

Berlin Zoo

peter rose

Berlin Zoo premiered in 1983 at Franklin Furnace in NYC and was performed at Performance Space 122 in New York City that year.

Peter Rose played the actor.
Noah Shapiro on keyboards and guitar
Marty Goldenberg designed the lights.

From 1983-89 Berlin Zoo was performed at:

The Alte Oper, Frankfurt, Germany, 1985
The Alabama Halle, Munich, 1985
The Neue Kultur Centrum, Hannover, 1985
The Thalia Theatre, Hamburg, 1985
The Metropole Theatre, Berlin, 1985
The Theatre in der Garage, Erlangen, 1985
The Institute of Contemporary Art,
La Jolla, California, 1986
Performance Space 122, NYC, 1986
Highways Performance Space,
Santa Monica, CA, 1989
The Powerhouse Theatre, Venice, CA., 1989
Closed 11/12/89, The Rose Theatre, Venice, CA.
Produced by Santa Monica Cable Television, 1991

a performance

for one actor

West Berlin
1980

Scene 1: Rehearsal
Bare Stage as Theatre

Don't touch my props! You can do anything but don't touch my props! Nils, from Czechoslovakia, right? You said you can't speak English. You're speaking English now! Leave that alone. I know I hammered a small Photo of myself into the floor and the nail's sticking up. I'll pull it out after tonight's show. Leave that altar alone! And the sleeping bag. Don't touch the sleeping bag. I know it's pinned up in a crucifix. Tonight's Holy Cross Sunday. Last night was Rosh Hashana, The Jewish New Year. I was at the Judische Volkshochschule for services. The only young man in the synagogue.

Tonight's performance is special. Everything is worked out properly. Don't touch the ladder. I had to use it to put the black velvet over the mirror. The ladder stays up! And the toilet paper has to be there. I go up the ladder during the performance and roll the toilet paper down the rungs of the ladder slowly, very slowly across the stage to the altar and say, "Godavari grant a shy and grant thy grace, Amen!"

It's all clear. Don't touch any props. Don't touch anything! Everything is in place for tonight's performance. Nils! Leave that alone. Nils, why don't you come back in an hour and we'll talk then. I'm performing tonight at nine. Come back in an hour, Nils. Prague. I'm performing tonight. See you later!

(Actor addresses audience)

I can't believe that. Everything is set for tonight's performance and Nils wants to destroy the show. It's a great performance. A special show. A history of all the great spiritual figures. Ghandi is here. He bicycles around and around the stage, parks the bike, puts the kickstand down and puts on his sandals. Jesus takes the stage and takes his sandals off and baptizes himself in a pan of dirty water. He throws the dirty water out the window, baptizing many people as well. He throws the water out the window onto our heroine, Anna Livia Plurabelle's head as she hangs her clothing to dry.

Mohammed is here. He kills a few people with his sabre. Everyone is here and Nils, that Czech mime is trying to keep me from performing.

In tonight's show there are Hebrew songs for prayer and rejoicing: "Sh'ma Israel Adonai Elohainuh, Adonai Echad, Amen!"

And Christian Spirituals (sings): “I’ve got the love of Jesus down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart. I’ve got the love of Jesus down in my heart to to stay. If the devil doesn’t like it he can sit on a tack, sit on a tack, sit on a tack. If the devil doesn’t like it he can sit on a tack, sit on a tack today!”

The finale of tonight’s performance comes with Anna Livia’s monologue. She takes off her dress and washes it in The River Liffey. She washes her dress with stones. She washes her face, neck and shoulders, breasts, belly, thighs, legs and toes in the river.

“Anna Livia Plurabelle” (from *Finnegan’s Wake* by James Joyce)

“Well you know or kennet or haven’t I told you every telling has a taling and that’s the he and the she of it. Look. Look! The dust is growing. My branch is lofty taken root and my poor chair’s gone ashley. Felour. Feloo. It saon is late. Tis endless now since eye or eyewon last waterhouse’s clogh. I took it asunder I heard them say, when will they reassemble it? Oh, my back, my back! I want to go to Aix-lee Pains.

