

Media, mythmaking the targets in Globe's compelling 'In This Corner'

PAM KRAGEN
STAFF WRITER

When boxer Joe Louis steps into the ring for the first time in Steven Drukman's boxing drama "In This Corner," he christens the canvas with a handful of Alabama red clay.

It's the soil from which he sprang — a poor sharecropper's son who would become the 20th century's greatest heavyweight fighter — and it's symbolic of how he was shaped and molded like clay by the manager, sportswriters and announcers who carefully crafted him into a legend, then discarded him once his glory days were behind him.

"In This Corner" was commissioned by the Old Globe especially for its Cassius Carter Centre Stage, and the arena space is a perfect setting for the play. Just as in real sports arenas, the audience sits on all four sides of Lee Savage's authentically recreated boxing ring, watching attentively as the drama unfolds before their eyes. Yet while boxing is what these fighters' lives were about, the theatricality of the sport was Drukman's target, and the two themes marry well in his two-act, two-hour play about the mythologizing of sports heroes.

"In This Corner" follows the rise and fall of the legendary "Brown Bomber" and his 30-year relationship with German boxing rival Max Schmeling. Yet while Louis is the central figure in the story, it's notable that he's practically mute in the play. Instead, the best monologues, dialogue and jokes are reserved for the colorful figures who surround the ring — the hyper-protective manager, the cynical sportswriter, the arrogant ring announcer and the government leaders who cannily used the boxers for their own political gain.

In his heyday, Joe Louis was an international superstar. He held the heavyweight title for an unprecedented 11 years and 25 title defenses, and during those years he was the subject of songs, dances and books, and thousands of

REVIEW

"In This Corner"

When: 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; through Feb. 10

Where: Cassius Carter Centre Stage, Old Globe Theatre complex, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$42-\$59

Info: (619) 234-5623

Web: www.oldglobe.org

children were named in his honor. His boxing career was practically unblemished, except for a shocking loss in 1936 to Germany's Schmeling (who had detected a flaw in Louis' technique), and their

blinger's sarcastic Sports-writer crafts a wealth of ethnic monikers for the pugilists, calling Schmeling the "Teutonic Tormenter," Max Baer the "Hammering Hebrew" and Louis everything from the "Pious Pickaninny" to the "Sable Cyclone."

And he's faithful to the style and energy of the radio announcers of the era — recreating in exciting detail the famous 2-minute, 4-second, Louis-Schmeling rematch, thrillingly performed by T. Ryder Smith. Globe audiences may remember Smith's award-winning performance in last year's "Lincolnesque,"

and he's just as compelling here in his show-stopping speech as the "third man in the ring" — the referee/announcer.

A raised boxing ring is a directorial challenge, with ring ropes obscuring the sightlines and the difficulty actors face getting in and out of the ring, but director Ethan McSweeney rises to the challenge. He moves the play all around the theater, creates a snarky, cynical edge to the story and lightens and brightens the dialogue with rat-atat, screwball line delivery in New Yawk-ese (courtesy of dialect coach Jan Gist).

The seven-member cast is excellent, particularly Smith, Rufus Collins as the cagey but generous Max Schmeling, and flame-haired sparkplug Katie Barrett in a variety of roles. Completing the cast is the athletic John Keabler as The Boxer, the godlike athletic ideal who wordlessly works out in the ring and plays a number of Louis' sparring partners and rivals.

As the play concludes, Louis and Schmeling come together one last time, with the now-wealthy Schmeling (costumed by Tracy Christensen in a huge fox fur coat) extending a helping hand to the destitute, institutionalized Louis. They dance and parry, exchanging a vocal jab or two and then a real one. Their final headlock is as much a boxing stance as a hug, as they embrace their history and their age, and — for a moment — shut out the world that turned them both into legends.

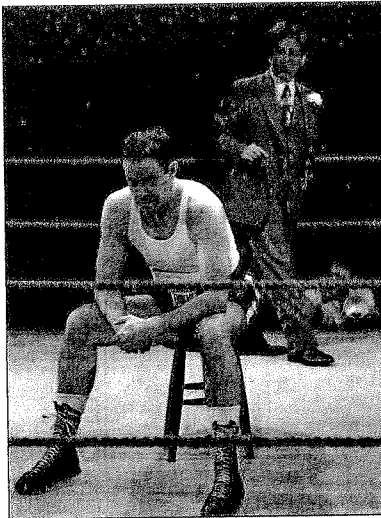


PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Rufus Collins plays Max Schmeling and David Deblinger is a sportswriter in 'In This Corner.'

rematch two years later was one of the biggest sports stories of the 20th century.

But as Drukman's play shows, Louis was a god with feet of clay. Depicted by big-hearted actor Dion Graham as a stuttering, easily manipulated mama's boy, he's mothered by his no-nonsense manager (a perfectly pitched performance by Al White) and treated with selfish disregard by the casually racist sportswriters and announcers. In his later years, he's a heroin addict, reduced to humiliating himself in costumed wrestling matches (Graham ages masterfully in the role).

One of the strengths of Drukman's script is his humorous homage to the alliterative, rhyming, purplish prose that peppered the sports pages of the '30s. David De-

THEATER REVIEW

Period feel as you are there, ringside

By James Hebert
ARTS WRITER

Besides battling his archival Max Schmeling, Joe Louis flattens enough bums in the course of "In This Corner" that for a time the show is a regular palooka-palooza.

The production's own fight card is a little mixed, too. It makes great use of the Old Globe's Cassius Carter stage, planting a boxing ring smack in the middle of the arena-style theater, where Steven Drukman's inventive play is having its world premiere.

It's also bathed in a rich period feel, from the vintage typewriters clacking away at ringside to the smoke floating high above the canvas to the language of the assorted ring rats, all wisecracks and wry rhymes.

About that language, though: Drukman clearly is having fun with the overripe stylings that distinguished the boxing talk of the time — that time being (chiefly) the 1930s, the great Louis' heyday. At its best, the dialogue bobs and weaves like a kind of pug's poetry.

Even so, the purposefully purple prose

(mmm... maybe contagious?) is carried so far that the play starts to feel a little punch-drunk on the stuff.

It's funny early on when the lunk-headed but ambitious reporter (David Deblinger) and seen-it-all boxing honcho (T. Ryder Smith) are brainstorming absurd nicknames for Louis ("The Chocolate Chopper," say, or "The Mocha Mauler").

But by the time Smith cuts off more such patter at the start of Act 2, lamenting that "For the love of Pete, they have a limit," you might be thinking said barrier was passed a few rounds back.

"In This Corner" revolves around the two heavyweight bouts Louis fought against the German champ Schmeling in 1936 and 1938. The Brown Bomber (not much of an improvement on those fanciful nicknames, but it stuck) lost the first fight in 12 rounds.

He won the second in barely two minutes — a left hook to Hitler and his "master race" blather. But like Jesse Owens' triumph at the Berlin Olympics two years earlier, Louis' couldn't trump the color of his skin in a segre-



Dion Graham (right) as Joe Louis and Al White as his trainer in the Old Globe's premiere of Steven Drukman's "In This Corner." Craig Schwartz

other cast members take on, the actor earns wows all around. Katie Barrett gets laughs as a tough-broad reporter and jaded nurse; Smith and Deblinger juice things up as hustlers, hacks and (in Smith's case) even Hitler. Al White is ideal in a pivotal role as Louis' trainer and confidant.

And the athletic John Keabler not only serves as a sparring partner and procession of stooges for Louis, but also puts on a phenomenal jump-roping show before the show starts. (It's not often a play has an undercard.)

Once the self-conscious clamor of

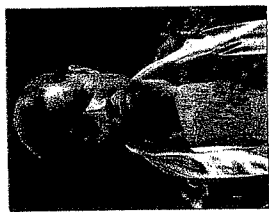
Act 1 fades, the play's latter half rears raging inside Louis' own heart. In those moments, the regrets and frustrations of a misunderstood hero hit like a fist.

Writer: Steven Drukman. Director: Ethan McSweeney. Lighting: Tyler Nicholson. Sound: Lindsay Jones. Costumes: Tracy Christensen, Cassi Dion Graham, Rufus Collins, T. Ryder Smith, Al White, David Deblinger, Katie Barrett, John Keabler.

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REVIEW

Knockout at the Old Globe



TRAGIC CHAMP: Dion Graham plays the heavyweight.

A gritty, ambitious new play takes on boxer Joe Louis.

BY PAUL HODGINS
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

"In This Corner," Steven Drukman's fascinating if imperfect new play about boxing legend Joe Louis, is the first solid indication of what the Jerry Patch era at the Old Globe will look like.

Patch, a longtime talent spotter at South Coast Repertory who helped it gain a national reputation for developing new plays and playwrights, left a couple of years back for San Diego's venerable company. Since December, he and Shakespeare Festival director Darko Tresnjak have been co-artistic directors at the Globe, one of America's largest regional theaters.

If Friday's world premiere of "In This Corner" is a harbinger of things to come, the Globe is about to get a lot livelier. Previous artistic director Jack O'Brien focused (and made his Broadway reputation) largely on mainstream musicals and big-name playwrights. Patch has long been a champion of daring and innovative spoken-word drama by fresh new voices, and this is the theater's first commissioned world premiere under his stewardship. While it won't ruffle too many of the stony heads in the Old Globe's subscription audience, "In This Corner" bears many of the hallmarks of Patch Theater: It's thematically ambitious, engrossing and reveals grandly in the high and low arts of theatrical storytelling.

Drukman's play encompasses four decades, from the 1930s to the '70s, and takes us all over America and occasionally to Hitler's Germany to tell the tale of Louis' rise and fall — and to celebrate, even mythologize,

SEE 'CORNER' • PAGE 5

FROM PAGE 1

Louis' relationship with his greatest opponent, German boxer Max Schmeling.

All the action takes place in a boxing ring, scrupulously recreated by scenic designer Lee Savage (the problematic in-the-round Cassius Carter Centre Stage has finally found its true calling). Through quick cuts and short scenes filled with rapid-fire dialogue, we're taken briskly through Louis' rise to fame. Drukman makes it seem like Louis (Dion Graham) was discovered accidentally — a stud-tenter Detroit raif whose boxing persona was created by a ruthless trainer (Al White, playing the legendary Jack Blackburn) and sports journalists (David Debinger represents that ratlike, alliterative breed) hanging for a new champion.

This is one of many places where Drukman compresses history and stretches the truth: Louis had already enjoyed a solid amateur career in Michigan and won the Golden Gloves by the time he stepped into the ring against boxing's bigger opponent. Such truncations are arguably necessary to present a bio-play with efficiency, but they might rattle Louis fans. Drukman stakes over other details, too, and gives short shrift to scenes that need more

'CORNER': Bio-play doesn't pull any punches

'In This Corner'

Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego
Continues: Through Feb. 10, 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays
How much: \$42-\$59
Availability: Good
Length: 2 hours
Suitability: Teens and adults
Tickets: 619-234-5623
Online: www.theoldglobe.org

The five supporting players provide a gallery of characters, many of them 1930s archetypes. Debinger's sports columnist, spouting creatively racist nicknames for Louis, seems pulled from "The Front Page." Katie Barrett shows amazing range as a torch singer; a nurse, a star-chy FDR factotum and a reporter who carries on a clandestine affair with Louis. T. Ryder Smith does a bang-on imitation of a breathless Golden Age boxing announcer and steals the show with a profane paean to the ring's referee. (I'm not sure what to make, though, of his heroic Hitler.) White brings a combination of hunger and world weariness to Louis' trainer John Keabler, provides some pre-show oodles and abhis as young pugilist going through a rigorous training routine.



RING MASTERS: Dion Graham, left, plays Joe Louis, and Rufus Collins is Max Schmeling.

McSweeney alternates between breathless speed with rat-a-tat delivery (think "His Girl Friday") as a boxing movie) and scenes of quiet revelation. But no director could make the boxing ring serve successfully as a dozen or more locales. At times (when a woman in high heels must squeeze through the ropes, for example), it's just too awkward a forum for non-fighting scenes.

ham and Rufus Collins, who plays Schmeling. Graham makes the most of the tension between Louis' public stoicism and his private passions. Despite his fame, Louis was still trapped by the pervasive racism of the era, and that more than the punches, took the greatest toll on the champion a punishment that Graham makes tragically clear. He wisely underplays the scenes that show Louis' descent.

Collins' Schmeling is a deep, caring man with a lifelong companion — and fascination — for his greatest opponent. The comes through most vividly in Schmeling's scenes with the all-time Louis in the VA hospital, presumably around 1970 (an other niggling inaccuracy — in real life, Schmeling and Louis re-established their relationship when they were brought together on the TV show "This Is Your Life" in 1964). A final feeble boxing match between the fading champs is a poignant juxtaposition of old enemies the cruel whims of fate, and the grim inevitability of age. It's a fitting end to a play that combines a welter of ideas and refuses to simplify Louis' twisted sad life story.

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But this show belongs to Graham.

Who They Weren't

In the time it took him to fire up his stogie, he missed the quickest TKO in heavyweight boxing history.

Right place, wrong timing: In 1938, a friend of mine's great-uncle saved his shekels and went to the, at that time, Fight of the Century — the Joe Louis/Max Schmeling rematch at Yankee Stadium. Along with an estimated 70,000 others, he wanted to see "the Brown Bomber" demolish the Aryan brute who floored Louis in 1936 and who symbolized all things Nazi.

