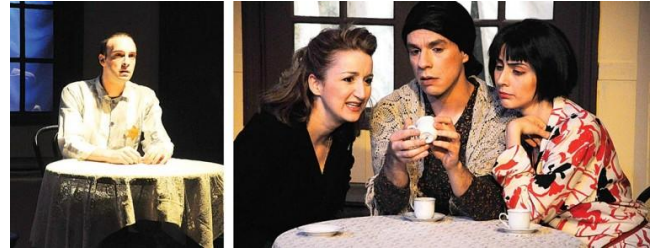


## Greek play explores love and war

by Erika Usui, qboro Contributor | Posted: Thursday, March 31, 2011 12:00 pm

Phyto Stratis (photo left) plays a Jewish refugee who escapes to Nazi-occupied Thessalonika. (Photo right) Theodora Loukas, left, Dimitris Bozinis and Kristina Siapkara seek omens at the bottom of their coffee cups.



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PHOTOS COURTESY GREEK CULTURAL CEN

It's the eternal question, which, when asked by a child, doesn't always get a clear answer: Where do babies come from?

For playwrights Thanasis Papathanasiou and Michalis Reppas, the answer is simple enough: "Babies are Brought by the Stork." Now in its seventh year of production, the whirlwind tale of love, lust and survival in Nazi-occupied Thessalonika unravels at Astoria's Greek Cultural Center, revealing the many mishaps that surround the wartime delivery of two bundles of joy.

At the center of the storm is a young Jewish man, Joseph, who escapes from a concentration camp and, hunted by the Germans, finds refuge in a Greek couple's bedroom closet.

While the lovely couple, played by Theodora Loukas and Christos Alexandridis, are true humanitarians who risk their own lives by offering him sanctuary, they are perpetually unable to take care of themselves. Their marriage is defined by their inability to conceive, a process made especially difficult due to the percussive sounds of Allied shelling which frequently disrupts their lovemaking.

And the couple who live upstairs, played by Kristina Siapkara and Yiannis Amouris, have the same problem of infertility.

The plot is further complicated by the fact that the upstairs husband is a Nazi sympathizer, and the neighborhood gossip queen, played by Dimitris Bozinis, just won't leave the couples alone.

After years of trying, the two childless couples' efforts to conceive are fruitless until the holy Mother Mary — or men other than the respective husbands — appropriately (and inappropriately) intervene. Consequently, on the celebratory day of Thessalonika's liberation from the Germans, the two heroines go into labor with the assistance of a Roumelian guerilla from the National Popular Liberation Army. Watching the two women give birth, the two husbands and the young Jewish man faint at the sound of their screams from contractions and the lingering gunfire.

According to the playwrights, the piece “is not farce, it is a comedy of situations and characters with glimpses of drama, emotion and conflict.” As such, the Papathanasiou-Reppas play is a cherished dedication to the Jews of Thessalonika and to the Greeks who sheltered them, displaying an extraordinary balance in telling the heartwrenching story of survival and the complications that arise from paternal ambiguity.

And as the story leaves it unclear whether the couples and their children live happily ever after or if they end up on the World War II equivalent of Maury Povich clawing at each other, the piece makes one wonder whether it is better to believe in superstition or to look for scientific truth. Perhaps either way, as the saying goes, all is fair in love and war.

‘Babies are Brought by the Stork ’

When: Fridays, Saturdays at 8 p.m. Sundays at 4 p.m. through April 17 (718) 726-7329

Tickets: \$20

Where: Greek Cultural Center, 26-80 30 St., Astoria