Actor address audience: And the finale draws nearer. (Actor hums Beethoven’s Fifth)

Actor as Anna Livia: Ping Pong. There’s the bell for Sexaloitez. Concepta conjenda des spray. Wring out the clothes bring in the dew. Ring out the old bring in the new: “Godavari grant the showers and grant thy Grace, Amen.”

The finale draws nearer. The music begins for the finale.
(Actor intones Beethoven's Fifth louder)

Anna Livia. Aura Luvia. Can't hear the waters of? The
chittering waters of. Flittering bats. Fieldmice. Bawk.
Talk. Ho! Are you not gone ahome. Go home! (Actor
lights candle): Can't hear the bawk of bats, all them
liffeying waters of. Save us. I feel as old as yonder elm.
Stone. All Livia's daughters sons. Dark hawk hear us.
Night. Night. My whole head hoes. I feel as old as
yonder elm. Stone. Night, now. Night.

Tell me tell me, tell me elm. Beside the rivering waters
of. Hithering, thithering waters of. Night. More no more.
Come again. Lost on a stranger. Night. Night.

(Actor blows out candle) Lights Up

Actor addresses audience: Nils came back into the
theatre. This time there were two men dressed in green
outfits with him. Policemen. West Berlin Polizei. They
walked onto the stage as Nils spoke.

"Was is hier los. Was nachst du hier?"

Nils, Ich habe meine performance heute abend.
You know I'm performing tonight. You gave me the keys.
We signed a contract. I'm going to do the performance
tonight. What are you doing?

“You have to leave the theatre. Jetzt. Nicht mehr. Du kannst hier nicht mehr theatre spielen. Was machst du hier? Scheisse! Raus!

Warum? Alles ist ordnung heute abend!

„You have to leave the theatre. Now!”

(Actor addresses audience): The police approached me. I turned on the radio and a waltz was playing. The policemen followed me and we danced a waltz as I collected my props. I climbed the ladder and took the toilet paper away. I took the sleeping bag off the crucifix. I got the hammer and took the photograph out of the floor. I got the stuff off my altar. I took the altar. I got my green sack and put my things in it.

I was getting kicked out of the theatre! No performance tonight. I picked up my green sack and the policemen escorted me off the stage, out of theatre, down four flights of stairs and onto the street.

I returned forty-five minutes later and there was a sign up on the theatre door:

Herrn Peter Rose

Keine Performance Heute Abend

Technisches Problem.

Scene 2
Bare Stage as Circus Grounds

I was counting on that performance tonight. For a few dollars. And a place to sleep in the theatre. I knew that one-fourth mile down The Anhalterstrasser was a circus, The Tempodrome. It's late and maybe the show is over for tonight. I'll go there and see what I can find. Find a place to sleep. I was counting on that performance for a place to sleep in the theatre. I saw the fence in front of the Big Top.

(Sings): Sheyn bin ich, sheyn, Sheyn iz mayn nomen,
Redt men mire shidichim Fun same rabonim.
Rabonische Toyre Iz doch zeyer groyz. Bin ich bay
mayn mamen a Lichtige royz.

On the other side of the fence were urinals. I raised my leg and went up and over the fence.

(Sings): A sheyn meydele bin ich, Royte zekelech trog
ich-Gelt in di tashn, Vayn in di flashn, Milech in di
krigelech, kinder in di vigelech. Shrayen ale sheyn-
Sheyn bin ich, Sheyn.*

I took a pee and the arc of my urine led me to the big top fifty yards ahead of me. I sat near a large stump which held the Big Top canvas down with thick rope.

I took my blue sleeping bag out of the green sack. I peeked under the canvas of the Big Top. There were only work lights on inside. No one was there. I lay out the sleeping bag opened the zipper and got in. I spent the night in the bag, half inside the fold of the canvas, inside the Big Top.

I felt a clump of a substance hit me on the chest. Another clump of this slimy substance hit me on the back and neck. Another clump hit me in the face and forehead. I got up and there was muddy earth all over my clothing and shoes. In front of me swaying back and forth, long trunk down in the muddy earth, throwing another clump at me.

