

# "Born in East Berlin" Reminds of the Power of Music to Change the World



**San Francisco, CA, USA** – East meets West by way of an amazing **Bruce Springsteen** rock'n'roll concert long ago and in what may well have been a galaxy far, far away.

This is the premise of ***Born in East Berlin***, playwright **Rogelio Martinez's** imaginings of the behind the scenes when **The Boss** performed in East Germany. This production, second in the playwright's three play cycle exploring the "Cold War," is under direction of **.Margaret Perry** and part of the **San Francisco Playhouse Sandbox Series** at the **Creativity Theater**.



The performance opens on a stage backdrop topped with barbed wire. Intermittent spots give a prison-like feel. The opening set offers only a table and chairs- like ones we'd expect in a place in which interrogations take place. A table is parked at stage left at which a head phones-wearing surveillance officer sat most for of the play, accompanied by an antiquated reel-to-reel tape recording machine. This all served to remind of the constant surveillance.



**Anne (Ash Malloy\*) receives some unsettling advice from hotel employee Hugbert (Christopher Reber\*).**

Enter the wise-cracking, big-haired imagined manager for **Springsteen**, Anne (**Ash Malloy**), and the three government officials with goal to detain, ahem, meet with her to discuss terms of her client's appearance. Anne does her best to negotiate with these "party" people, and the fun takes off spoofing the theme from a memorable line: "We don't separate culture and politics..."



**Government agents (Griffin O'Connor and Wera von Wulfen) listen in on conversations.**

The confinement of **Springsteen's** manager, big-haired “Anne” (**Ash Malloy**) (who astounds with her insouciance) is beyond funny. Anne manages to either agitate each of the boundary-less government bureaucrats to confusion- or draw them in with her unique form of American charm. Her valorous would-be chaperone, Hans (**Patrick Andrew Jones**) is convincing in his role of hapless overseer, as well as easy on the eyes. **Christopher Reber** is memorable in his double duty as both the stand-out and hold-up-the-works government agent, as well as a goofy government hotel employee, Hugbert.



Government agents (Griffin O'Connor, Wera von Wulfen, and Christopher Reber\*) report their observations back to headquarters.

Was this what really happened in 1988? We don't know. But we do know whatever did happen must have been just as unorthodox- and that **The Boss** felt he needed to make a statement about the reason for his appearance: "I'm not here for or against any government. I've come to play rock'n'roll for you in the hope that one day all the barriers will be torn down."



**Lotte (Lauren Hart\*) warns Hans (Patrick Andrew Jones\*) about possible consequences.**

Did rock 'n' roll help bring down the Berlin Wall? We don't know that, either. But it's interesting to ponder... especially considering **Springsteen's** unforgettable performance of his **Chimes of Freedom**.



**Katja (Isabel Langen) watches American music videos on TV with Gerhard (Griffin O'Connor).**

The playwright shares that *Born in East Berlin* is “an extremely personal play but no one would know it.” Born in Cuba, **Martinez** came to the US in 1980 on the Mariel boat lift. As **San Francisco Playhouse** artistic director **Bill English** states in his playbill statement, **Martinez** “struggled for years to write a play about the repressive years of his Cuban childhood, the constant surveillance, the total lack of respect for individual rights.” Illustrating this perpetual lack of privacy, **English** further shares a story about **Martinez** remembering from childhood having passed a woman watching him as he walked home with a bag from the grocery store; upon arrival at home that same woman was at his door asking what was in the bag.



**Hugbert (Christopher Reber\*) meets up with Alix (Wera von Wulfen) and makes her an interesting offer.**

"I just can hardly believe it," **English** said as he introduced the performance on Press Night. "It's been such an incredible act of love... We've worked so hard and it has been such a thrill to be a part of this."

"This production was so great because the cast was so young," **Martinez** shared after opening night. Yes, the cast is energetic, enthusiastic, and more than convincing as they take their positions on either side of the governmental fence as officials or fans who must look over their shoulders in order to follow their hearts.

Playful dialogue, a sense of intrigue, and an opportunity offered to appreciate the freedom that we have as US citizens really spoke to the audience. This reviewer appreciated the inclusion of the iconic footage of **The Boss** having someone reach down to pull a young fan onstage with him to dance to his rebellious **Dancin' In the Dark**. Imagining how that young woman's life was changed forever as she abandoned restraint and risked public fraternization with an "outsider" drove home the importance of the decisions we make, even here in the US, on a daily basis- –and about what it truly means to be free.





**Gerhard (Griffin O'Connor) gives Katja (Isabel Langen) feedback on creating an American flag.**

Text C2020 **Michele Caprario**

Photos 2020 Jessica Palopoli, used with permission of SF Playhouse.

This production, at part of SF Playhouse's "Sandbox Series," takes place at **The Creativity Theater** at Yerba Buena Gardens, 221 4th Street. Performances run until Saturday, February 29, 2020. Tickets may be obtained by contacting the box office at 415/677-9596 or by going to <https://www.sfplayhouse.org/sfph/2019-2010-season/born-in-east-berlin/>.