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Theater Review: 'A Matter of Murder'

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A Matter of Murder

By Manfred Franke

Adapted by Ruth Kanner and Theater group

The Ruth Kanner Theater

April 9

In a new work by Ruth Kanner and her superb company, the idea that an audience can use its brain, integrity, and arresting theatricality are givens. With these qualities, *A Matter of Murder* (*Mordeverläufe* in German, *Parashat Retzah* in Hebrew), follows its predecessors.

Yet there are differences. First there is a renewed sureness of touch here, in the work and from the performers, that is welcome. Moreover, Kanner and her actors have gone Brechtian. The audience here is always, but not only, "The Spectator". The actors start out from, and return to, seats in the audience and they include the audience in the actions. From moment to increasingly appalling moment we gradually become complicit. And that is the point - that what the inhabitants of one small German town on November 9, 1938 did or did not do, or avoided seeing or hearing or remembering or abetting, equally applies to us here and now.

The play is set during "Kristallnacht" - a beautiful name for the hideous pogrom Nazi thugs all over Germany inflicted on the Jews nearly 70 years ago on November 9 - and is based on Manfred Franke's 1973 documentary novel on the event, seen through the eyes of a then eight-year-old child (Tali Kark), 30 years later.

A purpose built and battered file-cabinet stands on a bare grey stage in Sivan Weinstein's excellent minimalist set. The back wall is white. On it the depersonalized scene titles are projected. Scene by scene then, doggedly, often dispassionately, often with humor, and with clinical thoroughness, the Child/Narrator (Kark) and her colleagues force the horrors into the open, including the murder of one Goldstein, depicted as a stick figure made of metal rods, a symbol, nothing human at all.