Come fight time, the bell rings and Louis blazes, landing jabs and rocket rights. Schmeling goes down. Gets back up. "Gonna be a great bout," the uncle thinks, why not make it perfect, with a good cigar? As he leans over to light up, he hears three dull cracks, like bullwhips on wet rawhide. The crowd explodes, stands, cheers. The uncle jumps up. Schmeling's down. In the time it took to fire up his stogie, he missed the quickest TKO in heavyweight boxing history.

Steven Drukman's *In This Corner* contends, a bit more often than need be, that history has missed something about Louis and Schmeling as well: the truth. The media turned each into an ideological icon, even though Schmeling detested Hitler (and sheltered two Jewish boys in his hotel from storm troopers); and Louis, once he stepped out of the ring, became yet another segregated African-American who couldn't have his picture taken with a white woman.

The play retells Pygmalion. Depression-choked America needs a hero, and a hero needs a villain.

So the media engineers them, out of words (many of them alliterative, often racist, tags). Louis, a gentleman who stuttered and liked to speak his mind, becomes a fabrication: a white's ideal black man. He can clobber opponents, preferably with fury,

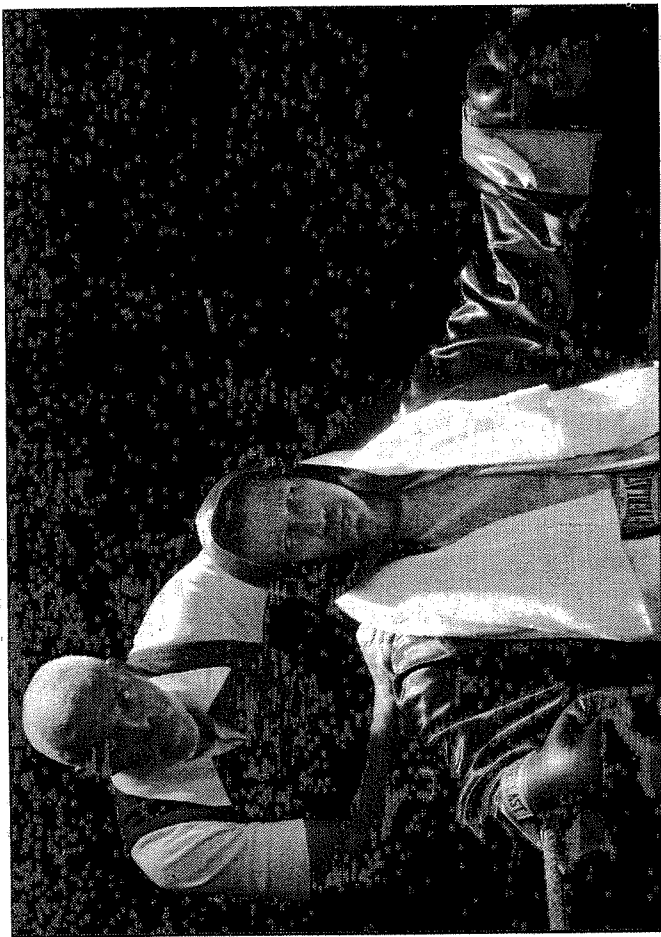
but can't smile or gloat and must remain subservient. When he steps out of the ring for good and the media can no longer exploit him, Louis noses dives from celebrity like

an Icarus.

For their first fight, Schmeling detected a flaw in his opponent's technique: after a series of jabs, Louis would lower his left hand. Drukman's world-premiere script also lowers its left: his characters exist more in theory, as verbal constructs meant to prove a point, than in depth.

The play shows us who they weren't, but who were Louis and Schmeling? We never learn, for example, why his manager chose Louis (the first time we see him punch, he has zilch skills). Plus, didn't Joe Philander, a lot? And the conclusion, which never happened (Louis is in a psych ward; Schmeling comes to visit in 1970), is weak. The playwright substitutes a thesis, that losing can make one born again, for a theory. The two square off and do a slow parody of *Rocky III*, when the Italian Stallion goes toe-to-toe one last time with Apollo Creed, as the credits roll.

Drukman's script has crisp dialogue and flashes of sharp writing (the ref does a set piece about order and chaos in boxing that's a foot)



Al White, Dion Graham in *In This Corner*

In This Corner, by Steven Drukman
Cassius Carter Centre Stage, Simon Edison Centre for the Performing Arts, Balboa Park
Directed by Ethan McSweeney; cast: Dion Graham, Rufus Collins-T. Ryder Smith, Al White, David Deblinger, Katie Barrett, John Keabler; scenic design, Lee Savage; costumes, Tracy Christiansen; lighting, Tyler Micoheau; sound, Lindsay Jones; fight director, Steve Rankin
Playing through February 10; Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Matinee Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. 619-234-5623.

but could use more grounding. As if sensing this need, director Ethan McSweeney has drenched the Cassius Carter with atmosphere and detail. The stage is a boxing ring, a near-perfect fit, in fact:

white canvas, frayed gold ropes, brown and black Everlast gloves dangling from turnbuckles. Four stations flank the squared circle, where actors watch, participate, and make practically unseen

costume changes. Designer Lee Savage has raised the Carter's floor three or four feet, to the same level as the audience. I've never seen actors' heads that close to the ceiling before at the Carter. It makes the pugilists (even though their fight choreography's pretty much by the numbers) loom almost larger than life.

McSweeney has an affinity for the Carter. He directed last year's *Body of Water*, which turned the intimate theater-in-the-round into a shimmering blue dreamscape. Often during *In This Corner*, he creates a soundscape. The banter straight from *The Front Page*, the pace of workouts, and the distinctive clack of an Underwood typewriter often have the fluidity of music.

Joseph Louis Barrow was six foot two. Dion Graham, who plays him, not only has Louis's height, he's also got his eyes, at once fierce and quizzical, as if he sees double — and double standards. Graham, and a booming-voiced Rufus Collins, who plays Schmeling, fill in many of the script's blanks with subsurface suggestions.

The play's about Main Event headliners, but McSweeney and a talented supporting quintet make it an ensemble show. As a reporter and a promoter (roles he makes reversible), David Deblinger talks like Louis de Palma on steroids. Al White's smooth trainer-manager percolates with low-grade malignity. John Keabler plays various sparring partners/Louis punching bags, for which roles he prepares with a brisk, half-hour preshow warm-up.

Katie Barrett, Craig Noel Award-winner for *Mother Courage* in 2006, demonstrates even *more* versatility as several different women, each sharply etched. Another Noel winner, T. Ryder Smith handles several assignments with skill. He cuts loose with the ref's speech ("I make the KO okay") and does the evening's most dramatic sequence. Along with being about race and celebrity, *In This Corner's* about pre-TV sports in America, in which words hyped, mediated, and at times mangled events. As an announcer, Smith calls the second

Louis-Schmeling fight and shows that words could also describe indelibly. No one moves onstage. Instead we listen, to round one on the radio, and hear Louis's genius combinations my friend's great-uncle missed seven decades ago. ■

Boxers and acrobats in a lovely dance

by Jean Lowerison

'In this Corner'

Boxer Max Baer once defined fear as "standing across the ring from Joe Louis and knowing he wants to go home early."

Baer should know. In 1935, two hours after Louis had married Marva Trotter, he stepped into the ring, KO'd Baer in the fourth round, and went off to celebrate his marriage.

In a 17-year career starting in 1934, Louis won 68 matches and lost three. In 2005, he was named the greatest heavy-weight of all time by the International Boxing Research Organization and the No. 1 puncher of all time by *Ring* magazine.

The Old Globe Theatre presents the world premiere of Steven Drukman's *In This Corner* through Feb. 10, directed by Ethan McSweeney. The stage of the Cassius Carter appropriately has been converted into a boxing ring for the occasion.

Both men were used as tools in their respective national political machines.

Louis (Dion Graham) is perhaps best known as the African American who first lost to, then knocked out Nazi hope Max Schmeling (Rufus Collins) in the politically charged years 1936 and 1938, respectively. The war was about to break out and the "final solution" would come later, but the touted Aryan supremacy

retirement in 1949, Louis, a generous man with time and money, was impoverished and forced into the wrestling ring to make a few bucks. He spent his last four years in a wheelchair and died in 1981 of a heart attack.

Though these men were opponents, they were never personal enemies. In fact Schmeling, who after the war became a rich man representing Coca-Cola in Germany, paid Louis' medical costs and reportedly served as a pall-

bearer at his funeral. (President Reagan bent the rules and had Louis buried at Arlington National Cemetery.)

zling sudden time shifts that detract from continuity, so that the play comes across as a series of episodes rather than a cohesive effort. Extraneous material is introduced and dropped (for example, Louis shows up initially with a violin. Though it is true that he studied briefly as a kid, this seems unnecessary information here.)

The best-written scene by far is the one in which T. Ryder Smith, as the referee, does his "third man in the ring"

bearer at his funeral. (President Reagan bent the rules and had Louis buried at Arlington National Cemetery.)

The relationship between sports and politics is a good topic for theater; it seems odd that this is the first play about Schmeling and Louis. *In This Corner* has some great elements and some that could use revision.

Drukman does a good job of drawing the time period with costumes, music and three sports reporter characters, who demonstrate the alliterative purple prose that was prized in sports reporting of the day. Katie Barrett, the sole woman in the cast, gets a workout playing all six female roles – and proves well up to the task.

Collins is a wonder – not only does he play Schmeling effectively, but he puts on a 20-minute pre-show demonstration of a boxing workout that made me wonder how he could even talk, let alone act afterward.

Graham is somewhat less effective, I suspect largely because he adheres to his manager's "never smile" admonition. That keeps him in character but limits his characterization significantly.

Mainly, though, the script (which was commissioned by the Old Globe) could use some reworking. There are too many short, staccato scenes and puz-

zling sudden time shifts that detract from continuity, so that the play comes across as a series of episodes rather than a cohesive effort. Extraneous material is introduced and dropped (for example, Louis shows up initially with a violin. Though it is true that he studied briefly as a kid, this seems unnecessary information here.)

The best-written scene by far is the one in which T. Ryder Smith, as the referee, does his "third man in the ring"

There are ways to pump up the drama here. I hope Drukman reworks *In This Corner*. It is a worthy topic.

In This Corner plays through Feb. 10 at The Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage. Shows Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets call 619-23-GLOBE or visit www.TheOldGlobe.org.

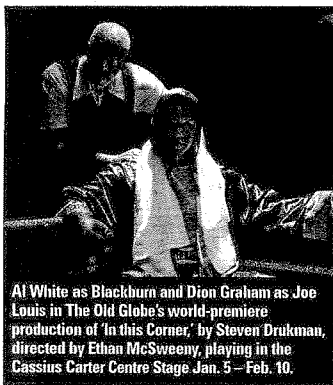


PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

At White as Blackburn and Dion Graham as Joe Louis in The Old Globe's world-premiere production of *In This Corner*, by Steven Drukman, directed by Ethan McSweeney, playing in the Cassius Carter Centre Stage Jan. 5 – Feb. 10.

during and after the Berlin Olympics was on the line. Schmeling, the great hero of the Nazis after the first fight, so angered the Führer with the 1938 loss that he had Schmeling drafted and sent on suicide missions. (Schmeling infuriated Hitler further by refusing to become a Nazi, and, in fact, harbored two Jews during Kristallnacht.)

Meanwhile, Louis, born of poor sharecroppers in Alabama and lionized in the U.S. after defeating the German challenger, was still barred by Jim Crow laws from celebrating with his white buddies in local bars and restaurants. After his

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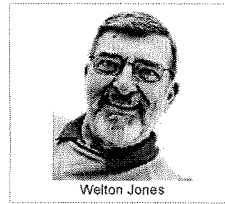
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San Diego Arts

"In This Corner" at the Old Globe Theatre

By Welton Jones
Posted on Jan 11 2008
Last updated Jan 11 2008



In writing the Joe Louis boxing play "In This Corner," now on the Globe Theatre's Cassius Carter Center Stage, author Steven Drukman rather obviously entertained vaulting metaphorical ambitions.

He ends up wallowing in mere alliteration and stale hyperbole, his flights of poetical philosophizing finally more fancy than wise.

Louis is a proud part of the royal line, from Jackie Robinson to Tiger Woods, who broke down race barriers in their sports. Only he was bracketed by more gaudy acts: Jack Johnson and Mohammad Ali.

All Louis did in the 11 years he held the heavyweight title was to defend it successfully 25 times, an unbelievable 23 of those victories by knockouts.

This despite a list of handicaps Drukman examines as if they were merit badges: youthful poverty, insanity in the family, a speech impediment, money woes, street drugs and, of course, the heavyweight champ of prejudices: race. Certainly plenty of that here.

Each gets its moment of emphasis but there's more, too. Louis gave up the violin for the fight ring? Hmm, OK, but that sounds an awful lot like sentimental 30s tear-jerkers. Visited late in life by his classic German opponent, Max Schmeling, Louis challenged him to a sparring match? Nice legend but again, is truth important?

Maybe not particularly. This play makes no claims to strict realism. (That's why the filter-tip cigarettes and the inaccurate uniform insignia aren't especially important.) What Drukman and his director, Ethan McSweeney, want is flavor.

And given the superior herbs and spices provided by this super cast, they get maybe even more than they deserve.

Dion Graham bears a resemblance to Louis that is uncanny at times and he carries himself at all times with the big-cat grace of a heavyweight. Rufus Collins is completely convincing as the retired Schmeling (and barely acceptable as the young Nazi stud). But it's the remarkable versatility and commitment of four supporting actors that gives the show almost as much atmosphere as the painfully accurate Lee Savage boxing ring set.