“Guten morgen, elephanten! Was machst du? Schoen guten morgen.“ Another clump thrown at me. Huge flapping ears, swinging side to side and the elephant threw muddy earth in another direction. Thick legs, ears flapping side to side. I saw a man running quickly from a trailer parked behind the elephant.

“Was machst du hier!”

Nichts. Ich mache nichts. Ich spiele mit dem elephanten. Das ist alles. Ich habe den elephanten nicht vorher gesehen. I climbed over the fence. Then I saw the elephant. I wanted to ask if you knew a place where I could have breakfast, bischen Fruhstuck. “Out, over the fence and down the road!” Danke-schon, Bitte-schon. Guten morgen, Mein Lieber Elephanten!“

Scene 3
Empty lot near Berlin Wall

(Actor Addresses Audience)

I ran down the road. I wonder if I can get this elephant to ask his friend elephants to come to a big party. The circus sits in front of The Wall. We'll have a big party. I'll invite all the people I know in West Berlin. The Postal workers from Bahnhof Zoo, The Turks, all the young Germans I know squatting houses, hanging out in cafes all day, or smashing Ku'Damm windows with stones!

Meine Leiber, Elefanten!

I'll invite five or six elephants and hundreds of people. I'll hand out invites in the street and on the subway. We'll have vodka and hashish. I'll ask the elephants to bring Persian carpets. I'll bring long wooden beams, railroad ties. I'll throw the Persian carpets on the elephant's backs. The elephant's trunks will hold the railroad ties.

After everyone is drunk, high and dancing I'll sit on the Persian carpet on the elephant's back. The elephants will do it. Bang! Bang! Bang! Elephants. Beams. Persian carpets. Bang! Bang against the base of The Wall. Bang against the base of The Berlin Wall! Knock it down! Knock it down! Beam driving elephants knock it down. I can see The Wall tumbling down slowly.

Small and large concrete pieces. Cheap cinder block! We kick them around, laughing and dancing in the dusty rubble.

The Wall is down! I'll pronounce myself the new king.

The new king of one Germany.

No more two Germanys. Nicht mehr zwei Deutschland.

One Germany. Ein Deutschland.

No more two cities. Nicht mehr zwei Staaten.

One city. Ein Staat. No more two communities. Nicht mehr zwei Gemeinschaften. One community. Eine Gemeinschaft.

One man. Ein Mann. A woman. Eine Frau. Human-beings. Menschen. A dog. Ein Hund. Two cats. Zwei Katzen. A bird. Eine Vogel.

One Germany. Ein Deutschland. No more two Germanys. Nicht mehr zwei Deutschland.

Peter Alan Friedland Rose

Der neue Koening aus einem Deutschland. The new king of one Germany.

Scene 4
Deserted lot near The Berlin Wall

I found myself where I am. A deserted lot. Sand pile mountains and junk cars. Walking. Scrap heap of metal, broken glass, tires, transmissions. Dog shit. Get out of this place. Saw a tiny hole in the chain link fence bordering the Anhalterstrasser. I backstepped closer to the chain link fence. Ragged link in the fence. I glanced to my right and saw one German Shepherd Dog. Looked to the left and saw another Deutsche Shepherd Hound.

(Actor growls, barks and scowls): Two watchdogs guarding the junk, pale yellow sand piles, destroyed racing cars. Howling! Growling!

Platz! Platz! Down! Down! Langzam! Easy!

I kneeled down lower and backed out of the opening in the chain link fence.

Anhalterstrasser!

Scene 5
Street and Courtyard

On the street again. What to do in the street? I reached into my right pocket. Two keys. Two keys? One for my green sack at Bahnhof Zoo Train Station. And the other key? The Turkish woman. The landlord's wife. She gave me the key of few days ago.

"Please make a copy of this key," she said

Sure, why not!

"It's the key to my Volkswagen," she said.

Really! There must be a reason she asked me to fix it. She gave me the broken key. When she gave me the key she taught me a prayer. She said it will help me to get to Mecca faster.

(Actor kneels to pray): Clean behind ears with thumbs. Cross arms across chest. Knees to the ground. Back, neck and head follow. Forehead touches the ground.
(Actor rises, addresses audience): I'm going to make it to Mecca. The least I can do is make a copy of the Turkish woman's key. I did.

