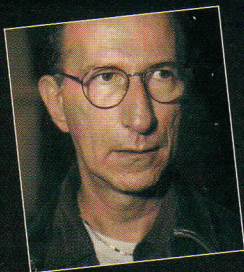


t h e a t e r

Two decades after the success of his gay Holocaust drama *Bent*, playwright Martin Sherman returns to Broadway— with Olympia Dukakis in the lead
By Gerard Raymond

Sherman's *Rose* blooms



Sherman (inset) says star Dukakis "completely inhabits the role."

DUKAKIS: LALAS SAMIS; SHERMAN: TOM MCINTYRE

Once again Oscar-winning actress Olympia Dukakis is playing an unforgettable character with an extraordinary story. But this time she's not Mrs. Madrigal in the TV version of *Tales of the City*. She's playing the title—in fact, the only—character in *Rose*, a new play on Broadway by Martin Sherman. *Rose* marks the London-based Jewish-American gay playwright's first Broadway play since the 1979 debut of *Bent*, his groundbreaking drama about the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany.

Sherman's latest play derives to some extent from his childhood on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Although he lived two doors down from his Ukrainian grandparents, they couldn't communicate: They never

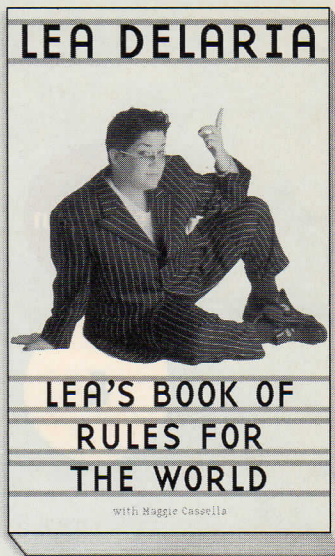
learned English, and young Martin was forbidden to learn Yiddish. But *Rose* packs in all the stories Sherman might have wished for.

An 80-year-old Jewish immigrant, *Rose* has lived through the horrors of the last century. And Dukakis holds the audience spellbound as she recounts *Rose's* epic life story. "She completely inhabits the role," the playwright enthuses. "She is totally present in every moment."

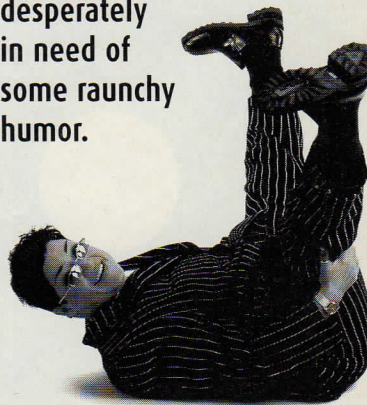
The indomitable *Rose* belongs to a long line of vivid Sherman creations that includes Isadora Duncan in *When She Danced* and the American expatriate Mrs. Honey in the apocalyptic black comedy *A Madhouse in Goa* (both performed by Vanessa Redgrave in London). "I love strong women," Sherman says. He will soon begin ►

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work for director Franco Zeffirelli on a film script about another great diva—Maria Callas.

"It's ironic that I'm most famous for *Bent*, which has no women in it. I love it when women come to me and ask, 'How do you know? How do you understand?'" Sherman says. "I know it isn't transference. It may have something to do with being marginalized by society. It may have to do with the fact that both gay men and straight women have to deal with men all the time in a particular way. That's very difficult, and so there's understanding."

Sherman had originally intended to write a companion piece to *Rose* about a gay man who has also lived through the past century. Rose, Sherman says, has witnessed "the slow death of a very vivid culture"—the gradual disappearance of Yiddish culture as European Jewry became assimilated in America or became part of the new state of Israel. "If you are writing about a gay person," he points out, "you would see the birth of a culture."

Gay characters frequently populate Sherman's work, even when he's not dealing explicitly with gay subjects as in *Bent* or his movie about a gay dancer living with AIDS, *Alive and Kicking*. Sherman never got around to writing that gay companion play, but gay audiences watching Dukakis in *Rose* will make their own associations with the character's remarkable story.

"In *Rose* it's the Jewish part of me, not the gay part, that is obvious," Sherman comments. "But it is clearly from someone who is gay. If someone writes out of an awareness of being gay, no matter what they write about—even if they write about sleigh dogs in Alaska—that will somehow make connections with gay audiences. At the time I wrote *Bent* it was important to declare yourself as a gay writer. It seems to me that we have now reached this point, which I think is extraordinarily healthy, where I can write about anything." ■

Raymond is a freelance theater writer based in New York City.



For other Advocate coverage of Martin Sherman and links to sites related to *Rose*, go to www.advocate.com