

PREVUE // THE TIMEKEEPERS

You think it's funny?

Israeli duo uses humour to get their watchmakers through the Holocaust

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Humour and the Holocaust together seems like oil and water: never the two shall mix. But the way Roy Horovitz sees it, comedy can be another legitimate way of exploring the human tragedy more than half a century after it occurred.

"In Israel, we're very familiar with the historical material [of the Holocaust]," Horovitz explains, freshly arrived in Edmonton and sipping tea on a friend's living room couch. "Sixty years after what happened, you have to look for new or fresh aspects to deal with the history. In no way is it a reduction or insult, but humour helps people."

Nodding, perched across from him, is fellow cast member Omer Etzion. This is the pair's second trip to Edmonton performing Dan Clancy's *The Timekeepers*. The play traces a concentration camp friendship that forms between Benjamin, a Jew, and a flamboyant German homosexual named Hans, paired together to repair watches for the Nazis. Humour is their coping mechanism—a technique more true to life than most Holocaust stories make note of.

"During rehearsals we read a book that was then published in Israel: a historian had collected all the characters and jokes [from] the concentration camps," Horovitz explains. "It's unbelievable."

He notes comparisons to *Life is Beautiful*, Roberto Benigni's Oscar-winning film, in the five or so years that *Timekeepers* has been touring the globe. The play's humorous touch has generally received praise from Tel Aviv to London, and it's kept Horovitz and Etzion busy with a globe-trotting agenda of performances, though there has been controversy, stemming not from content of the show but the nationality of those putting it on.

The Timekeepers appearance at the 2005 Dublin Fringe faced protests from those pushing a Palestinian-Irish solidarity agreement. The protestors didn't want the Israeli company performing; their public demonstrations inadvertently made *The Timekeepers* the most talked-about ticket in town.

"[It was] very good for public relations," Horovitz laughs. "The people [protesting] didn't see the show, and people coming out of the venue confronted them. We got a lot of media coming, and a lot of interviews. It

made us a great hit there. Actually, that's what brought us to Edmonton in the first place."

Miki Stricker, then the festival director of the Edmonton Fringe, was at the Dublin Fringe, and booked *The Timekeepers* for the following year's festival. It was a hit here too, becoming a Fringe holdover and now returning for a second go. The show's still attracting new audiences in new locales—"just this morning we got an email from Slovakia" Horovitz says—and the pair note that people around the world react in different ways to humour in a Holocaust story: Etzion mentions a tense atmosphere while performing in Germany, a more open one here and a particularly intense Poland run, where the theatre was just five minutes away from a concentration camp.

"In every place in the world, there is some kind of touch [for] the people who see the show," he says. ▽

UNTIL SUN, APR 19 (8 PM; 2 PM SAT & SUN)

THE TIMEKEEPERS

WRITTEN BY DAN CLANCY

STARRING VICTOR ATTAR, ROY HOROVITZ,

OMER ETZION

WESTBURY THEATRE (10330 - 84 AVE),

BY DONATION