T. Ryder Smith, who once played Abe Lincoln on this very stage, spreads himself over referees, rednecks and Joseph Goebbels with an intensity often near maniacal. He is burdened with the play's most pretentious speech – a lumbering polemic about the symbolic relativity of the referee – but he also gets a chance to recreate, splendidly, the radio call of the Louis-Schmeling fight with all its evocative cadences pealing like a 20-ton church bell.

Kate Barrett has the widest assortment of jobs, from ring floozy to presidential protocol rep, from USO blues singer to German movie star, from psycho ward nurse to news-hen, and she acs them every

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one, using whatever assortment physical tool applies in each case.

They all play reporters from time to time, since Drukman is interested in the idea of Louis as a construct of sports media. (The theatre almost never gets newspapermen right – newspaper women more often, oddly enough – and this is no exception. Remember, though, realism here is more a matter of atmosphere. So these orgies of alliteration – the African Avenger, the Chocolate Chopper – should be understood as mostly decoration.

David Deblinger does more reporter shtick than the others but he's most effective as Schmeling's canny Jewish manager. And Al White plays Jack Blackburn, Louis' trainer and manager, with a conviction that cuts through the cliché.

John Keabler, playing assorted other fighters and victims, doesn't have a line but needs all his wind for the impressive pre-show workout onstage. He's gonna be chiseled when this show closes!

Nobody will learn much about boxing from this show. Or anything else, for that matter. It's best seen as a musing on popular culture in a specific era and the dicey business of handling properly great champions who may be less than great human beings.

But Drukman, McSweeney and their terrific cast do make Louis real enough to merit sportswriter Jimmy Cannon's shrewd and touching epitaph: "He was a credit to his race, the human race."

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Dates : 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Feb. 10, 2008.
Organization : Old Globe Theatre
Phone : 619 234-5623
Production Type : Play
Region : Balboa Park
URL : www.oldglobe.org
Venue : Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

*About the author: Welton Jones has been reviewing shows for 50 years as of October 2007. 35 of those years at the UNION-TRIBUNE and, now, six for SANDIEGO.COM where he wrote the first reviews to appear on the site.
 More by this author.*

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JAN 24 2008

Old Globe's bruising premiere

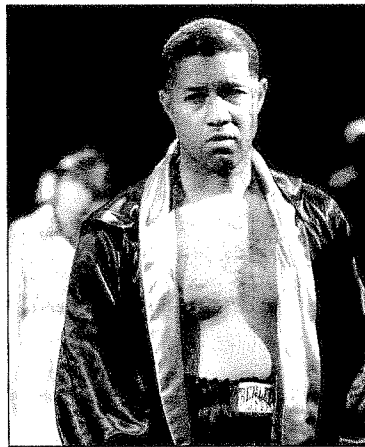
By CHARLENE BALDRIDGE | VILLAGE NEWS

The theater gods descended on the Cassius Carter Centre Stage in Balboa Park, bestowing upon director Ethan McSweeney a thrilling, complex and well-made play, casting that could not be better and technical support par excellence. Commissioned by the Old Globe, the world premiere play is Steven Drukman's "In This Corner." Do not miss it.

Theatergoers remember McSweeney's award-winning 2006 production of Lee Blessing's "A Body of Water" in the same space, another tiny miracle, especially to those who prefer plays up close. One prays that the theater gods also smile on the Globe's impending remodel of the beloved and intimate theater.

"In This Corner" spans decades, beginning in 1933, when a youth rooted in Alabama's red clay stumbles into a Detroit training gym and almost against his will becomes the Brown Bomber, Joe Lewis, who claimed the heavyweight title in 1937. As a boxer, Lewis was a creation of the press, his handlers and the times. As a creation of Drukman, his tragedy approaches that of Lear.

In the writer's swiftly moving play, Max Schmeling — the German prizefighter who defeated Lewis in 12 rounds in 1936 and lost to him in a 1938 rematch — came to America in the 1970s and sought out Lewis, who was institutionalized. After retiring from the ring postwar, Schmeling became a wealthy and successful businessman, but Lewis'



Dion Graham (front) as "Joe Lewis" and Katie Barrett as "Reporter" in The Old Globe's world-premiere production of "In This Corner," through Feb. 10 at the Old Globe. PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

— largely due to his extreme generosity and lack of practicality — ran up a huge IRS debt during his glory years. Like the Sword of Damocles, it hung over him the rest of his life.

Some historians wrote that Schmeling and Lewis became friends. They go a few philosophical rounds — one of the play's highlights. Drukman scatters duets and arias throughout, notably between Lewis and his trainer and Schmeling and his manager. During dialogue with Lewis, Schmeling declares boxing "the sweet science of bruising," presumably lifted from "The Sweet Science," a series of 1950s New Yorker articles written by A.J. Liebling, who in turn borrowed the phrase from Pierce Egan's earlier sketches, "Boxiana."

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less, Drukman is not. Amusingly, he capitalizes on the purple prose sports writing of the day and invents characters and situations enriched by language and imagery, tying together disparate social issues from an era when common racial and ethnic practices allowed discrimination against negroes at home and Jews abroad.

Utterly convincing emotionally and intellectually, Dion Graham portrays Lewis. Rufus Collins is fine as Schmeling, a man of torn loyalties. The others in the company play multiple characters. T. Ryder Smith ("Lincolnesque") changes facial hair and makeup ringside, right before our eyes transforming from boxing announcer to Hitler. Among other characters, Al White ("Two Trains Running") plays Lewis' trainer; David Deblinger, the press; and Katie Barrett, Lewis' nurse and an unforgettable array of females. Prior to curtain, Globe/MFA actor John Keabler demonstrates the rigors of training.

Scenic designer Lee Savage transforms the Carter into a boxing ring, and though it's irksome at times, all negotiate the ropes ably, indicating character and, in Collins' example, touchingly, Schmeling's aging (he really was the good German who in fact helped Lewis financially). Tracy Christiansen's costumes are a joy and so are Lindsay Jones' sound and Steve Rankin's fight direction. Perhaps the most stunning of all technical elements, Tyler Micolesku's lighting

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BRUISING

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is another miracle of theatrical craft.

"In This Corner" continues through Feb. 10, playing at 7 p.m. Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday; 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday; and 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. For tickets (\$42-\$59) and info, call (619) 23-GLOBE or visit www.theoldglobe.org. ■

JAN 24 2008

Hard-hitting drama at Old Globe

By Eileen Sondak

When the Old Globe officials commissioned playwright Steven Drukman to write a play for the intimate theater-in-the-round atmosphere of its Cassius Carter Center Stage, they could not have anticipated the brilliant results.

Although Drukman had already been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for "Another Fine Mess," and has amassed a formidable body of work, "In This Corner," (which will run at the Carter through Feb. 10) is a very special gift that was made to order for its current home.

Credit the Globe's Resident Artistic Director Jerry Patch (a sports junkie who dreamed up the idea of a play centered around American boxing legend Joe Louis and his German nemesis Max Schmeling) for the play's central theme.

Of course, Drukman took the ball and ran with it — using the fascinating tale of the "Brown Bomber" (an American hero of epic proportions) and his defeat of Schmeling in 1938 (in a boxing match that was considered the fight of the century) to create a memorable play. The victory was all the sweeter to the American public, since Louis had lost to the



Dion Graham plays boxing great Joe Louis and Rufus Collins plays Max Schmeling in the production of 'In This Corner,' which revolves around the lives of the pugilists who held the expectations of their countries in their fists. Also shown is T. Ryder Smith as the referee. Photo provided.

German boxer just two years earlier.

The event took place just before the Nazis loomed over the political landscape — but not before anti-Nazi sentiments were strong in this country. And to give audiences a broader view of the social and political climate, Drukman widened the scope of the play to include some of those issues.

After all, Americans didn't just see the fight as a match between two box-

ers, it was a contest of good against the evils of Nazi Germany.

The play takes full advantage of the Carter's unique arena space — which has been transformed by Lee Savage's savvy scenic design into a typical boxing ring. You'll feel as if you're getting ready to see a championship fight, not a theatrical event. However, you don't have to be a boxing enthusiast to savor

Please see **Globe** page B10

this production. Its dramatic impact and off-beat humor is captivating.

The author is also quite a linguist, who loves to play with the poetry. His use of alliteration and rhyme accounts for much of the comic aspects of the show. Even slow-talking Joe Louis quips, "I don't have a way with words. In fact, words have their way with me."

Not so with the fast-talking sports reporter (played with tongue-twisting ease by David Deblinger). He can alliterate and dramatize any situation that will get him more space in the paper. Deblinger (a newcomer to the Globe) also plays Jacobs (the German boxer's Jewish manager) and he hits the mark on both characters. Let's hope we'll see more of this dynamo.

The leading characters in this play are Louis and Schmeling, of course — and both roles have been very well cast. Dion Graham is excellent as the Brown Bomber, and Rufus Collins has

Schmeling nailed. Both actors have to deal with the time shifts in "In This Corner," because the action flip-flops from the early days of Louis' career to his sad decline in 1970. The meeting between Louis and Schmeling in a mental institution is one of the most moving scenes in the play.

There is only one woman in the production — Kate Barrett — and she plays all the female roles with such skill, most people don't even realize it's the same actress until later in the play. Barrett is just as convincing as the photographer as she is enacting Louis' nurse, and she puts over a song in style in one scene.

A knock-out cast, a clever script, and Ethan McSweeney's astute direction, all combine to make "In This Corner" one of the best productions ever performed at the Cassius Carter. Tickets range from \$42 to \$59. Call 619-23-GLOBE or go to www.TheOldGlobe.org for information.

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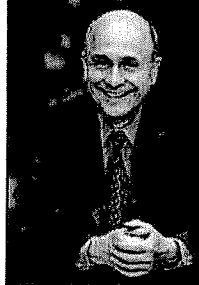
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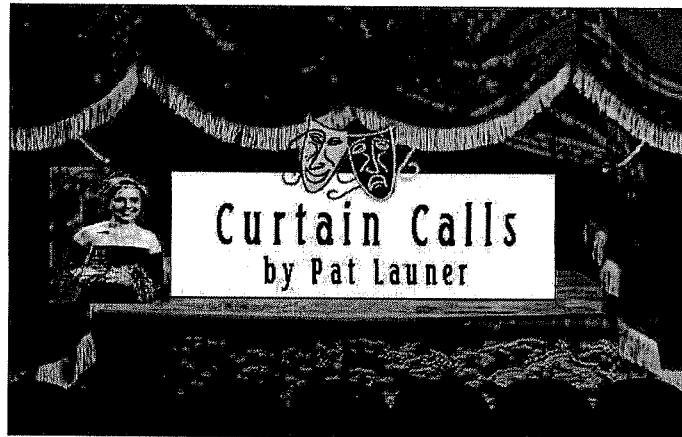
*Actor
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Eric Poppick



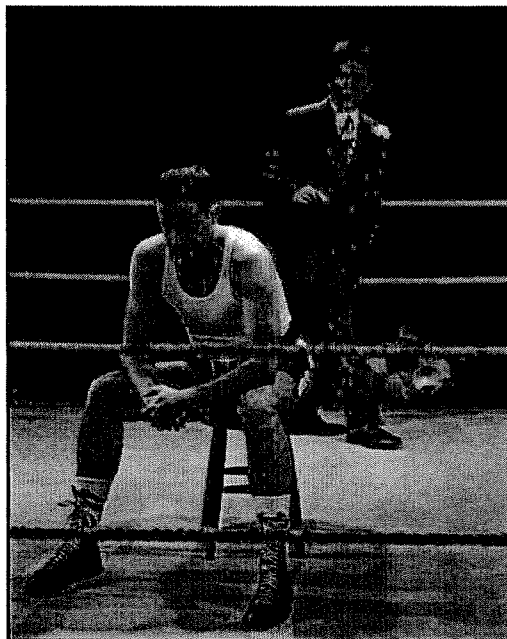
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1/18/08

The year's kicking off in a really fun way:
 With pearls and a ring and a taste of Patté.



THE ONE-TWO PUNCH

THE SHOW: *In This Corner*, a world premiere by Steven Drukman that provides the backstory and conjectured re-match of the fabled boxers Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, who met in the ring in 1938, and met again (so this story goes) in a psych ward in 1970.

THE STORY: It was an international incident, *the* sporting event of the century. The American nicknamed the "Brown Bomber" (Louis), in the ring with the über-Aryan German (Schmeling), on the eve of World War II. The fight would elevate Louis to the status of African American hero and all-American idol. Drukman hypothesizes a later meeting, when Louis has descended into alcohol, drugs and possibly, inherited mental illness. And Schmeling comes to visit him for one last go-round.

THE PLAY: More history than dramatic narrative, the drama (with occasional comedy tossed into the ring) is more cautionary tale than anything else, especially now, in the midst of the hotly contested fight we call the Presidential primaries. It's not just about race, it's also about the crafting and creation of a superstar. In the play (and presumably, in real life), the trainers and sportswriters took a hayseed Mama's boy from Alabama and transformed him into a bombshell. There's a funny scene where the

'handlers' riff on various alliterative names that might work to promote the young fighter (the Sable Cyclone, the Chocolate Chopper, the African Avenger, the Sienna Savage). Think spinmeisters, image-makers. The stardom they offer, of course, comes with a hefty price.

The kid's coach, Jack Blackburn, even sets out a few racially-sensitive, unassailable rules for Louis to live by, including 'Don't speak. Never have your picture taken with a white woman, and Never smile.' Oh yes, and 'Remember your ABCs: Always Be Clean.' It's these 'wholesome' and self-effacing behaviors that helped make an African American more palatable to white sports fans. But they still didn't gain him admission to white clubs (another potent scene in the play).

