

Theater Review; In 'Fedunn,' a Holocaust That Never Ends; Murray Mednick's rich, difficult and fantastically intricate new play probes a painful legacy.  
The Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles, Calif.; Sep 6, 2002; F. KATHLEEN FOLEY;

Abstract:

In "Fedunn" at the Odyssey Theatre, veteran playwright [Murray Mednick] returns to a subject that has increasingly preoccupied him in recent years--the emotional turmoil of Jews in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, and the dreadful emotional legacy of that genocide.

Masterfully directed by Mitchell Ryan, and acted with wrenching authority by a superb cast, "Fedunn" represents a career watershed for Mednick, who had already recently raised the bar of his own accomplishments with the remarkable "Joe and Betty," an autobiographically inspired examination of marital dysfunction, also set in the Catskills. "Fedunn's" period and locale are flawlessly re-created through Gary Randall's set, Rand Ryan's lighting and Shon LeBlanc's costumes. The small and struggling Catskills hotel, the microcosm for "Fedunn," is owned by three brothers: Leon (William Bumiller), a Hollywood producer in town for a rare visit; Pinnie (Joel Polis), the volatile workhorse of the business; and Ray (Michael Pasternak), a failed comedian whose beloved wife, Tali (Maia Danziger), is dying.

Full Text:(Copyright The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 2002. Allrights reserved.)In "Fedunn" at the Odyssey Theatre, veteran playwright Murray Mednick returns to a subject that has increasingly preoccupied him in recent years--the emotional turmoil of Jews in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, and the dreadful emotional legacy of that genocide."Mrs. Feuerstein," presented last season by Padua Playwrights' Productions at 2100 Square Feet, dealt with the individual psychological torment of the play's eponymous heroine, herself a survivor of the death camps. Set in a small Borscht Belt hotel in 1948, "Fedunn" is a roiling, digressive display of anguish in the aggregate, focusing on a stunned but resilient group of American Jews struggling to come to terms with the ghastly recent revelations in Europe.Masterfully directed by Mitchell Ryan, and acted with wrenching authority by a superb cast, "Fedunn" represents a career watershed for Mednick, who had already recently raised the bar of his own accomplishments with the remarkable "Joe and Betty," an autobiographically inspired examination of marital dysfunction, also set in the Catskills."Fedunn's" period and locale are flawlessly re-created through Gary Randall's set, Rand Ryan's lighting and Shon LeBlanc's costumes. The small and struggling Catskills hotel, the microcosm for "Fedunn," is owned by three brothers: Leon (William Bumiller), a Hollywood producer in town for a rare visit; Pinnie (Joel Polis), the volatile workhorse of the business; and Ray (Michael Pasternak), a failed

comedian whose beloved wife, Tali (Maia Danziger), is dying. The complicated skein of familial and personal relationships stretches to include Al (Travis Michael Holder), a non-Jew who sacrificed his own flourishing business in Europe to save Tali from the Nazis, and Tali's beautiful niece Gina (Bari Hochwald), who also escaped the Nazis through a series of humiliating and psychologically scarring shifts. Then there's Hesh (Evan Arnold), a junkie saxophonist and brother of Pinnie's indulgent wife, Eve (Elizabeth Tobias). The troublesome, eloquent philosopher of the group is Eli (Matt Gottlieb), short for Elijah. In contrast to his angry wife, Rosie (Dinah Lenney), for whom the Holocaust ended all religious faith, Eli's scientific skepticism has given way to agonized theological reflection and a nascent belief in God. When Fedunn (Zoltan), a Ukrainian goy from the nearby town, begins haunting Tali's sickroom for mysterious reasons, these embattled and resentful Jews teeter on the edge of violence. A spiritual descendant of Clifford Odets' "Awake and Sing," Mednick's rich, difficult and fantastically intricate drama could well have been titled "Awake and Wail." In his hopeful lamentation, Mednick deals with concerns both epic and elemental, from arcane intellectual ponderings to a glass of tea savored by a dying woman. It is a virtuosic offering from one of our most distinguished playwrights, a writer whose sense of outrage is exquisitely balanced by an overriding humanity. \* "Fedunn," Odyssey Theatre, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., West Los Angeles. Thursdays-Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. No performance today; additional performance on Sunday at 7:30 p.m. Ends Oct. 13. \$25. (310) 477-2055. Running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes. [Illustration]Caption: PHOTO: Matt Gottlieb, left, Travis Michael Holder in '40s- era "Fedunn."; PHOTOGRAPHER: ED KRIEGERCredit: SPECIAL TO THE TIMES-----

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