



Chloe Adamczyk, of Lindenhurst, portrays Anne Frank, a part close to her heart after a high school trip that included visiting the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam.



Gary Tifeld, from left, Chloe Adamczyk, Melanie Lipton and Victoria Kay star in East Line Theatre's production of "The Diary of Anne Frank" in Lindenhurst.



The audience takes in "The Diary of Anne Frank" onstage at BACCA Arts Center.

The immersive 'Anne Frank'

New EastLine Theatre production brings the audience onstage and into the attic

BY CLAUDE SOLNIK
Special to Newsday

Audiences at EastLine Theatre's production of "The Diary of Anne Frank" won't just be watching the play. They will be immersed in Anne Frank's world.

The show, which is running at BACCA Arts Center in Lindenhurst through Feb. 25, brings Anne Frank's story to life near the 79th anniversary of her death at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, be-

lieved to be in February or March 1945.

This two-hour production, including intermission, seeks to position the audience in the attic, surrounding the action, with no backstage. In his research, director Danny Higgins said he found a plan of the real attic that he used to recreate the space onstage. "The audience sits in the space itself. We are trying to create the most realistic environment we can. We want the audience to feel like they are in the attic," he said. "The idea is people are experiencing the claustrophobia of the family, that they lived in this environment, this place."

WHAT "The Diary of Anne Frank"
WHEN | WHERE 8 p.m. Saturday and Feb. 24, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday and Feb. 25, and 2 p.m. Monday, BACCA Arts Center, 149 N. Wellwood Ave., Lindenhurst
INFO \$25; eastlinetheatre.org

BECOMING ANNE FRANK

Higgins isn't the only one who's done his research. Chloe Adamczyk, 23, of Lindenhurst, who plays the teenage Anne, was a student at Lindenhurst High School when she went on a class trip to Germany and Amsterdam. Among the places she visited were Bergen-Belsen and the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam.

"I felt like I started to understand her. I bought her diary at the house," said Adamczyk. "The diary is so personal and the

play comes from the diary. . . . You feel like you really know her when you finish it. I hope that's what the audience feels when they're done watching the play."

"The show has always been on my bucket list," said fellow cast member Michael Ruggiere, who plays Mr. Kraler, one of the people who helped the Franks. "It's always a goal of mine to invoke a visceral experience in any audience."

Higgins said the drama, being presented in partnership with the Babylon Citizens Council on the Arts, holds a special place in his life, having seen it on two occasions: In the late '90s on Broadway with Jericho's Natalie Portman as Anne and a few years later when Holy Trinity High School in Hicksville presented it.

"It was the first play I really remember," Higgins said. "It kind of set me on the path I'm on now. I sat there and saw actors be human and wanted to do that."

A tutor who was the daughter of a Holocaust survivor also encouraged him to read about the Holocaust.

"She gave me 'Night' by Elie Wiesel and said, 'Read this.' And I did," Higgins said of the book, which is based on Wiesel's time in concentration camps at Auschwitz in Poland and Buchenwald in Germany. "Four years later she took me to meet Elie Wiesel. I said, 'Your book changed my life.' And he said, 'Good.'"

EastLine is performing Wendy Kesselman's stage adaptation of "The Diary of Anne Frank," which was originally written by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett.

"We're using that revision that more embodies Anne's womanhood," Higgins said. "I don't imagine she is writing this for publication. She is writing her diary. She is writing this for herself."

LOUD VOICE, LASTING IMPACT

Higgins believes the diary, story and the script can move people and open eyes, provoking emotions and even epiphanies.

"We're not just doing this because it has an anniversary," Higgins said. "It has something to say about what

we're living through, that people are people."

He sees Anne Frank as a strong, perceptive person whose life, not her death, prompts interest.

"It's the idea that this person lived at all and she was able to put her feelings down on paper," Higgins added. "With what she was going through, she shouldn't have been able to speak at all. Her voice is the loudest one among many. She was granted new life almost."

He believes the pandemic made people painfully aware of isolation, increasing relevance, but that the play resonates for so many other reasons.

"We can look at these people hiding in an attic, because they're being persecuted," he said. "And people say, 'Yes, I understand.' That's scary."

For Adamczyk, who has been rereading the diary to become better acquainted with Anne Frank, the preparation was eye-opening.

"I'm in a process where you're empathizing so much further," she said. "When you read the play, you realize how young she is. I think people don't really realize that sometimes."