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The piece sheds some important light on the racial divide in the early years of sports (and the situation was far worse before Louis came along). The play paints an interesting picture of Schmeling who, though he was an emissary of Hitler (who makes a brief appearance onstage), is also revealed to have harbored two Jewish children during the War, saving their lives. He has the potential for becoming a multi-dimensional character, but all we really get is sketches of the two powerhouse punchers. And there doesn't really seem to be a moral or point to the story, though it creates a compelling portrait of a man whose breaking down of the racial barrier was earth-shattering in its time, but who somehow didn't become as much a household name as Jackie Robinson. We do come to feel for the two men, both trapped in the national issues of their day, driven by forces beyond their control and their natural talents.

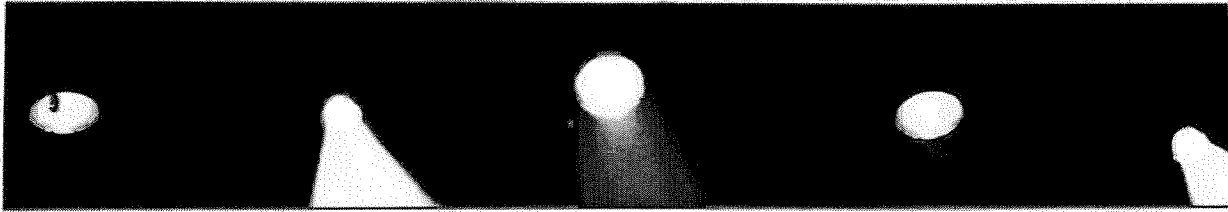
THE PLAYERS/THE PRODUCTION: The pre-show diversion is a show in itself. The theater is configured as a boxing ring (scenic design by Lee Savage). And in it, we watch hunky John Keabler, a student in the Old Globe/USD MFA program, warming up. It's quite an entertainment. He works the bag, jumps rope double-crossed, double-time. And then he does it all over again, for an extended period of time. Impressive. The whole show builds up the steam and suspense of a real boxing match.

Only occasionally do the ropes get in the way (making entrances and exits in a skirt is a little cumbersome at times for the sole female in the cast, Katie Barnes). But nothing else impedes her outstanding array of secondary characters, from a hard-boiled Noo Yawk journalist to a bathing-suit-clad beauty. She's a knockout in every one of her multiple portrayals. T. Ryder Smith, last seen at the Globe in a splendid performance in *Lincolnesque*, is also fine in a number of roles, including Hitler. David Deblinger provides most of the comic relief, as a cigar-chomping Jewish manager, and a shirt-sleeved, rough-and-tumble, purple-prose-writing reporter. Al White is solid and credible as Louis' sensible, no-nonsense trainer, though he seems to be channeling Morgan Freeman as Eddie Scrap-Iron Dupris in "Million-Dollar Baby." In the central roles, Dion Graham as Louis and Rufus Collins as Schmeling are both compelling. They make the men and their relationship believable. But the 'takeaway' isn't that clear. The performances and the story itself are riveting. Ethan McSweeney's direction is superb. But it's not clear what Drukman wants us to get or know. His rat-a-tat repartee is thrilling at times, but it also wears out its welcome; a few overwritten alliterations go a long way, and the humor deflates after awhile. The characters could be more sharply etched, and the point of it all could be clarified. Still, you won't be sorry you spent some time in this very specific, confined world, roped into this ring.

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THE LOCATION: The Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage, through February 10

BOTTOM LINE: BEST BET



SDJJ | what's going on

by eileen sondak

fabulous february

With the San Diego Opera in full swing, the Old Globe featuring shows on both stages, the San Diego Symphony performing throughout the month, the North Coast Rep unveiling "A Shayna Maidel," the Lyric Opera back with a Gilbert & Sullivan masterpiece, La Jolla Playhouse putting a hip-hop beat on a Greek tragedy, and the Lamb's launching its season with "Hello Dolly" (just to name a few of the highlights on tap this month), San Diegans are in for a lot of entertainment packed into the year's shortest month.

The North Coast Rep's production of Barbara Lebow's "A Shayna Maidel" won't open until Feb. 20, but you can start making plans to see this story of survival and hope following the Holocaust right now. This moving tale of a family's ability to transcend grief, is directed by the Rep's David Ellenstein – and promises to be an important addition to the local theater scene. The show will play through March 23.

The Old Globe's Cassius Carter Theater will continue its commissioned production of Steven Drukman's "In this Corner" through Feb. 10, in case you haven't seen this play about German boxer Max Schmeling and America's "Brown Bomber" (Joe Louis).

On Feb. 23, the Cassius Carter will unveil Tony Award-winning playwright Richard Greenberg's "The American Plan" – which runs through March 30. This comedy, set in the Catskills (circa 1960s), revolves around a German-Jewish refugee and her eccentric daughter. Most of the jokes should hit home, so mark your calendar for this one.

The Globe's Main Stage is featuring the West Coast premiere of "Sea of Tranquility" – a hilarious play about a New England

psychologist and his wife, who start a new life in the southwest. This comedy (directed by Michael Bloom) will run through Feb. 17.

The San Diego Opera's long-awaited production of "Tannhäuser" winds down on Feb. 3, but it will be followed on Feb. 16 by "Mary, Queen of Scots." The bel-canto masterpiece (which runs through Feb. 24) is the fictionalized story of the romantic conflict between Queen Elizabeth and her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots.

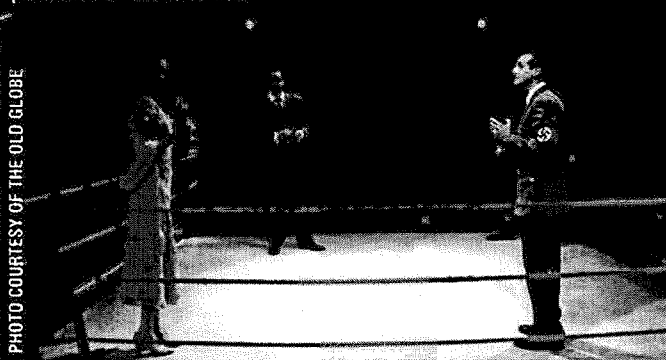
The Opera's "Royal Rendezvous" gala will take place in conjunction with the opening of "Mary..." The elegant pre-curtain dinner is slated for the US Grant Hotel. After the performance, guests will return to the hotel for a posh post-curtain party.

The San Diego Symphony starts its busy month on Feb. 7 with the "Symphony Exposed" series. Maestro Jahja Ling will conduct "The Firebird Suite." "Firebird" will be part of the Jacobs' Masterworks series Feb. 8 – 10 as well. Guest artist Jeffrey Biegel will perform Liebermann's "Piano Concerto No. 3" with the orchestra in that exciting series.

Silent Film Night Feb. 15 – 16 will spotlight "Robin Hood," with Gillian Anderson conducting the symphony. The final Jacobs' Masterworks series this month will take place Feb. 29 and March 1, when violinist Martin Chalfour and the San Diego

■ **The Old Globe's Cassius Carter Theater will continue its commissioned production of Steven Drukman's "In this Corner" through Feb. 10.**

(L-R) Katie Barrett as "Anny," Rufus Collins as "Max Schmeling" and T. Ryder Smith as "Hitler" in The Old Globe's world-premiere production of "In this Corner."



Los Angeles Times

February 7, 2008

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Theater

Reviewed by Phillip Brandes (P.B.), F.
Kathleen Foley (F.K.F.), Lynne Heffley
(L.H.), Charles McNulty (C.M.), David Ng
(D.N.), David C. Nichols (D.C.N.) and
Charlotte Stoudt (C.S.).

In This Corner Playwright Steven Druk-
man throws jab after jab of sociopolitical
interpretation into the rise and fall of Joe
Louis; but the drama never scores an
emotional knockout (C.M.). Old Globe,
Cassius Carter Centre Stage, 1363 Old
Globe Way, **San Diego**. Today-Fri., 8 p.m.;
Sat., 2 and 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 and 7 p.m.; ends
Sun. \$47-\$59. (619) 234-5623.

COMMENTARY

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A Performance with Real Punch

By Tom Shanahan

Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008 | The Cassius Carter Centre Stage, converted to depict a boxing ring, filled for a matinee performance last week with an audience that wasn't your normal Old Globe theater crowd.

They were high school-aged students from alternative schools around the county. One was the Sports Academy at the Jackie Robinson YMCA, which is part of the San Diego County Juvenile Court Schools.

The Old Globe's education program invited the male and female students to see "In This Corner." It's the story of two boxers, African American Joe Louis and Nazi-era German Max Schmeling, and their epic matches staged against the backdrop of World War II's ominous approach.

Before the lights dimmed, the students were cautioned to remain silent for the actors to perform their craft. It was a reasonable concern; nearly all of the students were seeing a play for the first time. Did they know the difference between a juvenile comedy at the movie theater and a profound play?

Turns out no one needed to worry. The kids may have rough edges, but they sat in rapt attention. The story and performance were that good.

Only a couple of times did a kid make noise, and you quickly heard a sharp "Shhhl!" The students policed themselves.

"I didn't expect that kind of a story between a black guy and a white guy," said Andres Gallegos, a senior at the Sports Academy.

Alex Philpott, a sophomore, added: "It wasn't normal for those times."

Michael Brunner, executive director of the Jackie Robinson YMCA, and Charles Mohammed, a Sports Academy teacher and a former Lincoln High and Utah running back, said the students could relate to the conflict and eventual friendship in the story.

"We have 52 sets of gangs in our service area," Brunner said. "These are kids learning to get along and transition back into traditional schools."

Before the play began, one of the students asked me if he would see real punches exchanged during the boxing scenes. But by intermission, they knew better. When I asked what they thought the play was about, they replied, "History."

They had learned that a sports story 70 years ago could deal with discriminations, stereotypes and challenges that they see in life.

When Louis avenged his 1936 loss to Schmeling two years later, he was black man in Jim Crow America suddenly elevated to an All-American hero for beating a man considered an evil Nazi.

The students soon learned that neither label was the full story.

On Louis' rise up, he still encountered discrimination despite his status as an American icon. In one scene, he was unable to enter a nightclub to see a singer he knew perform because of the color of skin.

They learned that although Schmeling was perceived as a villain by Americans rooting for Louis to beat him, he was a man that had saved two young sons of a Jewish friend by hiding them from the Nazis.

They listened as the play told how Louis lost everything and was used by people around him, including the U.S. government.

Schmeling, meanwhile, incurred the wrath of Hitler for what the Nazi leader, espousing Aryan supremacy, considered the disgrace of losing to a black man. The Nazis enlisted him as a paratrooper, and he was wounded in the war.

But the play ends with Schmeling, now wealthy as a Coca-Cola executive in Germany, and Louis, committed by his son to a mental institution, reunited decades later in a bond of friendship based on their competition in the ring.

To help the students relate to the story, the Old Globe invited Paul Vaden, a former IBF world junior middleweight champion, to speak after the play. Vaden, the only San Diego-born boxer to win a world title, grew up in the same neighborhoods as the students and got his start in boxing at the Jackie Robinson YMCA.

"Having Paul here lends credibility," Bruncker said.

Vaden told them Louis' success as a black American long before the civil rights movement helped open the first doors for others, like him, that came later.

He also explained the difference between fighters and street fighting.

Fighters compete and walk away from each other with newfound respect.

"I wish more kids could get involved in boxing," he said. "You can wash away a lot of trouble with three minutes in the ring. If you're involved in non-productive things, you're wasting your time. You're creating a negative image. Why give society the chance to label you in a negative way?"

By the time the lights went up on the Cassius Carter Centre Stage, the students learned society's labels didn't tell the full stories of Joe Louis and Max Schmeling.

Tom Shanahan is voiceofsandiego.org's sports columnist. He is the media coordinator for the San Diego Hall of Champions and an occasional writer for Chargers.com. You can e-mail him at toms@sdhoc.com. Or send a letter to the editor.



Tom Shanahan

Close Window

February 7, 2008

Old Globe's bruising premiere

By CHARLENE BALDRIDGE | DOWNTOWN NEWS

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PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Dion Graham (foreground) as Joe Louis and Katie Barrett as the Reporter in The Old Globe Theatre's world-premiere production of "In This Corner," through Feb. 10 at the Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage.

theatre



IN THIS CORNER: A KNOCK-OUT

by Lisa Lipsey

The Old Globe: Cassius Carter Centre Stage: Now - February 10



Dion Graham as "Joe Louis" in The Old Globe's world-premiere of *In This Corner*.
photo by Craig Schwartz.

February marks Black History Month. And what better way to acknowledge history than to settle in for a night at the Old Globe? Here it comes, the world premiere story of African-American World War II era boxer, Joe Louis.

"In 1938," according to *In This Corner* press notes, "there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American 'Brown Bomber' Joe Louis. World War II is about to change how Americans view the world around them and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward. The Cassius Carter Centre Stage becomes the ultimate arena and every seat is ringside as the decisive battle begins—for honor, country, and for self-respect."

Truly, the world-premiere staging of Steven Drukman's *In This Corner* is a knock-out production. From the moment audiences enter the theatre, they are transformed. Sitting in the intimate Cassius Carter, not around a stage, but an authentic boxing ring, makes the show.

The play shifts through history from the Great Depression and the WW II era up through the 1970s and the passing of Joe Louis in 1981. But (despite well-done costuming) the audience is not lost in the times. The focus remains on the character development. In and out of the arena there is a steady realism. Did anyone know the man behind this rising star that was put out there as America's answer to Hitler's strong-boy? Will anyone remember this fallen, iconic hero?