A few days later I walked into the courtyard and saw the white Volkswagen. There it was in front of me. Does the new key work? See if the key works. If the Turkish woman wants me to go to Mecca I'll need a Volkswagen to get there! For this life in Berlin the least I could get is a used white V.W. Volkswagen!

I went into the driver's seat. The key fits. Turning the ignition and the engine rumbles. Turning the steering wheel slightly to the left. First gear?

Suddenly running towards me and immediately facing the V.W. and me in it was the Turkish landlord and his wife right behind screaming, "Polizei! Polizei! Polizei!"

The landlord opened the car door violently and flung himself at me. He threw me into the courtyard and I tumbled backwards.

I didn't do anything! I fixed the key. The key works! Your wife asked me to fix the key. It's fixed!

He went for my throat. I rolled over and immediately did the prayer. You see, you see, Mecca! Mecca! I want to go to Mecca!

(Actor repeats prayer): Clean behind ears with thumbs. Cross arms across chest. Knees to the ground, back, neck and head follow. Forehead touches the ground.

The landlord held my shirt collar tight hurting my neck. I strained to turn around and there were two West Berlin Polizei standing in front of me.

“Passeport, bitte!”

Scene 6
Bare Stage as Prison Cell/Prison

The police took me to the station and I was fingerprinted. I checked into a cell after my passport, wallet and key were confiscated. A prison guard gave me tea in a plastic cup and a Milky Way. In the cell there was a buzzer to my right. I buzzed constantly. My index finger pressed repeatedly against the buzzer, buzzing the buzz of the beehive. A new guard came to the cell every time they heard the buzz. I asked each guard: "Do you speak English?"

"In Deutschland musst du Deutsche sprechen," he said.

Parli Italiano?

„In Deutschland musst du Deutsche sprechen.“

Parlez-vous Francais, Hablas Espanol?

In Deutschland musst du Deutsche sprechen.

You don't speak any English, American English, New York City English. I stood in the cell the entire night, buzzing the buzzer and howling. A guard brought me another tea in a plastic cup and a Milky Way. I stopped buzzing. The morning came and a different man came to the cell, dressed casually and speaking English.

“Herr Rose, can I talk to you?,” he asked

I’d love to.

“Come with me.”

He opened the cell and walked me down the hallway to an interview room. There were two rows of desks and chairs with an aisle down the middle. We sat at a desk on the left side closest to the window.

Herr Rose, he asked, what are you doing in West Berlin? And what is this key for? (pointing to the key in his right hand).

It’s for my locker at Bahnhof Zoo Train Station

“Really?” he asked.

Really!

“You know, Herr Rose, the police have many problems here in West Berlin. The French, British and American troops are stationed here. The Turks, Arabs and Eastern Europeans are arriving in large numbers. The situation in East Berlin necessitates that we be cautious. We watch for illegal activity of all kinds: immigrants without papers, drug traffic and the dangerous element wherever it may be. I hope you’re telling the truth, Herr Rose. If you aren’t the authorities will deport you.

Believe me, I said. It's the key to my locker at Bahnhof Zoo Train Station. I have a green sack in the locker with some dirty clothes, a towel, clean socks and a book.

The detective left the interview room and spoke to two men in the hallway. They escorted me back to the cell. The detective returned forty-five minutes later holding the green sack in his arms and a smile on his face. I asked if he'd read the book. He said all West German detectives were required to read *The Idiot* by Dostoyevsky.

"I'm taking your passport, he said. The secretary down the hall will give you a pink slip. You must return to The Foreign Police in two weeks. Until then the pink slip is your identification card in West Berlin. Don't lose it. You cannot leave the city. Don't try. You are very lucky, Herr Rose.

Lucky?

The detective escorted me to a prison guard who led me into the lobby. I signed out, took the pink slip, my green sack, one more Milky Way and exited the prison onto the street.

