

ARTS & ISSUES

Bringing 'The Other Mozart' to life

Writer, actor Sylvia Milo speaks on show

By MADELAINE DEARDEUFF
For the Intelligencer

Segue

EDWARDSVILLE — Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is proud to welcome renowned actor and playwright Sylvia Milo for a live performance of "The Other Mozart," at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 28, at Durham Hall Theater, as part of SIUE's Arts & Issues series.

On this week's episode of Segue, SIUE's premier radio show that discusses the lives and work of the people on campus and beyond, Greg Budzban, PhD, College of Arts and Sciences dean, discusses Milo's career in theater and what inspired her to create, write and produce "The Other Mozart."

This episode of Segue will air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 18, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

"I've been reading about your production, and I'm quite excited to have it as part of Arts and Issues," Budzban explains. "First, what brought you to America? And how did you build a career in theater?"

"I came to the United States when I was 15-years-old as an exchange student," Milo says. "I ultimately returned and studied at New York University. I started as a musician and switched my vocation to theater."

As a young woman originally from Poland, Sylvia struggled to fit in with the stereotypes that clouded the New York theater industry, particularly surrounding people with accents.

"Even though I lived in New York for years, my accent had softened, and I always had to put on a thick accent in auditions," Milo mentions. "I played some wonderful parts, and the

people in theater community are very welcoming of diversity. I've even played roles like Bob Dylan and Hamlet."

Though she had been landing a few great roles, Sylvia was not working as much as she would have liked and often compared herself to other working actors in New York.

In an effort to find her true calling as an actor, Sylvia traveled to Vienna, Austria and attended a festival celebrating Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's music. A fan of his compositions, she toured his former apartment, which is now a museum, and found herself taken aback by a photograph of his family.

"In the photograph, he was seated at a piano with a sister, their hands intertwined on the keys playing together," Milo recalls. "That was a moment of revelation for me that there was such a person."

It was this moment in Vienna that caused Sylvia to research Maria Anna "Nannerl" Mozart, and bring her into existence along with a team of designers and composers for the production of "The Other Mozart."

"The Other Mozart" provided meaning in my life," Milo says. "It meant a lot to me that I could bring such an important story about great women from the past, back to life."

"Clearly, the fact that we didn't know more about this person who was an amazing musician in her own right, that had to be a source of inspiration for you," Budzban says.

"I was astounded the story wasn't public knowledge," she



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Sylvia Milo, writer, creator and star of "The Other Mozart."

replies. "We know so much about Wolfgang, and his music is so present, but we also know his story so well, particularly what his film, 'Amadeus,' explored. Yet, even that film didn't even have Nannerl!"

"I don't even remember a sister character in that film at all!" Budzban mentions.

"These children traveled together as child prodigies," Milo says. "From the beginning, there were always two children. She was five years older, and was actually billed first on the concert advertisements and played better at first. It is even shocking that she was erased from history."

"At the age of 18, she had to stop touring, because it wasn't considered proper for her to display herself in such a manner as a grown woman. However, until that point, there were two Mozarts."

"The cultural restrictions of women in that time period are quite interesting," Budzban states. "Can you speak more on that?"

"The Mozart family aspired

toward nobility, but they were merely middle class," Milo says. "The Mozart children performed so much, and they were always invited to perform for the greatest courts of Europe because they were such miracles. The family received compensation for that, but they could not sustain a similar lifestyle."

The one-woman show features music composed by Nannerl's famous brother, as well as music that inspired young composer Marianna Martines. Contemporary composers Nathan Davis and Phyllis Chen wrote original music for the play that features instruments like clavichords, music boxes and bells, as well as ordinary objects like teacups, fans and other things that might have captured her imagination.

"I always wanted to travel with the play, and it needed to be stunning and grand like the period, but also easily transferable," Milo mentions. "Our dress is 18-feet in diameter, and it's our whole set and costume!"

As Sylvia begins work on a

new project, she does not want to simply stop her work on "The Other Mozart" entirely. With a mission of spreading Nannerl's story as far as possible, Milo and her team of global directors have been training a team of five actors to perform the play in different languages, including French, German, Portuguese and Spanish.

"The incredible thing about the German version is that Nannerl actually reads the Mozart family letters verbatim," Milo says. "Those are the words that Mozart intended to say, and it's quite special."

Tickets for "The Other Mozart" start at \$35 and can be purchased at artsandissues.com, by phone at 1-866-698-4253 or at the Morris University Center (MUC) Welcome Desk. The-BANK of Edwardsville sponsors the show.

Prior to the show, you can take advantage of the SIUE Friends of Music's dinner buffet in Fixins' Restaurant, located in SIUE's Morris University Center. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. for a reception with dinner starting at 6 p.m. Dinner tickets are available for \$25 each and are purchased separately from the Arts & Issues performance. Preferred seating at the performance will be available for those attending the benefit dinner. In addition, for those that purchase tickets for the benefit dinner and the performance, Arts & Issues will contribute the cost of your performance ticket to the Friends of Music scholarship fund.

Arts & Issues is tied to the academic mission of the University and offers unique opportunities for students, faculty, staff and the community, to engage with performers and speakers through master classes and special sessions.