

MY PLAYLIST

AVI JACOBS



Occupation: Event coordinator
Age: 21

Music

Do you download or buy over the counter: Download.

The last music I purchased was: The Script.

On high rotation on my iPod is: a lot of '80s music till now.

The last live show I saw was: Shweky, Rihanna in New York.

Films/TV/Radio

The last film I saw was: *Slumdog Millionaire*.

The last DVD I hired was: *Taken*.

My favourite TV shows are: *Friends*, 24.

My favourite radio station is: 104.1 by day, 106.5 by night.

Books

On my bedside table are: Harlan Cobin novels.

Internet

My favourite websites are: Facebook, smh.com.au, thehothits.com.au.

Berger back to hold the pickle

DALIA SABLE

COMEDIAN Rachel Berger's story is not unlike that of many Australians.

The daughter of struggling immigrants seeking to make a better life for their child, Berger grew up in her parents' delicatessen shop in iconic Acland Street, St Kilda.

It is this story that Berger recounts in her self-written, self-produced one-woman show, *Hold the Pickle*, which is back after unprecedented success for its third season.

For Berger, the success of the show came as somewhat of a surprise.

Though Berger has been a stand-up comedian for two decades, when *Hold the Pickle* opened in 2008 at Carlton's La Mama Theatre, it was her first-ever theatrical performance.

It is the universality of her story that Berger believes has contributed to her show's success.

"At a time when there is more migration around the world, perhaps the most since World War II, I wanted to deliver a play about them and survival to convey that you can't always control what happens to you in life, but you can control how you feel," Berger says.

"Lots of people stayed after [the performance] and told me their stories. That's really a privilege to hear. What has been said to me, especially

by Holocaust survivors, is that they never realised their children understood. That has been very validating."

Further validation came when the show received three Green Room nominations, including best female performer and best lighting in an independent show, and new writing for the Australian stage.

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Rachel Berger
Writer and performer



Rachel Berger is back for the third season of *Hold the Pickle*.

"It's affirming because you take this huge leap like Evil Knievel to see if you can jump over all these cars and [when] you get to the other side, you think, 'well I did it and it worked.'"

In this season of the play, Berger will reach out to a new audience, performing for the first time to school groups – an audience she previously restricted from seeing the show.

"I had it down for no-one under 18. I didn't want [them] to have to hear this stuff. I am not a parent; I

don't know what they want to see and I thought it would be boring and way too historical," Berger explains.

The dramatic change came after Berger was approached by the principal of Carey Grammar School, who said she believed years 10 to 12 students would benefit from seeing the show.

Despite being "terrified" by the idea, Berger will stage two performances especially for schools – one for Carey Grammar and the other for

Bialik College.

As for what's next for Berger, after this season she hopes to take the show on the road, with the ultimate goal of holding the pickle for audiences in New York.

"It will get the audience it deserves there," she says.

Hold the Pickle will be staged from June 9-21, 8pm, Sunday 6pm, at Chapel off Chapel in Prahran. Bookings: (03) 8290 7000; www.chapelloffchapel.com.au.

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A look at French complicity

BRAM PRESSER

WHEN Daniel Goldhagen published his incendiary work *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in 1997, the sense of outrage within Germany was palpable. With the exception of a few minor works that preceded it – one of which Goldhagen clearly plagiarised in part – no other book had so overtly posited the theory that ordinary German people were not merely naïve or complacent bystanders to the Final Solution, but active and willing participants.

Now similar resentments are bubbling to the surface in France, thanks to Jonathan Littell's massive novel, *The Kindly Ones*, which turns a mirror on French complicity in the Nazi atrocities.

Having won both of France's major literary prizes, and already a bestseller in several countries, *The Kindly Ones* is finally available in English translation and is sure to set the literary world ablaze once again with its provocative penchant for finger pointing.

Dr Max Aue, a former SS apparatchik, lives a comfortable life as the manager of a lace factory in postwar France. Having escaped any form of retributive justice for his wartime actions, he decides to write a memoir about his involvement in the

BOOK REVIEW

THE KINDLY ONES

Jonathan Littell

Random House, \$34.95

Nazi machine "to set the record straight".

But whereas previous novels with a former Nazi as the protagonist almost always have had a sense of shame or moral comeuppance, Littell dares to eschew convention and makes Dr Aue an unapologetic, amoral narrator. Don't expect any moments of clarity or ethical epiphanies here. This is a cold, harsh book in which Littell clearly aims to show that the French, even by just standing aside and allowing the Holocaust to sweep over them, had an unforgivable complicity that often culminated in active participation.

Dr Aue himself is not an opportunist in the fashion of Alberto Moravia's *Conformist* or Michel Tournier's *Ogre*, but rather someone dragged along by the tide of fascism. He is conveniently present at many of the historical places and milestones of the war, from the siege at Stalingrad to the offices of the Nazi Party's elite to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Throughout he uses his legal background to report "objectively" on the war effort.

In addition to the chilling absurdity of Dr Aue's observations, peppered as they are with deep, albeit skewed, philosophical introspection and classical literary allusions,

there is also an undercurrent of insane legalism and pedantry, which lays bare a society built on its own logic devoid of conventional morality.

Nazi prosecutors are concerned about possible instances of embezzlement and profiteering by camp commandants who might be fiddling the books for their own purposes.

No question is raised as to whether the killing of Jews is wrong, but seeing as budgets are allocated according to the numbers that are killed, deliberate misreporting amounts to theft and is a serious crime against the Reich. As a Jewish reader, it is difficult to confront perfectly rational logic like this and not feel challenged.

The Kindly Ones has been compared in France to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, but beyond the sheer size of the book, the comparison is erroneous and, frankly, lazy. Among the instances of graphic sexual perversion and disturbingly detailed descriptions of atrocities there are flashes of poetic brilliance, but not enough to catapult it to the level of modern classic. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly remains an important book, terrifyingly plausible in its rendering of the postwar attitude of many former Nazis.

Bram Presser is a lecturer in critical criminal law at The University of Melbourne and regular AJN columnist.