feels a special kinship with Corrie and spoke about her as if she was still living.

“There are many similarities between me and Rachel besides our age. We both have a lot of energy and we don’t really know what to do with it. Rachel is an activist and I have also done activist work. She writes, as I do, very passionately about what she cares about – it’s the same passion that structures our lives.”

Silverstein’s other stage roles have included Lili (Carnival), Little Sally (Urinetown), Monica Welles (Rehearsal for Murder), and Essie (The Dining Room). Clark Cameron, Artistic Producing Director of the Mission Theatre Ensemble, said he chose Silverstein because he knew she could handle the challenges of a one-woman show.

“Kathryn is an exceptional actress and the similarities between she and Rachel make this show outstanding. Her writings about this part [Tumblr blog <http://thisisrachelcorrie.tumblr.com/>] are very philosophical and thought provoking.”

Clark said the performance is more about Rachel Corrie as a young, passionate person and not necessarily about the political issue of Israel’s intensely polemic border disputes. Since its acclaimed debut in England in 2005, “My Name is Rachel Corrie” has had its own unique dance with history. Performances scheduled at the New York Theater Workshop in 2006 were canceled because the play was viewed as being offensive to Jews. Performances in Canada were called off for similar reasons. Rickman and Viner condemned the cancellations and pursued other venues. Eventually the play was shown at the Minetta Lane Theatre in Greenwich Village in the fall of 2006.

“We are not contradicting the fact that this play presents political issues,” said Clark. “And for those who know about the issues, it’s an extra layer in their point of reference. But we’ll leave that to those people to decide for themselves. What we’re interested in is Rachel’s passion, courage and her need to make a difference in the world.”

Silverstein, who is Jewish, said she tries to understand both sides of the issue. “I think this is about internalized trauma and reminds us of the Holocaust and also how Israel was victimized by other countries and governments. But in the case of the illegal settlements on the West Bank, there needs to be some sort of balance.”

Just this past August, nine years after Corrie’s death, a lawsuit brought by Corrie’s parents against Israel was rejected by a judge in Haifa. The decision claimed that Corrie refused to leave a closed military zone and her death was an accident and not a deliberate act. The Corries are expected to appeal the decision. Despite this recent story, Silverstein said portraying Rachel Corrie has meant rescuing her from all the news driven images and rhetoric.

“In one sense I want this to be a performance that is applicable to any era. I don’t want to tie it to the event that happened, but rather about what Rachel would be involved with today, had she lived. When I read about current international events, I think of what Rachel would respond to – like the genocide in Dafur – Rachel would be there.”

Clark, who has produced and directed off-Broadway productions for over 20 years and also here in the Hudson Valley, said this production is different from the larger scale shows usually performed by the Brewster-based Mission Theatre Ensemble.

“This is not your typical theater experience. We want to draw the audience in to Rachel’s world immediately. The challenge of this 90-minute play is to keep the audience engaged.”

“My Name is Rachel Corrie”

At the Cerebral Palsy Foundation Performance Space in Brewster

15 Mount Ebo Road South

(Off of Route 22) Brewster

Thursday, Nov. 8 at 8 p.m.

Friday, Nov. 9 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 10 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

House opens one-half hour prior to curtain time.

\$15 general admission.

More information at www.mteny.org