Scene 7
Bare Stage as Bahnhof Zoo Train Station

Green sack. No passport. A pink slip. Two more weeks. No money. I'll go to Bahnhof Zoo and check the green sack again. To the train station in the center of the city. Up onto the platform. Train tracks. Huge Station Bahnhof Zoo. Eight tracks. Trains coming and going everywhere. Arrivals. Departures: Hamburg, Paris, London, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Roma, Warsawa, Vilna, Minsk, Leningrad, Moscow!

Bahnhof Zoo. Station with a huge glass dome. Like an airport hanger of glass. For trains. I see pigeons. Doves. Doves flying into the station from the open end of the glass dome. Flapping. Flying. Flapping, flying into the station and flying out. At the farend of the glass dome many doves flying out of the dome and some doves hovering against the glass. Flapping, wings beating against the glass. Flying into the glass. Wings crashing, beaks smashing into the glass. Two doves hovering, Breast beating against the dome's glass. Smashing themselves. Doves crashing again and again against the glass!

Two doves fall dead on the tracks. Eighth platform, sixteenth track. I kneeled down on the platform and saw five, six, seven, eight and nine. More dead birds. Dead doves on the tracks.

I hopped down onto the tracks and took one and then a second dead pigeon-dove. Pulled my green sack closer to me on the platform. Unzipped the green sack and put the two dead doves into the sack. Zipped close the sack and walked down the platform and began running, running down the stairs.

I ran into the toilet. There was a lady folding towels. I opened a toilet stall and went in. I placed the green sack on the floor beside the toilet bowl. Opened the sack. I put one dead dove head first into the toilet bowl, holding its claws with my right hand. I flushed and flushed and flushed the toilet bowl. Pulled the dead bird up and shook it out!

Two clean dead wet pigeons. I put the two dead birds into my sack and left the toilet stall, the public bathroom, the train station and went directly to my campsite.

Scene 8
Deserted lot by Berlin Wall
Actor's Campsite

I snuck on the U-Bahn, schwarzerfahren. To the Kochstrasser. Late. I ran through the fields passed the open lot near The Wall. My campsite. A hole in the ground and a rusty grate over it for a fire. Small pot for boiling water. Old Tagespiegel. I took the grate off and emptied the water from the pot and tossed the pot away.

I dug out the earth from the hole. I dug the hole out deeper and deeper and richer and richer earth piled up to my left. I opened my green sack and first took one and then the second clean dead wet pigeon and buried them in the hole and piled, piled and piled the earth, rich, fresh and wet black brown earth and shovelled the earth with The Tagespiegel back on top of the two clean dead wet white doves.

I took off my ripped button down shirt and placed it over the earth. Tucked it into the earth. Put the grate over the shirt and added twigs and an old towel. Made a crucifix with two broken branches and stuck it into the earth!

Leaving the campsite! By the wall, no more! Nothing more to do with it! I walked along the wall for one-hundred yards. Late night. Late. Walking along The Wall to find another place to sleep.

Arrived at an industrial section of the city. Factories where the newspapers and money are printed. Quiet but for the whirring of machines and I could see the lights beaming from the look-out towers over The Wall in East Berlin. I came to the American border patrol.

Small outpost on the Kochstrasser. Two young black soldiers sitting inside their pillbox house, eating cheese doodles, Milky Ways and Pepsi. I knocked on the glass window.

“What are you doing?” one soldier asked.

“Takin’ a walk.”

They were listening to American Armed Forces Radio. They offered me some cheese doodles. I asked for a Milky Way and they gave me one. They had hot water and tea bags and plastic cups. I had some tea. One guy was from Baltimore and the other from a small town in Virginia. We talked about basketball. The National Basketball Association (NBA) and The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). I thanked them and left.

I continued down The Wall. Walking the dirt road along The Wall. I came to an opening. There was a wooden crucifix and many dead flowers and photographs nailed to the lower left cross.

This looked like a great place to sleep!

I took out my International Student Identity, dark green and light green:

#A9 033905
25/11/55
Rose, Peter
American
Berlin, 1980
(Printed in Sweden)

I took the small photo off my identity card and stuck it up with the four or five other photos on the cross. This is where I'll sleep tonight! One more week in the city. Get myself out of here. Sleep. Slept.

