

'Fritz & Froyim' a haunting musical

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"Fritz & Froyim," a new musical by Norman Bein, concerns a former German S. S. officer, who is haunted and hounded by the ghost of a Jewish comedian.

This delightful show deals with heavy themes, and is loosely based on material from the novel, *The Dance of Genghis Khan*, by Roman Gary. The year is 1968 in Hamburg, Germany. Fritz and his dummy, Froyim, have a cabaret act. The chorus introduces the act with a cheerful song, "You Asked For Them," (and here they are!)

But the cabaret owner, Trudi, feels the act isn't bringing in an audience, and he wants to retire them. "People want to hear what's new," she sings. It's her view that they don't want to hear about the holocaust anymore, which is part of their act. So the act is retired.

At home and everywhere, Fritz (T.J. Mannix) doesn't know how to rid himself of this persistent ghost. (Mathew Hardy)

This is a clever, ingenious imp who knows how to annoy Fritz, and enjoys himself while doing it. Fritz is desperate to rid himself of the creature. But how? He tries many things, even shooting. But of course, you can't kill a ghost with a gun. The ghost laughs at Fritz and his gun.

Fritz moves on. Perhaps Father Donatikus can exorcise the ghost. So he visits Father D. But wait, Father D. fears that the ghost is Jewish. Froyim wears the yellow star that Hitler made Jews wear during the holocaust. "What," he

screeches, "you expect me to kill a Jew?" Of course he won't do that. He is furious with Fritz and makes him leave.

And now, Fritz frets about what he did to the Jews when he was an S.S. Officer. His wife tries to placate him. She sings, "A Job is a Job," meaning, he only had a job and he tried to do it, even if the job was killing people.

The picture changes radically. Since Fritz must put up with his unwanted companion, Froyim, he decides he ought to accommodate him. He wears a skullcap and sings, "I Keep a Kosher Home."

There's a subplot with Donatikus' secretary. She's getting married, and thrilled about it. She sings, "Through Life Together," a song extolling the virtue of having a partner.

This delightful escapade of a musical is narrated by Tracy Stark, who plays the piano and sings the musical score. What a treasure Tracy Stark is! She is a fascinating, endearing, multi-talented musician and performer.

The performers are all excellent. T.J. Mannix scores as Fritz; Mathew Hardy has a rare presence

as Froyim, the ghost who won't quit. Joan Barber, always a delight in her roles, scores again here in multiple roles. Erin Cronican who has an ingenu quality, is sweet and appealing, also in multiple roles. Dennis Holland has a strong thrust in multiple roles and so does Richard B. Watson, who certainly has a voice that carries. Froyim also does a playful, engaging dance.

Cheryl Cutlip is choreographer, Ryan Scott did the sets, A. Christina Giannini made the costumes, Eric Larson the lighting, and Eyo Cayer the sound design. These consummate professionals have done a splendid job and their work enhances the production. John W. Cooper did a superman job as director in pulling it all together seamlessly and gracefully.

"Fritz & Froyim" is at the Turtle Shell Theater, 300 West 43rd Street, until June 16th. Performances are Monday at 7p.m., and Wednesday through Saturday, at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$18 and are available from SmartTix, at www.smarttix.com or phone 212-868-4444. For group sales, call Carol Osrow, (212) 265-8500.