In This Corner is carried by strong writing and a strong cast, featuring Dion Graham, Katie Barrett, Rufus Collins, David Deblinger, John Keabler, T. Ryder Smith and Al White. This group had to go beyond the rehearsals and memorization known to their craft. In preparation for the production, cast members received boxing training from the Boxing Company of Point Loma.

Joe Louis is portrayed by Dion Graham and makes his Globe debut, but this is no new-comer. Dion has originated roles in numerous premieres of works by playwrights including Tennessee Williams (*Not About Nightingales*, London's Royal National Theatre/Broadway) and Kenneth Lonergan (*Lobby Hero*, Playwright's Horizons/Houseman Theatre). He is also the series narrator for A & E's *The First 48*, HDTV's *Art of the Heist*, and various documentaries. He is the recipient of the Ben Franklin Award and a Lucille Lortel Award nominee (*Lobby Hero*). He currently plays State's Attorney Rupert Bond on HBO's *The Wire*.

Rufus Collins plays Max Schmeling (the German Boxer) and is also making his debut at the Globe. His Broadway credits include *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, *An Ideal Husband*, *The Homecoming*. Film credits include *Joshua*, *Saving Souls*, *Under the Bridge*, *Neurotica*. Couch potato sightings include *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *All My Children*, and *The Guiding Light*.

Give credit where it is due, this is a masterful script by playwright Steven Drukman. Drukman's past works include: *Going Native*, *Another Fine Mess* (Pulitzer Prize finalist), *Flattery Will Get You*, *Snowm Maiden*, *Collateral Damage*, *Fox Hollow* and *Youth in Asia*. He is an associate arts professor at New York University, and former senior editor for *American Theatre Magazine*.

Directed by Tony nominee Ethan McSweeney (Gore Vidal's *The Best Man*), *In This Corner* brings a lasting punch. Two gloves up and one size fits all -- the history buff, the theatre divas and the sports fan.

For tickets contact the Globe at 619.234.5623 or log-on: www.theoldglobe.org.

► BACKSTAGE

Continued from 2

ready thinking way ahead into the future.

On Jan. 18, San Diego Opera announced that it has co-commissioned a new opera based on Herman Melville's classic novel "Moby-Dick."

The opera, to be produced in 2011, will be composed by Jake Heggie (composer of the opera "Dead Man Walking") and librettist Gene Scheer.

The opera is being co-produced by four regional opera companies that will take turns presenting the opera during the 2011 season.

They are Dallas Opera, which will present the opera's world premiere, followed by San Diego Opera, San Francisco Opera and Canada's Calgary Opera.

■ ■ ■

And speaking of commissions, the San Diego North Coast Singers has commissioned its own opera, which will have a much shorter production schedule than "Moby-Dick."

The Encinitas-based, 125-voice youth choir has commissioned composer Cary Ratchiff to write a short opera for chorus based on the award-winning children's book "Mice and Beans" by San Diego author Pam Munoz Ryan.

The new opera for families will be presented in its world premiere April 26 and 27 at the Birch North Park Theatre in San Diego.

■ ■ ■

A group of North County theater volunteers is seeking applicants for its 2008 "Vagina Warriors" campaign. Yes, you read that right.

V-Day Escondido, which will present a weekend of benefit performances of "The Vagina Monologues" next month at THEATR community theater in Escondido, is seeking nominations for 10 people whose local efforts have contributed to a reduction in violence against women and girls.

Every February, "Vagina Monologues" playwright Eve Ensler allows theater groups worldwide to produce her play royalty-free so that all proceeds can benefit women's charities.

The V-Day Escondido campaign will collect nominations for its campaign and will name its 10 honorees on Feb. 14. For details, visit www.vdayescondido.org.

■ ■ ■

Boxing comes alive onstage this month in the Old Globe's world premiere play "In This Corner," a drama about legendary fighter Joe Louis, and students from local schools are getting an extra bonus at special morning matinee performances this week and next.

Besides offering the students free admission to the play by Steven Drukman, the Old Globe has invited former pro boxer and Olympic Festival gold medalist Paul Vaden of San Diego to talk about the sport and present a free boxing demonstration after each of the free matinees. Two of the matinees were held Jan. 23 and 30 and the final one is Wednesday.

In This Corner

Steven Druckman's drama retells the relationship between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, whom the press turned into ideological icons for their 1936 and 1938 Fights of the Century. But, the play insists more often than need be, they weren't: Schmeling detested Hitler, and Louis, once he stepped out of the ring, became yet another segregated African-American who couldn't have his picture taken with a white woman. The play retells Pygmalion. Louis becomes re-engineered out of words into a racist white's ideal black man. He can clobber opponents, but must never smile or gloat. When he leaves the ring for good, and the media can no longer exploit him, Louis nosedives from celebrity like an Icarus. The world premiere script has crisp dialogue and flashes of sharp writing, but Louis and Schmeling exist more in theory, as verbal constructs meant to prove a point about verbal constructs, than in depth. And the ending (a tidy summation about winning losers with echoes of *Rocky III*) is weak. As if sensing that the text needs more grounding, director Ethan McSweeney has drenched the Cassius Carter with atmosphere and pugilistic detail. The stage is a boxing ring, a near-perfect fit, and although the play's about Main Event headliners, McSweeney and seven talented performers make it an engaging ensemble show, in spite of the script's lack of a knock-out punch.

Worth a try.

CASSIUS CARTER CENTER STAGE, SIMON EDISON CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, 1363 OLD GLOBE WAY, BALBOA PARK. THROUGH FEBRUARY 10; THURSDAYS, 8 P.M., FRIDAYS, 8 P.M., SATURDAYS, 2 P.M., SATURDAYS, 8 P.M., SUNDAYS, 2 P.M., SUNDAYS, 7 P.M., 619-234-5623.

REGIONAL

IN THIS CORNER

(CASSIUS CARTER CENTER STAGE;
225 SEATS; \$59 TOP)

SAN DIEGO An Old Globe presentation of a play in two acts by Steven Drukman. Directed by Ethan McSweeney. Sets, Lee Savage; costumes, Tracy Christensen; lighting, Tyler Micoeau; sound, Lindsay Jones; fight direction, Steve Rankin; production stage manager, Diana Moser. Opened, reviewed Jan. 10, 2008. Running time: 2 HOURS.

Joe Louis Dion Graham
Max Schmeling Rufus Collins
Announcer, Hitler, Ref,
Officer T. Ryder Smith
Blackburn, Pastor Al White
Reporter, Jacobs David Deblinger
Nurse, Reporter, Girl,
Anny, Tutor, USO Girl Katie Barrett
The Boxer John Keabler

By BOB VERINI

With "In This Corner," Steven Drukman sets out to restore the rep of Joe Louis, the unassuming "Brown Bomber" sandwiched between controversial Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali but arguably the boxer with the strongest claim to the title of greatest ever. If this rehab effort succeeds, it seldom rises above the level of an A&E "Biography" segment, due to a cipher protagonist and thematic uncertainty. Pulled punches prevent a knockout, but as sheer entertainment, Ethan McSweeney's colorful Old Globe world preem wins a decision on points.

Louis (Dion Graham) was carefully schooled to restrain from any Johnson-like antics likely to turn off the majority culture. (For a time, he was forbidden to fight white opponents.) American-hero status came through celebrated battles with Nazi Germany's pride and joy Max Schmeling (Rufus Collins) and a subsequent Army induction, but postwar tax problems, drug abuse and commitment to a psych ward haunted him into decline and obscurity. He died in 1981.

Who was that man in that corner, and why did he fall so far so fast? Drukman lays out key events, punctuated with ironic commentary from an energetic chorus, but no consistent, coherent point of view emerges.

Whether Louis was a tool, victim or wise player in the effort to control his emotions for white

America's benefit isn't explored. Nor can we extrapolate much from his impassivity at the racial prejudice encountered at every phase. Hints of inherited mental problems are raised, doubted, dropped.

Graham's dignified, world-weary Joe hints at more than meets the eye, but, in a way, that's the problem, as the writing never provides enough to sink our teeth into. "I am a man; I have my name" is about as deep as the investigation ever gets. Why was he forced into wrestling matches wearing an Indian headdress? Throughout, Louis garners our sympathy but rarely our understanding.

Schmeling's treatment is even more ambivalent, his involvement in Hitler's world propaganda plans papered over in a shockingly insensitive (and opportunity-wasting) sequence with a burlesque Hitler, denying the boxer's dilemma any reality or tension. Thereafter, he's one-dimensionally noble, his main characteristic a Col. Klink accent more appropriate to a Bob Hope wartime farce.

The Hitler scene is McSweeney's only major flub, as he otherwise satisfyingly applies fancy footwork to disguise the material's thinness. Characters prowl across, around and beneath Lee Savage's superbly crummy boxing ring set, with considerable variety and several visual coups to command attention.

Tyler Micoeau's lights imaginatively distinguish Louis' public and private worlds, and, though movies have spoiled us, Steve Rankin infuses the snatches of pugilism with as much realism as the stage permits. Still, the most effective boxing sequence is the second Louis-Schmeling bout, which aud and actors experience exactly the way America did: staring in hushed darkness at a radio.

Among the capable ensemble, T. Ryder Smith adds a welcome touch of film noir in his uncanny resemblance to the late, great Marc Lawrence. He scores with a ref's sizzling monologue defending his role in raising the level of prizefighting.

Aficionados of fistiana and/or beefcake should show up early for John Keabler's solo warmup routine, establishing a suitably sweaty mood. Thesp's skills with a punching bag, medicine ball and (especially) jump rope are far more impressive than those of the canvas-munching palookas — Primo Carnera, Max Baer and various Louis sparring partners — he impersonates during the show proper.



Dion Graham is the "Brown Bomber," Joe Louis, in Steven Drukman's "In This Corner."

NIGHT & DAY

'In This Corner'
dramatizes the
life of Joe Louis

MOVIE REVIEW

The
Orphana

The San Diego

Union-Tribune.



Thursday
January 3, 2008

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THE WEEKLY GUIDE

JANUARY 3-9, 2008

NIGHT & DAY

"Kurt Cobain: About
a Son" flops as rock
documentary
AT THE MOVIES

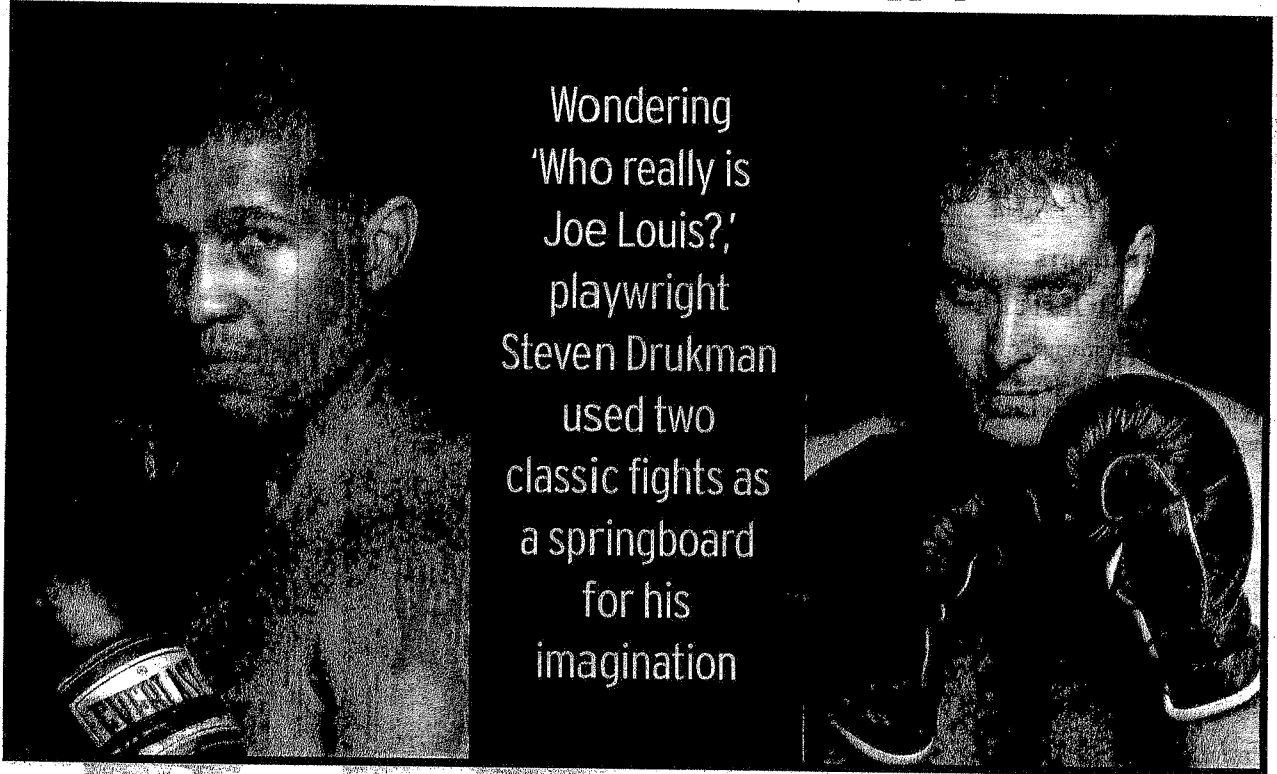
Jazz vocal giant
Andy Bey still
doing it his way
POP MUSIC

'Pearls' strings
lives together at
North Coast Rep
NORTH COUNTY N&D

HEAVYWEIGHT THEATER

"In This Corner" dramatizes
the life of Joe Louis, the fighter
and the man **UP FRONT**

'CORNER' MAN



Wondering
'Who really is
Joe Louis?,'
playwright
Steven Drukman
used two
classic fights as
a springboard
for his
imagination

Dion Graham (above left) is Joe Louis and Rufus Collins is Louis' nemesis, Max Schmeling, in Old Globe's premiere, "In This Corner." Craig Schwartz

By Anne Marie Welsh
THEATER CRITIC

At the Boxing Company in Point Loma where three actors appearing in his "In This Corner" will be working out, playwright Steven Drukman sat near a punching bag with his skilled, widely praised director Ethan McSweeney.

