

## JET's "4000 Miles" bridges the distance between generations

By Vivian DeGain, The Oakland Press

The Jewish Ensemble Theatre is staging a contemporary drama, created by a gifted 38-year-old writer and performed by a truly talented cast, "4000 Miles" by Amy Herzog.



Herzog's play was a finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and won the 2012 Obie Award for Best New American Play.

Herzog writes about her story, "After suffering a major loss while he was on a cross-country bike trip, 21-year-old Leo seeks solace from his feisty 91-year-old grandmother Vera in her West Village apartment. Over the course of a

month, these unlikely roommates infuriate, bewilder, and ultimately reach each other. '4000 Miles' looks at how two outsiders find their way in today's world."

Directed by Christopher Bremer, JET's managing director, "4000 Miles" stars Joseph Seibert as Leo and Henrietta Hermelin as Vera.

Each character struggles with loss and denial, and the audience witnesses how frustration and compassion are both sides of the same coin.

Bremer said, "What struck me about this wonderful play is that we all know the cliché you come into this world and you go out alone, but the truth is that we all spend a great deal of time alone even though we are surrounded by other individuals."

The fine actors do it with movement and distance.

Hermelin's Vera maneuvers her way around the apartment in an aging body. Her steps become all the more delicate, her need to hang on pronounced, and her everyday items misplaced.

Yet she remains a dogged force for her survival and leftist ideas.

Seibert's Leo says he will only be staying for one night, but the tension in his face and posture belie his capacity to decide anything. He can't sit still and he can't move on.

The acting is true and the dialogue is wonderful.

**FYI: The Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents '4000 Miles' through Dec. 1 at the Aaron DeRoy Theatre on the campus of the Jewish Community Center, 6600 West Maple Road in West Bloomfield Township. Tickets are \$41-\$48, discounts for seniors and students. Performances at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays; 5 and 8:30 p.m. Saturdays; 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays; plus 2 p.m. Wednesday Nov. 20 and 7:30 p.m. Nov. 27. Call 248-788-2900 or visit [www.jetttheatre.org](http://www.jetttheatre.org).**

Ronelle Grier, of Detroit Jewish News

"*4000 Miles*, the dramatic comedy by Amy Herzog now playing at Jewish Ensemble Theatre, takes its characters (and the audience) on a multi-leveled journey, with an insightful script and superb cast that make the trip worth taking.

A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, *4000 Miles* is the story of free-spirited Leo (Joseph Seibert) and his equally nontraditional grandmother, Vera (Henrietta Hermelin).

When Leo shows up unexpectedly at Vera's Manhattan apartment after the last leg of a cross country bicycle trip, they spend an edifying few weeks getting to know each other and themselves. While Vera is initially disconcerted by Leo's sudden arrival, they eventually forge a bond that transcends their generational differences.

It would be hard to imagine a more perfect role for Hermelin, who brings Vera to life with all her emotional complexity and age related frailties. When she says 'The worst part of being old is not being able to find my words,' we feel her frustration and admire her acceptance of that which is beyond her control.

She moves like a much older woman, wincing with the effort of rising from a chair or navigating the single step between the kitchen and the living room.

Seibert is genuine as the young adult who is filled with equal measures of self-confidence and self-doubt. Buoyed by his grandmothers honesty and unconditional support, he comes to terms with a recent tragedy and confronts the tumultuous family relationships he left behind.

If the sign of a good director is to make the play appear to flow effortlessly, then Christopher Bremer, who is also JET managing director, does an exemplary job.

There is one hilarious scene where grandmother and grandson smoke an herb-filled pipe and end up giggling, consuming copious amounts of junk food, and sharing questionable confessions about their respective love lives.

Lydia Hiller plays Rebecca, or Bec, Leo's on-and-off love interest, who goes through her own transformation during the brief time she shares with Leo and Vera.

A humorous diversion is provided by Amanda (Arianne Villareal), a flamboyant art student and intended one-night stand, complete with Valley Girl accent, outlandish mini-skirted ensemble and mile-high platform shoes.

Sound Designer Mathew Lira realistically replicates the screeching feedback from Vera's hearing aid, and the songs by various pop-rock artists that punctuate each scene change are just right.

Lighting is by Neil Kavin, with costumes by Christa Koerner, props by Diane Ulseth, and wonderful set by Jennifer Maiseloff."