

VWEEKEND

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FROM Russia, WITH love

Natalia Tszyu wanted to keep her children grounded, despite their famous father Kostya's massive fame. After divorcing her world champion husband she's guided them as a single mother to make their own mark on the world

CYDONEE MARDON



LIFE'S HURDLES
JANA'S BATTLE
TO BE A MUM

PASSION PLAY
A STIRRING
MUSICAL HOLDS
EXTRA MEANING
FOR ITS STAR

Story KEN BURROWES

PASSION PLAY

Generations of the one family come together on stage as soprano Tania de Jong brings her inspirational grandmother to life in new musical Driftwood based on a book written by her mother

Taking to the stage in Driftwood the Musical can be both confronting and cathartic for Australian soprano Tania de Jong.

The musical, based on a book by her mother Eva de Jong-Duldig, pays homage to Australian sculptor Karl Duldig and his artist-inventor wife Slawa Horowitz-Duldig and is very much a labour of love for de Jong, who is also producer.

The five-person cast musical, playing now at the Chapel off Chapel, follows the couple's lives in pre-war Vienna, the family's narrow escape from Nazi Austria, Slawa's ingenious invention of the foldable umbrella, and the incredible chain of events that took place after miraculously escaping the Holocaust and rebuilding their careers as artists in Melbourne.

The musical is an evolution from the original stage play by Jane Bodie, with lyrics by Anthony Barnhill and additional lyrics by both Bodie and de Jong.

De Jong portrays her inspirational grandmother Slawa in Driftwood.

Slawa and Karl were forced to escape the Nazis and still managed to save the majority of their magnificent paintings, sculptures and Viennese furniture which were hidden in a Paris basement with the help of her sister Rella and her husband at great risk.

With the exception of Rella, Slawa's entire family were murdered in the Holocaust.

De Jong's mother Eva was born in Vienna in 1938, a month before the annexation of Austria into the German Reich.

"My grandmother was a very talented artist and inventor and invented the original foldable umbrella in Vienna in 1929, the same one you carry in your handbag or briefcase," de Jong says.

"She named it 'Flirt' because we think she and my grandfather used to flirt underneath the brolly.

"Sadly when Hitler came into Vienna she was forced to sell her royalties because Eva was only a



Tania de Jong

few months old and she needed every cent to escape."

Escape to Switzerland (via Karl's tennis prowess which allowed him to gain a visa to enter a tournament) was followed by a move to Singapore. Again the drums of war beat loudly and the family fled again, this time to Australia, before the fall of Singapore to the Japanese.

Because of their Austrian citizenship the family were then interred at Tatura, which de Jong says "was like being in prison".

Their ticket out, and a new home in Melbourne, came when Karl joined the Australian Army.

Karl continued to make significant contributions to the art world but for a number of years Slawa couldn't create any art such as the impact of trauma on her.

This is the second iteration of Driftwood.

Since it was staged last year it has evolved tremendously, with new songs, new scenes and the role of de Jong's mother Eva brought into the musical as a character rather than a narrative role.

De Jong has a long list of her own achievements. A law graduate and singer who has performed around the world, she has also founded four charities – The Song Room, Creativity Australia and With One Voice social inclusion choir programs, Mind Medicine Australia and the Umbrella Foundation.

And she says it is the inspiration and fortitude of her family, particularly her grandmother and mother, which has had a telling effect on her life.

Each of her parents and her grandparents faced sometimes horrific experiences, but continued to forge new paths and create loving homes. "My mother is the most positive, optimistic person you could ever meet," she says. "Somehow my mum and her parents managed to transmute all of that suffering through their art, I believe.

"That's why mum's book being called Driftwood: Escape and Survival Through Art, it was really I think the art and their creativity which enabled them to continue to survive and thrive again in their lives."

De Jong says her mum has always been kind and generous to all people she meets. "This empathy and our background undoubtedly inspired me my passion for social inclusion and building bridges of understanding between diverse people, not walls between us," she says.

De Jong says Driftwood is about intergenerational trauma "because there is significant evidence showing that children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors carry this trauma within their cells even though they were not even born at the time".

"I was convinced that this was the cause of some of my existential angst and I believe most of us carry trauma, either from our ancestors and/or collective trauma.

"Creating Driftwood the Musical has been like coming full circle for me and it has brought mum and I closer together to work on this project. I now understand so much more of the sacrifices and suffering of our parents and grandparents. Their courage and resilience against all odds is truly inspirational."

Driftwood the Musical is at Chapel off Chapel until May 20 before travelling to Sydney and then will move to New York later this year

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Above: Tania de Jong as Slawa and Anton Berezin as Karl Duldig. Bottom from left: Slawa and Eva; Slawa and Rella in 1938; Slawa and Karl circa 1933.