"Who really is Joe Louis?" Drukman asked. "That's the question of the play. Joe Louis was presented as light-skinned, clean, Bible-reading, polite. He never had a chance to find out what or who he really was ontologically."

Though the play hopscoches through time, revealing facets of the man and the fighter, "there's no way to know who the real Joe Louis was. He exists only in the public imagination. He had some really expert African-American handlers. They took it as their charge to white-wash our collective unconscious about blackness," Drukman said.

"What happened to Joe Louis later is not a pretty picture. It's the archetypal story of the hero falling from the heights — of beating Hitler in the ring, then being discarded."

"Hitler," or at least "Hitler's boy," was Max Schmeling — who defeated Louis in 1936 and in the "fight of the century" two years later at Yankee Stadium was TKO'd in the first round.

The play was commissioned by the Old Globe Theatre when its resident artistic director, sports-loving Jerry Patch, heard Drukman's idea of writing a play about Louis and Schmeling.

Drukman also knew "The Globe had this

DETAILS

"In This Corner"

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday, 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 1 and 6 p.m. Sunday, through Feb. 10.

Where: Cassius Carter Centre Stage, Old Globe, Balboa Park

Admission: \$42-\$59.

Information: (619) 23-GLOBE

Online: theoldglobe.org

space," he said referring to the arena-style Cassius Carter Centre Stage, a place being transformed by scenic designer Lee Savage and lighting designer Tyler Micolleku into a stylized boxing ring.

"Boxing is not the only fight in this play," said McSweeney.

Said Drukman: "Their fights were as rich with drama as any sports story can be — and replete with irony. Schmeling was the poster boy for Hitler. Here was this African-American held up as an emblem of democracy 20 years before the Civil Rights Act, yet when he joined the Army, it was in a segregated unit."

An arts writer for *American Theatre* magazine and *The New York Times*, as well as a theater professor at New York University, Drukman is fascinated by the ironies surrounding Louis.

"Max Schmeling had a Coca-Cola franchise in Germany and sat on the board of directors in Hamburg. Yet in the democratic United States, Coke wouldn't sponsor Joe Louis because he

was black.

"The trick was, which ironies do you pursue?"

Bred in Boston, Drukman follows the fortunes of his former hometown's teams — the undefeated Patriots, the hot Celtics, the World Series-winning Red Sox. In boxing, Muhammad Ali was his "gateway into the sport." Though he and Patch are huge sports fans, the phenomenon is fairly rare among theater workers — and, said McSweeney, "people who love musical theater and people who love sports seem to have like two different genes."

Though the play opens in 1970 when Louis was hospitalized, the script centers on the two iconic Louis-Schmeling bouts: the German's surprise June 19, 1936, win and the rematch in which a reborn Louis, by then world heavyweight champion, scored the first first-round knockout in a world championship. Louis continued setting records for number of title defenses and longevity as a world champion that still stand. He knocked out 23 opponents in 27 fights.

In the first Schmeling fight, said McSweeney, "Schmeling finds a way inside (Louis') extraordinary power. Then, the second is the fight of the century. Seventy million stopped to listen. That's out of 120 million in America then. It was the kind of event like Kennedy's assassination; people remembered where they were on the night of the Joe Louis-Max Schmeling fight."

Last here for his subtle, award-winning production of "A Body of Water," also at the Carter, McSweeney modestly echoes an old theater max-

Fists of fury provide a filter for race

Playwright Steven Drukman said that, culturally, heavyweight champ Joe Louis "fell between the extremes of brash Jack Johnson and ultra-brash Muhammad Ali. Louis was the moderate, whitewashed by his handlers."

The three black boxers — and their artistic representations — provide one way of looking at the history of race in 20th-century America:

Jack Johnson (1878-1946):

Brash and, in the words of the Ken Burns documentary, "notorious," he was the first black heavyweight champion of the world, and was tried and convicted for violation of the Mann Act — in a sham trial tinged by racism. Fictionalized, he's the subject of the Pulitzer- and Tony-winning play "The Great White Hope" (1967), later a film also starring James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander.

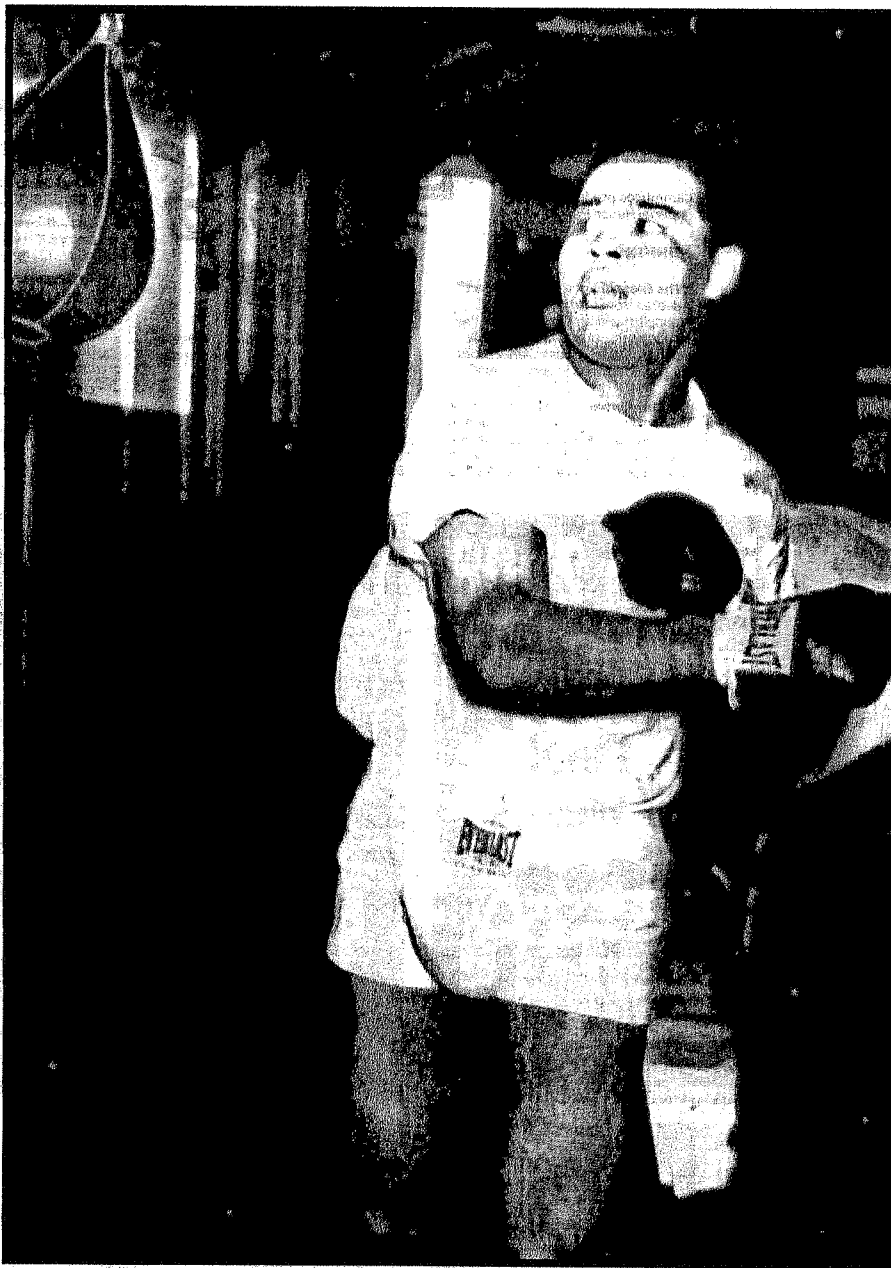
Joe Louis, "The Brown Bomber,"

(1914-1981): At a time when African-Americans were still being lynched and segregated, the son of an Alabama sharecropper achieved an iconic status previously reserved only for whites. Trained to seem impassive while fighting, he possessed a locomotive punch and was a world champion for nearly 12 years. His two bouts with "Hitler's boy," Max Schmeling, are the subject of Steven Drukman's new play "In This Corner," at the Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage.

Muhammad Ali, "The Greatest"

(1942-): Born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr., he won a gold medal at the 1960 Olympics despite an unconventional "floating" technique. His merrily rhyming self-promotional career included three world championships. Ali's embrace of Islam and refusal to be inducted into the Vietnam-era army cost him 2½ years out of the ring, but his charm, pride and championing of the developing world have kept him in the public eye, even as his body has been wracked by Parkinson's. Will Smith starred (with Jon Voight as Howard Cosell) in the 2001 film biography, "Ali."

— ANNE MARIE WELSH



Joe Louis trained for his fight against "Jersey" Joe Walcott in this November 1947 photo. Louis' two bouts with Max Schmeling are the subject of Steven Drukman's new play "In This Corner" *Allsport U.K.*

'CORNER'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

im: "It is almost true that casting is 90 percent of directing. If you make a mistake in casting, there's really very little you can do about it."

He credits Samantha Barrie and Patch at the Globe with "pulling casting closely into the primary duties of the artistic staff," as opposed to farming it out to an agency.

McSweeney, Drukman and the Globe team tried out the actors cast as Louis and Schmeling in two

different New York workshops of the play: Dion Graham will play Joe Louis and Rufus Collins will be Max Schmeling — each of them time-traveling through 40 years of his character's life and each also beefing himself up with three workouts a week during rehearsal periods.

David Deblinger, who plays Schmeling's manager Joe Jacobs, came in "talking that New York talk like a walking anachronism," said McSweeney. "Perfect for the part."

Others in multiple roles include

several already familiar to San Diego audiences. Katie Barrett plays the women; she gave an award-winning turn here last year as Yvette the Whore in La Jolla Playhouse's "Mother Courage and Her Children." Al White plays Louis' trainer and pastor; he was the shrewd and dapper undertaker in last year's Globe cast of "Two Trains Running."

And T. Ryder Smith plays the fight announcer and Hitler, among other roles. Smith was also at the Globe last year, striking and unforgettable as a mentally challenged man who

thinks he's Abraham Lincoln in John Strand's "Lincolnesque."

At the gym before rehearsal, writer and director returned to their theme of the scarcity of plays about sports. "It's a myth that theater geeks can't love sports. Jerry and Steven are geeks who are total sports fans," McSweeney said. "But this is also a play about American history. It's a great American story."

Anne Marie Welsh: (619) 293-1265; anne-marie.welsh@uniontrib.com

JAN - 3 2008

Boxing-themed play recalls famous Louis-Schmeling rivalry

PAM KRAGEN
STAFF WRITER

On June 22, 1938, a battle of epic proportions unfolded in a boxing ring at Yankee Stadium. The Alabama-born "Brown Bomber," Joe Louis, was set to defend his heavyweight boxing title in a rematch against Germany's great white hope, Max Schmeling, in a fight that carried with it the immense symbolic weight of the looming struggle between American democracy and Nazi fascism.

On Saturday, the starting bell will ring again when "In This Corner," a new stage drama about the famous Louis-Schmeling matchup, makes its world premiere at the Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage. Commissioned by the Old Globe for the small, square theater-in-the-round and directed by Ethan McSweeney (who helmed last year's award-winning "A Body of Water" at the Globe), Steven Drukman's play brings together the two pugilists and the media and handlers who molded them into legends in a drama that spans three decades.

In the 1930s, there was no bigger sports story than the Louis-Schmeling fight, and no greater athlete than Louis, who was recently ranked the greatest heavyweight of all time by the International Boxing Research Organization and the No. 1 puncher of all time by Ring Magazine. Born in 1914 to impoverished Alabama field hands, Joe Louis Barrow began boxing at the age of 10.

By age 20, he was the Golden Gloves light heavyweight champ, and he grew into a national hero in 1935 when he scored a pair of impressive knockouts against heavyweights Primo Carnera and Max Baer.

But he met his match in 1936, when Germany's Schmeling, who'd detected a flaw in Louis' technique (the tendency to drop his left arm after delivering a punch, dealt Louis the only defeat of his career).

Louis went on to win the heavyweight crown in 1937 — beating James J. "Cinderella Man" Braddock — a title Louis would hold for an unprecedented 11 years and 25 title defenses, but it wasn't until he faced Schmeling again in 1938 that Louis felt he had earned the right to the title.

Drukman's play profiles

"In This Corner"

When: Opens Saturday and runs through Feb. 10; showtimes, 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays
Where: Cassius Carter Centre Stage, Old Globe Theatre complex, Balboa Park, San Diego
Tickets: \$42-\$59
Info: (619) 234-5623
Web: www.theoldglobe.org

the Louis-Schmeling fights, as well as the cordial relationship that grew between the two men in later years. After World War II, Louis struggled with ill health and more than \$1 million in tax debts, and Schmeling (who prospered after the war as a German distributor for Coca-Cola) helped Louis pay some of his debts.

Drukman talked about his new play in a telephone interview from New York last week.

