



Photographer | PJ

Rhodes University Drama Department Presents

# BENT

By Martin Sherman

Directed by Robert Haxton

24 -26 September

Main Theatre

7:00pm

## About the Play |

The persecution of homosexuals during the Nazi party's rule in Germany, especially during the holocaust of the Second World War, is an aspect of history that has only come to light in the past 30 years. Martin Sherman was one of the first to explore the happenings of this era in his play *Bent*, first produced in 1979.

The play follows Max as he is hounded out of Berlin during the Night of the Long Knives, when Hitler purged his ranks of those he deemed impure and dangerous. Parading as a Jew in Dachau Concentration Camp, Max embarks on the ultimate journey of discovering what truth actually entails and how humanity is only achievable

through honesty and love. While it is a direct examination of the terrifying atrocities which the Nazi's committed during the holocaust, the play interweaves themes of loyalty, cruelty, despair, humanity and love resulting in one of the most shocking and powerful outcomes in theatre history.

This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the plays production, and so commemorates the rebirth of homosexual activism and pride.

Robert Haxton directs the play in a completely different era than the one it was originally set in. As such, he is acknowledging the difficulties which minority groups, such as homosexuals, have been forced to deal with in society through a lens which magnifies the experience.

The play speaks across all existence, mirroring the pain, both physical and emotional, which suffering and loss bring. *Bent* is a story about having the strength to achieve one's own identity, to preserve it and cherish it.

## About the Playwright |

Martin Sherman (born 1938) is an American screenwriter and playwright. He was educated at Boston University, where he received a B.A. and an M.F.A. in theatre. Although trained as an actor, he was early drawn to writing plays. His large body of work deals mainly with gay issues, but he also looks at themes revolving around the search for identity and love.

Martin Sherman grew up in a conservative Jewish household. As such *Bent* is written from a very personal perspective, dealing as it does with the Nazi's persecution of homosexuals as well as Jews during World War II.

Sherman's most successful film was adapted from the original script *Alive and Kicking/Indian Summer*, which he authored himself. Other screenplays include *Mrs Henderson Presents* which starred Dame Judi Dench. He also wrote the book for the musical *The Boy from Oz*, based on Peter Allen's life and career, earning him a second Tony nomination. Sherman has written two collections of gay-themed plays. His play *Rose* was nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play in 2000. Olympia Dukakis starred in the Broadway production that same year.

[http://www.glbtq.com/arts/sherman\\_m.html](http://www.glbtq.com/arts/sherman_m.html)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Sherman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Sherman)

## About the Director |

After completing his BA in Drama and English in 2007, Robert went on to obtain his Honours in Drama (2008) specialising in Directing, Choreography, Physical Theatre and Writing. Throughout his time in Grahamstown he has worked, performed and directed for the National Arts Festival (NAF). 2006 saw him perform in Alan Parker's *Attic Stories* for the *First Physical Student Company*. At the National Schools Festival 2007, Robert did the musical direction and performed with the *Ubom! Eastern Cape Theatre Company* for a revival of *Triplets of Tanti*. In 2008, he performed in Wesley Dientje's *Hamlet Machine*. Most recently Robert performed at the 2009 NAF in Zoe Reeve's *Outside & Beside Herself* as well as directing Martin Sherman's classic Comic Thriller *Cracks*.

Currently doing his Masters in Directing, also at Rhodes, Robert has eagerly waited four years for the opportunity to direct Martin Sherman's *Bent*. His Honours directing examination piece, *Wit* by Margaret Edson, allowed him to explore and realise the stylistic combination of some of his influences, mainly in directing, physical theatre and choreography. In *Bent*, Robert wishes to take the 'total theatre experience' to extreme heights by collaborating with Journalism, Music & Fine Arts students for the Bent Voom Portraits Exhibition. These portraits combine aspects of film, musical composition, original writing, photography, painting as well as performance art exhibits, and will be a conceptual offering celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2 Act epic that is *Bent*.

## About the Pink Triangle |

The pink triangle (German: *Rosa Winkel*) was one of the Nazi concentration camp badges, used by the Nazis to identify male prisoners in concentration camps who were sent there because of their homosexuality. Every prisoner had to wear a triangle on his or her jacket, the colour of which was to categorize him or her according "to his kind." Jews had to wear the yellow badge (in addition to any other badge representing other reasons for incarceration), and "anti-social individuals" (which included vagrants and "work shy" individuals) the black triangle.

By the end of the 1970s, the pink triangle was adopted as a symbol for gay rights protest. Some academics have linked the reclamation of the symbol with the publication, in the early 1970s, of concentration camp survivor Heinz Heger's memoir, *Men with the pink triangle*.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink\\_triangle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_triangle)

## About the Night of the Long Knives |

The Night of the Long Knives (German: Nacht der langen Messer) or "Operation Hummingbird", was a purge that took place in Nazi Germany between June 30 and July 2, 1934, when the Nazi regime carried out a series of political executions, most of those killed being members of the Sturmabteilung (SA), the paramilitary Brownshirts. Adolf Hitler moved against the SA and its leader, Ernst Röhm, because he saw the independence of the SA, and the penchant of its members for street violence, as a direct threat to his power. Hitler also wanted to conciliate leaders of the Reichswehr, the official German military. They both feared and despised the SA and in particular feared Röhm's ambition to absorb the Reichswehr into the SA under his own leadership. Finally, Hitler used the purge to attack or eliminate critics of his regime, especially those loyal to Vice-Chancellor Franz von Papen, and to settle scores with old enemies.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night\\_of\\_the\\_Long\\_Knives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_of_the_Long_Knives)

## Information |

**Age recommendation** | 16 language nudity violence

**Duration** | two hours | including interval

**Tickets** | Theatre Café | Theatre Foyer | 09:00 – 16:00 weekdays

**Ticket price** | R15 & R20

**Further Information** | [www.ru.ac.za/drama](http://www.ru.ac.za/drama)

**Contact** | theatrecomplex at ru.ac.za

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