(Actor pauses then rises to address audience): His half-hearted attempts at suicide which occurred regularly during this period, were not wholly serious. It was not so much the desire for death since for him there was neither peace or hope in death- as an attempt to recall himself to consciousness through physical pain, in moments of terrible fear or a blank calm that bordered on non-existence. Those times at which his mind seemed to riding on some weird and eccentric idea were still his best. Then at least he was almost at peace and his wild eyes were not as terrifying as in those moments of fear, seeking salvation in an unending torment of unrest. Often he beat his head against the wall or in some way caused himself violent physical pain.

Georg Buchner, LENZ

Scene 9
Bar

I grabbed my green sack and made my way to the only place in town I could trust. I hopped on the U-Bahn, schwarzerfahren. To Nollendorfplatz. I went to my favorite streets: Goltzstrasser and Hauptstrasser. I turned at the intersection of Goltzstrasser and Eisenacherstrasser and went up the Hauptstrasser and down the Hauptstrasser I went up the Hauptstrasser and down the Hauptstrasser. I stopped by a door covered by a gray flannel blanket. I went in.

It was a café with a bar, bartender and people sitting at tables. Sitting. Standing. Dancing. Drinking. Smoking cigarettes. I went out.

Up the Hauptstrasser and down the Hauptstrasser! Up the Hauptstrasser and back into the café! I looked up and on the wall there were five, seven, nine, ten, twenty-seven paintings. Small paintings. Blue. Gold. Green. Yellow. Black. Gray. White. I asked the bartender about the paintings.

What's with these paintings? They're paintings of The Star of David. What are they doing here?

“Thomas Lange, a Berlin artist did these paintings.”

I'll stay here! Was ist dein name?

„Thomas. Und dein name?“

Peter. Mein name ist Peter. Let me ask you something. There's a place near The Wall. It has a cross. There's an open area near The Wall. Dead flowers. Photographs of men and women nailed to it. I put a photo of me up there too. Do you know what it is?

“It's a memorial. There were three or four people killed there trying to escape from East to West Berlin.”

I slept there last night!

“Really?”

I only have a few more days in the city. I have a pink slip as a passport. That's how it is. You have something to drink?

“Ya. Was willst du Trinken? Weisswein?“

Ich will cafe haben, mit milch kein zucker. I won't stay there again tonight.

“Zigaretten? Would you like to have a cigarette?”

Sure. (Match lit. Blackout. Cigarette lit) Marlboro (Lights up). Thomas, forget the coffee. Vodka, bitte. I want to have a shot of vodka. I have three or four Marks.

You say I can go to The Salvation Army? I can sleep there? Bahnhof Zoo Train Station. I can sleep at The Salvation Army.

(Actor sings smoking cigarette):

Nu, koyftzhe papirosin nu koyftzhe saccharin, Gevorn iz
haynt s'choyre bilig vert,
A leben far a grosh, a prute a fardinst,
Fun geto-hendler, hot ir doch gehert.

Ch'heys yisrolik, ich bin dos kind fun geto,
Ch'heys yisroli, a hefkerdiker yung.
Chotsh farblibn gole neto,
Derlang ich noch itster a svifshe un a zung.

Scene 10

Bare Stage as Salvation Army Bahnhof Zoo Train Station

I went to The Salvation Army. Men and women there. Waiting in line. Smoking cigarettes and passing out packets of sugar to one another for coffee. The line: Taking tickets for a place to sleep. Ragged looking people in old dirty overcoats. Dirty faces. Unshaven. Torn shoes. Boots with no laces. I put out my cigarette and went to the back of the line.

The person taking tickets was a male nurse with red hair. The line moved forward and my turn came.

“Kann ich einem Schlafplatz haben? Heute abend! Ich habe meinem Schlafsack.“

„You don't need a sleeping bag, he said. Two Marks, please.“

I gave him two Marks and showed my pink slip passport.

“What do you do?” asked the nurse.

Actor Sings: My name's Yisrolik, the child of the ghetto. I'm called, Yisrolik, a free and easy lad. And though I'm clean and haven't got a thing. I still can whistle and I still can sing. (Actor whistles)(Lights to Full)

I'm an actor.

In the theatre.

(BLACKOUT)

END OF PLAY

for Thomas Derra