Q: Where did the idea for "In This Corner" come from?

A: I approached Jerry (Patch, the Old Globe's artistic director) about a year ago when he visited New York. I'm a classic boxing fan. I loved Muhammad Ali when I was a kid. And I couldn't believe there had never been a major play about Joe Louis. He had a great story that needed to be told.

Q: This play is much more than the story of Joe Louis, though.

A: I didn't want to do just a bio play. Those are boring. It's more about the forces that made Joe. They took his name and gave him a new name and then took away his name. It's about the way he was mis-

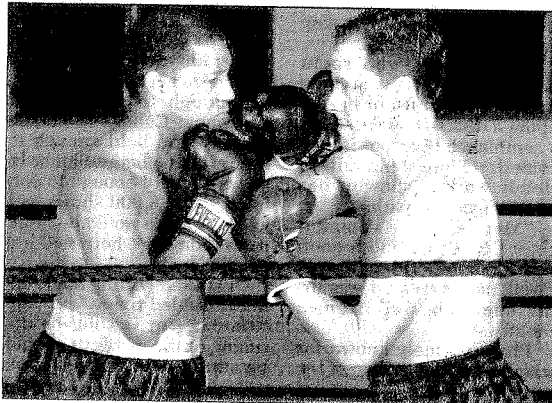


PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Dion Graham and Rufus Collins play 1930s-era boxers Joe Louis and Max Schmeling in the Steven Drukman play 'In This Corner.'

treated by this country after they didn't have any use for him anymore. The same thing happened to Max Schmeling. After he lost to Louis, he was abandoned by his country.

Q: How were they used by their countries?

A: These were two men who were asked to stand for something that they had nothing to do with. Max Schmeling was used by Hitler as a symbol of Nazi power, but he never joined the Nazi party and during Krystalnacht, he hid two Jewish boys from the Nazis. Joe was used as a symbol of democracy but he wasn't even allowed to use the same drinking fountains and couldn't stay in the same hotels as white Americans. It was a situation fraught with irony.

were dozens of newspapers at the time and these writers thrived on mythologizing sports figures, like Babe Ruth, Braddock, Seabiscuit and Joe Louis. These guys (sportswriters) were not very well-schooled and they wrote in this kind of purplish, colorful way ... alliteration was considered good writing ... and it was an interesting sort of Ben Hecht-style language I wanted to use. It was the color that made the world of this play.

Q: This play brings Joe Louis and Max Schmeling together late in their lives. How much of this is truth and how much is fiction?

A: To call them friends is an overstatement. They only saw each other a few times after the 1938 bout and many of those meetings were staged (like Schmeling's surprise appearance on a 1954 television episode of "This Is Your Life" about Louis). But they clearly enjoyed seeing each other

Q: Besides the two boxers, the play has some key characters who are sportswriters. Why do they play such a big role in the play?

A: The 1930s were a golden age for sportswriting. There

► BOXING, 18

▶ BOXING

Continued from 17

and Max helped pay Joe's debts. I used some theatrical license in writing their scenes together, but what I hope comes out of it is that whatever anybody else said or wrote

about them, they had this unnameable something that existed for them in those moments they were in the ring together, and it's something only they themselves could touch.

Q: While researching the lives of these two men, did you discover any new insights or surprises?

A: It was fascinating learning about Max and what a chameleon he was. He was so morally and ethically slippery

and he didn't stand for anything. He was always speaking out of two or three sides of his mouth.

He was really a remarkable survivor. He was popular in the Weimar, Germany, era; then he survived Hitler without joining the Nazi party, then he thrived in post-war Germany.

Joe Louis, on the other hand, was a great fighter in the ring, but he had no ability to survive outside of it. From

the beginning of his career, he had people who handled him, managed him and took care of him. Outside the ring, he couldn't manage his life at all.

Yet he was wildly popular in his day. If you were an African-American of a certain generation, you named your kid "Joe" or "Louis," or you daughter "Josephine" or "Louise," out of respect for what he accomplished.

Joe Louis beat Hitler's boy and was the world's best fighter and that was an undisputable fact for years and years. It was very affirming for the African-American community because they were treated as second-class

citizens.

Q: How have you enjoyed working on this play at the Old Globe?

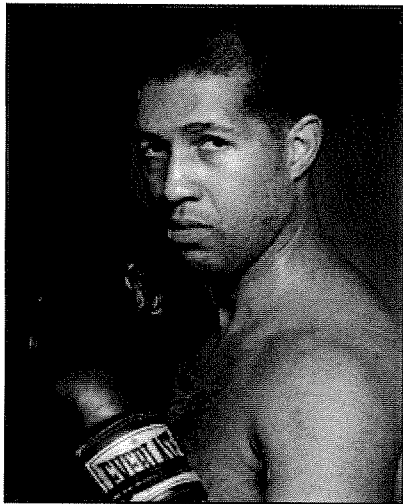
A: It's been the best experience. Jerry (Patch) is known throughout the theater world as the champion of new plays. There is no other dramaturge like him and finding a good dramaturge is gemlike.

They champion your work and they help you find your play as you write it. It's even rarer to find a good director, and Ethan (McSweeney) has a natural talent and he brings an incredible energy and ambition to this play. I'm very excited to see this come together in San Diego.



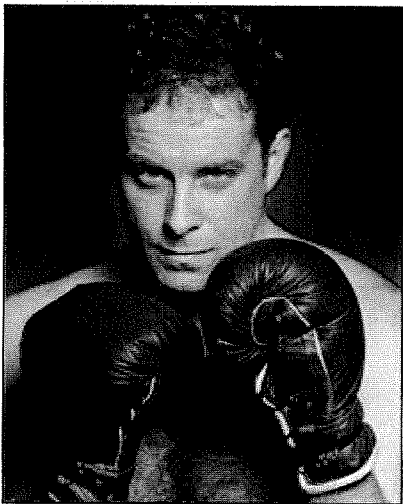
World Premiere of *In This Corner* Opens at Old Globe Jan. 10

By Adam Hetrick
10 Jan 2008



The world-premiere staging of Steven Drukman's *In This Corner* officially opens at San Diego's Old Globe Jan. 10; previews began Jan. 5.

Tony nominee Ethan McSweeney (*Gore Vidal's The Best Man*) helms the production featuring Dion Graham, Katie Barrett, Rufus Collins, David Deblinger, John Keabler, T. Ryder Smith and Al White. The cast performs on the Cassius Carter Centre Stage, which has been transformed into a boxing ring for the production.



Dion Graham as Joe Louis and Rufus Collins as Max Schmeling
Craig Schwartz

"In 1938," according to *In This Corner* press notes, "there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American 'Brown Bomber' Joe Louis. World War II is about to change how Americans view the world around them and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward."

The production team features Lee Savage (scenic design), Tracy Christensen (costume design), Tyler Micolesku (lighting design), and Lindsay Jones (sound design). In preparation for the production, cast members received boxing training from the Boxing Company of Point Loma, CA.

Steven Drukman's works include *Going Native*, *Another Fine Mess* (Pulitzer Prize finalist), *Flattery Will Get You*, *Snowm Maiden*, *Collateral Damage*, *Fox Hollow* and *Youth in Asia*. He is an

associate arts professor at NYU, and former senior editor for "American Theatre Magazine."

In This Corner will play the Old Globe through Feb. 10. For tickets phone (619) 234-5623 or visit www.theoldglobe.org.

The Old Globe is located at 1363 Old Globe Way in San Diego, CA.

**Send questions and comments to the [Webmaster](#)
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SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
International Times

JAN - 1 2008

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Ranch & Coast
Magazine

JAN - - 2008

1/5-2/10: *In This Corner*

In 1938, there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis. The Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage becomes the ultimate arena and every seat is ringside as the decisive battle begins. (619/23-GLOBE, www.theoldglobe.org)

In This Corner 1/5-2/10



In This Corner/ Photo by Craig Schwartz



"In this Corner"
「イン ディス コーナー」

アメリカを沸かせた世紀のボクシングマッチ

●&● 1938年。世紀のイベントとして注目を集めたドイツ人マックス・シュメリング vs. アメリカ人ジョー・ルイスのボクシングマッチ。ヒトラーの命を受けたシュメリングに対し、人種差別を受けてきたアフリカ系アメリカ人のルイスは全国民の支持を受け、国の名誉を懸けて戦うことに――。

● THE GLOBE THEATRES (Cassius Carter Centre Stage), 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park / 619-239-2255(T)。期間—1/5(土)～2/10(日)。上演—火・水曜: 7pm、木・金曜: 8pm、土曜: 2pm & 8pm、日曜: 2pm & 7pm。チケット—\$32～\$54。http://www.oldglobe.org

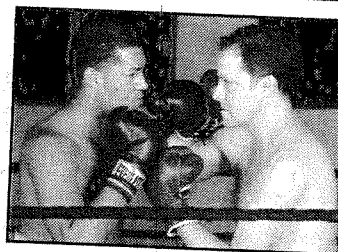
San Diego Clipping
SD City Beat

JAN - 2 2008

ON STAGE

CHECK THIS OUT

After the bell: The historic 1938 rematch between boxers Joe Louis and Max Schmeling was less about sports than ideologies. Adolf Hitler's Nazis crowed that Germany's Schmeling, who had beaten Louis two years before, would do it again and illustrate Aryan supremacy in the process. Louis, only 24 and raised in abject poverty, was a serious media darling, having won the heavy-weight title in 1937. To Hitler's outrage, Louis would beat Schmeling in one round, and he'd go on to defend his title 25 times—but life eventually got in the way, briefly remanding him to a Denver psychiatric hospital in 1970 amid a cocaine addiction and a diagnosis of para-

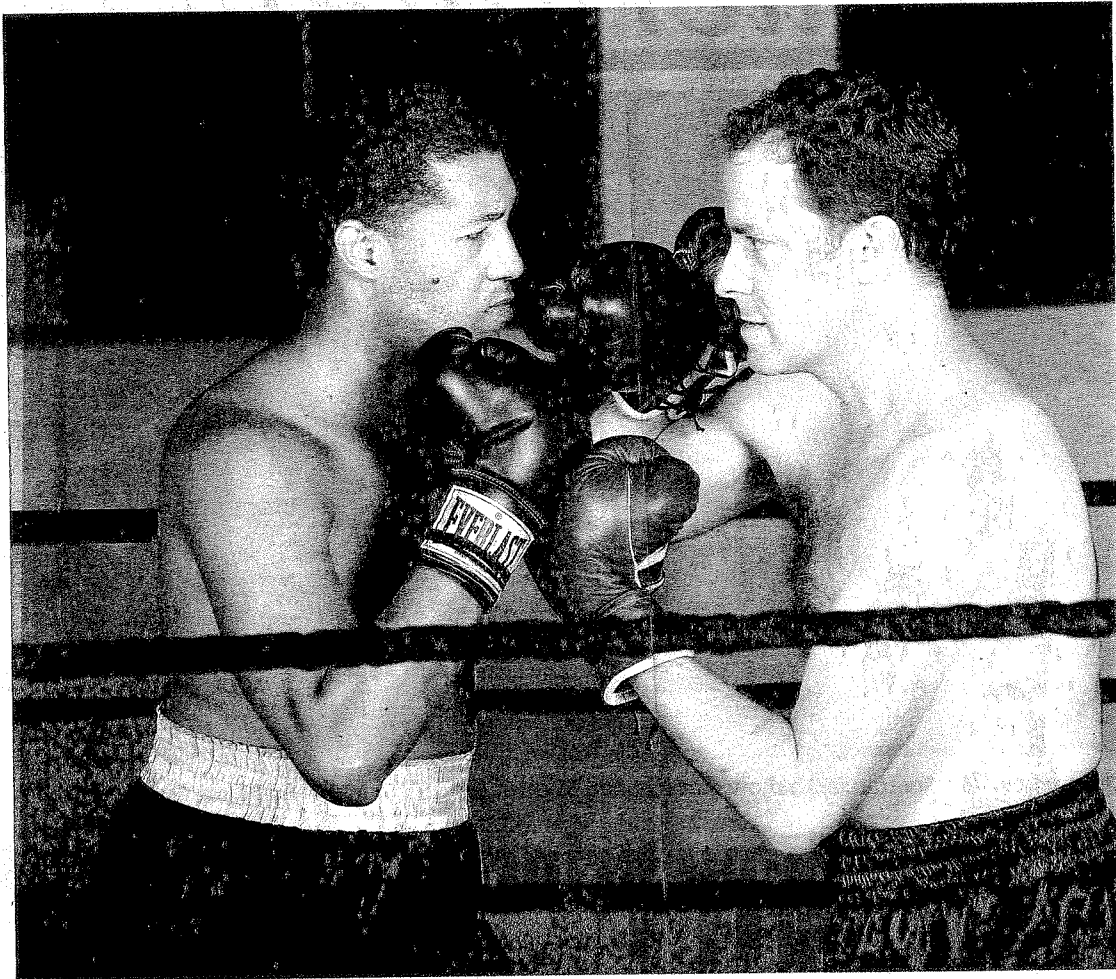


In This Corner

noia. The rest of the world might not know that Max picked up Joe's hospital tab—in fact, The Old Globe Theatre's *In This Corner* recounts the men's close friendship and accurately paints Schmeling as anything but a Nazi sympathizer. The show opens in previews on Jan. 5 at the Cassius Carter Centre Stage, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. 619-23-GLOBE of www.oldglobe.org. \$46-\$59.

