



Temple Beth Hillel

Sunday Morning Bagel Brunch

October 25, 2015
10:15 a.m. - Noon

Giovanni Is Here

**A staged dramatic reading of an original play written
by Mercedes Cohen and directed by Michael Cohen**

Based on historical events and people, and set during the Holocaust in wartime Rome, ***Giovanni Is Here***, written by **Mercedes Cohen** and directed by **Michael Cohen**—both TBH members—recalls a part of Holocaust history not commonly known. During the Nazi occupation of Italy, many Italians willingly risked their lives protecting and hiding their Jewish neighbors from the enemy. The play recounts the story of Belle Levi, a pregnant Jewish dressmaker, hidden in the home of the Romanos, a Catholic family. The title, *Giovanni Is Here*, is the coded term used to alert Jews of the dangers of an imminent German raid.

The hazards of war, the occupation, and survival are part of Belle and the Romanos' lives as they strive for a semblance of a normalcy. Taking place in close quarters, the family jokes, laughs, squabbles, and discusses their fears as Belle, the young Jewish dressmaker, risks her life sewing and selling her handmade dresses on the Black Market.



Playwright **Mercedes Cohen** taught English for 27 years, and has written plays, novels and screenplays. The inspiration for *Giovanni Is Here* came to her when she met an elderly shopkeeper in the Roman ghetto. The shopkeeper told Mercedes her story of delivering a wedding gown on the morning of the Jewish round-up and of being rescued and hidden by a Catholic family until the liberation. After doing research, the viewpoints of the collaborator, the resistance fighter, and the secret partisan were added to the play to represent the complexities of human relationships. *Giovanni Is Here* was the 2014 award-winning production of Ross Alternative Works.

Play director **Michael Cohen** has been active in theater for over 45 years. He is board president of the Actors Ensemble, Berkeley where he has co-produced and directed several productions. Michael has also served for 25 years as Director of Performing Arts at Rosemead High School in Los Angeles, and is now a retired member of the Actors' Equity. His extensive theatre career includes stage management for the Barn Theatre in Augusta, Michigan, the Ensemble Studio Theater and the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts, Los Angeles.



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