

WAY TO HEAVEN

Until May 8 at SBW Stables/Griffin

It's 1942, and a Red Cross inspector is invited by the Nazis to visit a Jewish ghetto near Berlin. He tours the town and sees normality: couples court, children play, vendors sell their wares. Conditions are tough but acceptable, the inspector reports. The inspector is wrong.

Juan Mayorga's play *Way to Heaven*, co-produced by Griffin Independent and **Ride On Theatre**, is a darkly-focussed meditation based on the true story of a Czechoslovakian concentration camp called Terezin (or Theresienstadt). Of the 144,000 Jews sent there, it's estimated just 17,247 survived.

A nervy **Nicholas Hope** (*Bad Boy Bubby*) brilliantly depicts the Red Cross inspector, who is wracked by guilt. "I didn't see anything ..." he implores, "what else could I have done?" The stage light falls on the audience too, casting us as involuntary judge and jury of his confessional.

The action switches to the camp, where the chief Nazi Commandant (**Nathan Lovejoy**) and a reluctant Jewish detainee appointed as liaison between the Nazis and the captive Jews (**Terry Serio**) are workshopping the scenes of the grand deception. The Commandant plunges with gusto into his role as "director" - repressing his feelings of horror about the task at hand. As he polishes and re-polishes the artifice, shuffling his "actors" around the camp in anticipation of the inspector's visit, he retreats deeper into the delusion that he is, in fact, creating a splendid work of art.

The play's pacing suffers slightly from its own theatrical conceit - as the Commandant labours over scenes, the play labours too, weighed down by repetitive rehearsals and an unvarying script. Yet it remains an intriguing, clever, unique piece of theatre with a cautionary, contemporary undercurrent, phrased best by Mayorga: "The invisibility of horror is an ongoing subject in our lives"



Kate Hennessy