

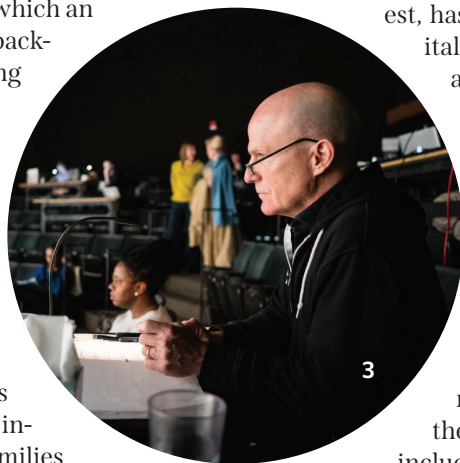


Exploring Stoppard's 'Leopoldstadt' at Court

Tom Stoppard, the Czech-born British playwright, is renowned for such brainy, linguistically clever works as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (a riff on *Hamlet*), *The Real Thing* (a meditation on adultery), *Arcadia* (in which an English country house is the backdrop for ideas about everything from history and mathematics to landscape gardening and lust), and *The Coast of Utopia* (a trilogy dealing with the philosophical roots of the Russian Revolution).

His latest play, *Leopoldstadt*, which opened in London shortly before the pandemic forced its early closure, follows the fates of the members of two intermarried Viennese Jewish families and all the convulsive events they were caught up in between 1899 and 1955.

For years, Stoppard, now 83, delighted in referring to himself as “a bounced Czech”—a winningly witty capsule version of his background that, as it turned out, was a great deal more complicated than that clever bit of wordplay suggested. Born in 1937, in what is now the Czech Republic, Stoppard’s family fled to Singapore just before the Nazi onslaught. After the death of his father, he and his mother and brother moved on



to British India before finally settling with his new stepfather in England in 1945. But it wasn’t until the 1990s that Stoppard learned that all his grandparents were Jewish, and that they all had been murdered in the Holocaust.

Chicago’s Court Theatre, unable to stage live productions until February 2021 at the earliest, has devised a series of special digital programs to fill the gap. Chief among them is “Dive Deep—Leopoldstadt” (running Oct. 5–Nov. 16) for which Charles Newell, the theater’s artistic director, has gathered a group of scholarly talents from the faculty of Court’s partner, the University of Chicago, who will give five seminars exploring the history and politics of Vienna during the first half of the 20th century, including the influence of Austrian Jewish intellectuals and artists of the time, and aspects of Jewish migration and identity. Those sessions will culminate in a virtual reading of the play that Newell, who has a rich history of directing Stoppard’s work, will oversee.

Note: For an insightful essay about Stoppard and Leopoldstadt, visit bit.ly/3ldw9mw. For full details about Court’s programming, visit courttheatre.org.

Modern designer stages Elmhurst Art Museum exhibit

The West Suburban-based Elmhurst Art Museum reopened June 30. And on exhibit in several rooms of its historic McCormick House—the 1952 structure designed by famed modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe that is part of the museum’s campus—is “A Space Problem: Organized by David Salkin,” running through Nov. 15.

Trained as an architect, Chicago-based David Salkin now focuses on the art and design of custom rugs and wall coverings. Drawing on the work of five other contemporary designers, he has curated and decorated a series of rooms that is described as “an exhibit outfitted with paintings, ceramics, photo collages, and other design objects [including Salkin’s rugs] that is a combination of new and vintage works.”★

Visit Elmhurstartmuseum.org for details.

BY HEDY WEISS

Hedy Weiss, a longtime Chicago arts critic, was the Theater and Dance Critic for the Chicago Sun-Times from 1984 to 2018, and currently writes for WTTW-TV’s website and contributes to the Chicago Tonight program.



DID YOU KNOW? JUF partner agency Mount Sinai Hospital serves on the front lines of the pandemic.