—Martin Jones Westlin

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Rancho Bernardo
Journal
JAN - 3 2008



OLD FRIENDS — The Old Globe presents the debut of its commissioned play 'In this Corner,' which focuses on the 1938 bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and Joe Louis and their unlikely reunion in a psychiatric ward during the 1970s. The play will run at the Cassius Carter Centre Stage from Jan. 5 to Feb. 10. Tickets range between \$42 and \$59 and can be purchased by calling 619-23-GLOBE, at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Daily Transcript

JAN - 4 2008

'In This Corner'

The Old Globe Theatre transforms its stage into a boxing arena for its newest show, "In This Corner," which opens Saturday. The story depicts the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis, boxing rivals who are reunited in a psychiatric ward.

At 6:30 p.m. Monday, The Old Globe will hold a seminar with actors, designers and directors to present ideas and insights about the production.

For more information, call

(619) 234-5623 or visit the-oldglobe.org.

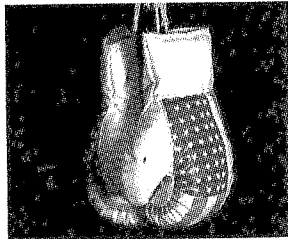
SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
International Times

DEC 16 2007

"In this Corner"
「イン ディス コーナー」

アメリカを沸かせた世紀のボクシングマッチ／実話に基づく戯曲

⑤ 1938年。ドイツ人マックス・シュメリングとアメリカ人ジョー・ルイスのボクシングマッチが世紀のイベントとして世間の注目を集めていた。第二次世界大戦が近づき、各国の対立が深まる中、ヒトラーの命により送られてきたシュメリングに対して、それまで人種差別を受けてきたアフリカ系アメリカ人のルイスは全国民の支持を受け、国の名誉を懸けて戦うことに――。



In This Corner

⑥ マックス・シュメリング(1905-2005)はドイツ人で唯一のプロボクシング世界ヘビー級王者。1930年に王座を獲得し、32年に前王者のジャック・シャーキーに敗れるまで君臨した。36年にジョー・ルイスとの対戦にKO勝ちし、38年に再戦する。第二次世界大戦開戦後はリングから離れ、反ナチスの立場を取ったことからドイツ軍に徴兵される。一方、「褐色の爆撃機」と呼ばれたジョー・ルイス(1914-81)は史上2人目のアフリカ系アメリカ人世界ヘビー級王者。11年間の在位中に、全階級を通じて最多の世界王座25連続防衛という記録を打ち立てた。この記録は現在も破られていない。

① THE GLOBE THEATRES (Cassius Carter Centre Stage), 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park / 619-239-2255(T)。期間—1/5(土)～2/10/2008(日)。上演—火・水曜: 7pm、木・金曜: 8pm、土曜: 2pm & 8pm、日曜: 2pm & 7pm。チケット—TBA。
<http://www.oldglobe.org>

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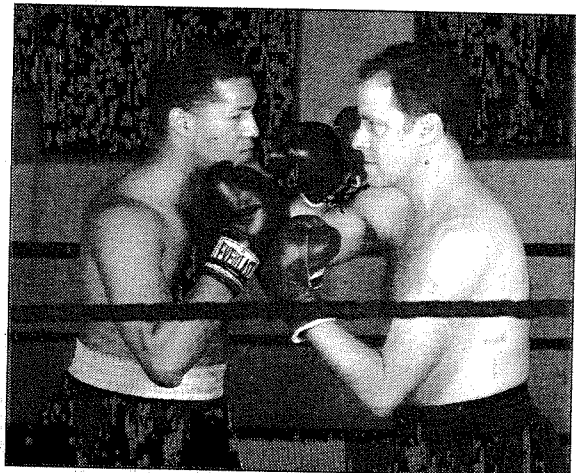
DEC -- 2007

Balboa Park

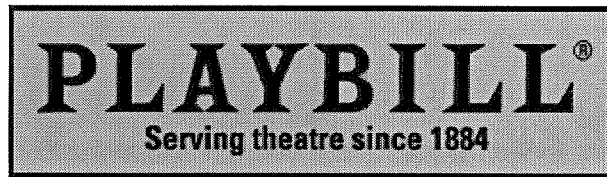
The Old Globe Theater recently donated 600 tickets to local schools for the premier performance musical *A Catered Affair*. Students attended the special matinee performance on November 7. The Globe's free student matinee program began in January, 2006, and to date the Globe has donated over 6,500 tickets to students for its productions. The program will continue in 2008 with special 10:30 a.m. student matinees for *In This Corner*, *Dancing in the Dark*, *The Glass Menagerie* and *Beethoven, As I Knew Him*.

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
North Park News

JAN -- 2008



The epic bout between African-American Joe Louis and German Max Schmeling, which transcended the boxing ring to the international political stage and an aftermath years later, is dramatized in the world premiere production of *"In This Corner"* by Steven Drukman. Dion Graham plays Lewis and Rufus Collins is Schmeling. Old Globe Cassius Carter Centre Stage. Jan. 5 - Feb. 10. \$42-\$59. 231-1941. theoldglobe.org.



McSweeney to Stage *In This Corner* for Old Globe in January 2008

By Adam Hetrick
07 Dec 2007

Steven Drukman, a Pulitzer Prize finalist, will see the world premiere of his play *In This Corner* staged at San Diego's Old Globe beginning Jan. 5, 2008.

Tony-nominated director Ethan McSweeney (*Gore Vidal's The Best Man*) will stage the new work about famed African-American boxer Joe Louis on the Old Globe's Cassius Carter Centre Stage, which will be transformed into a boxing ring for the unique Old Globe staging.

In This Corner will star Dion Graham (Joe Louis), Katie Barrett (Nurse/Female Reporter/Girl/Anny/Tutor/USO Girl), Rufus Collins (Max Schmeling), David Deblinger (Reporter/Jacobs), John Keabler (Boxer), T. Ryder Smith (Announcer/Hitler/Ref/Officer) and Al White (Blackburn/Pastor).

"In 1938, there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American 'Brown Bomber' Joe Louis," according to press notes. "World War II is about to change how Americans view the world around them and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward."

The production team features Lee Savage (scenic design), Tracy Christensen (costume design), Tyler Micoleku (lighting design), and Lindsay Jones (sound design). The cast is receiving boxing training from the Boxing Company of Point Loma, CA.

Steven Drukman's works include *Going Native*, *Another Fine Mess* (Pulitzer Prize finalist), *Flattery Will Get You*, *Snowmaiden*, *Collateral Damage*, *Fox Hollow* and *Youth in Asia*. He is an associate arts professor at NYU, and former senior editor for "American Theatre Magazine."

In This Corner will play the Old Globe through Feb. 10 with an official opening set for Jan. 10. Tickets go on sale to the general public beginning Dec. 9. Old Globe members may currently purchase tickets for the limited run.

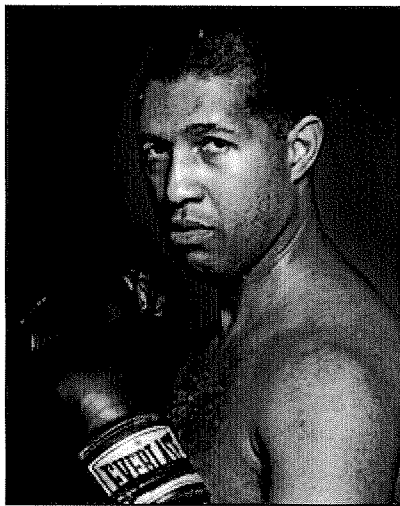
For tickets and further information about the Old Globe engagement, visit www.theoldglobe.org.

**Send questions and comments to the Webmaster
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***In This Corner* Makes World Premiere at Old Globe
Jan. 5**

By Adam Hetrick
05 Jan 2008



Steven Drukman's boxing drama *In This Corner* — about "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis — makes its world premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Jan. 5.

The Old Globe's Cassius Carter Stage has been transformed into a boxing ring for the staging of Drukman's work about famed African-American boxer Louis.

Tony nominee Ethan McSweeney (*Gore Vidal's The Best Man*), directs a cast comprising Dion Graham (Joe Louis), Katie Barrett (Nurse/FemaleReporter/Girl/Anny/Tutor/USO Girl), Rufus Collins (Max Schmeling), David Deblinger (Reporter/Jacobs), John Keabler (Boxer), T. Ryder Smith (Announcer/Hitler/Ref/Officer) and Al White (Blackburn/Pastor).



Dion Graham as Joe Louis and Rufus Collins as Max Schmeling
Craig Schwartz

"In 1938," according to *In This Corner* press notes, "there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American 'Brown Bomber' Joe Louis. World War II is about to change how Americans view the world

around them and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward."

The production team features Lee Savage (scenic design), Tracy Christensen (costume design), Tyler Micolesku (lighting design), and Lindsay Jones (sound design). In preparation for the production, cast members received boxing training from the Boxing Company of Point Loma, CA.

Steven Drukman's works include *Going Native*, *Another Fine Mess* (Pulitzer Prize finalist), *Flattery Will Get You*, *Snowmaiden*, *Collateral Damage*, *Fox Hollow* and *Youth in Asia*. He is an associate arts professor at NYU, and former senior editor for "American Theatre Magazine."

In This Corner will play the Old Globe through Feb. 10 with an official opening set for Jan. 10. For tickets to *In This Corner*, phone (619) 234-5623 or visit www.theoldglobe.org.

The Old Globe is located at 1363 Old Globe Way in San Diego, CA.

**Send questions and comments to the [Webmaster](#)
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BEST BETS

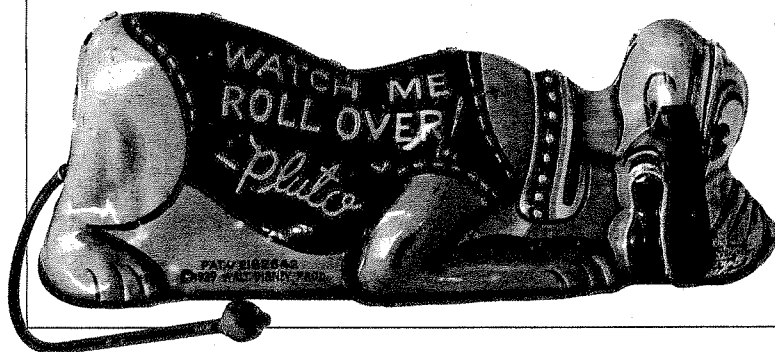
BY JULIA BEESON POLLORENO & PHYLLIS DeBLANCHE



HAROLD EUGENE EDGERTON

I for an Eye ^

Celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Museum of Photographic Art by viewing its collection through the perspective of the late John Szarkowski, whose book, *The Photographer's Eye*, influenced the way photographers take pictures and, ultimately, the way we look at photos. "The Photographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing the Permanent Collection" is on view through April 20. 619-238-7559; mopa.org.



Medieval Night, Mary Days

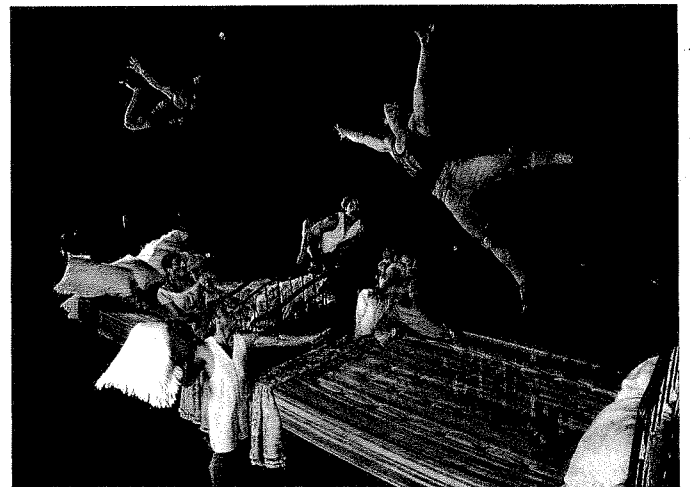
Composer Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* transports audiences to a spectacular fantasy world, as San Diego Opera opens its season in the Civic Theatre January 26 through February 3. Later in the month, Gaetano Donizetti's *Mary, Queen of Scots* reigns on stage, February 16-24. 619-533-7000; sdopera.com.

String Me Along, then Bring Me Home

Michele Lowe's *String of Pearls* loops the fate of a piece of jewelry through the dozens of lives it connects, as four actresses play 27 characters at North Coast Repertory Theatre in Solana Beach through February 10. Sisters are reunited after war-torn years in Barbara Lebow's multifaceted *A Shayna Maidel*, exploring family, battle scars and survival, February 20-March 23. 858-481-1055; northcoastrep.org.

Tent Time in Del Mar v

It's a show to die for: Cirque du Soleil raises its big top at the Del Mar Fairgrounds for *Corteo*, a clown's imagined funeral cortege, featuring the troupe's trademark amazing acrobatics and haunting music. The show goes on through February 17. 858-755-1161; cirquedusoleil.com.



© CIRQUE DU SOLEIL, INC.

< Museum Musings

During February, more than 30 museums around the county offer half-price admission in recognition of Museum Month, organized by the San Diego Museum Council. Pick up a pass (good for up to four people) at any San Diego County Macy's. For store locations and a list of participating museums, visit sandiegomuseumcouncil.org or call 619-276-0101.



Portal to Pompeii ^

Opening February 15 at the San Diego Natural History Museum, “A Day in Pompeii” features more than 250 artifacts unearthed from 30 feet of volcanic material in the once-thriving city of the ancient Roman Empire. Also included are casts of human bodies — victims of Mount Vesuvius in their final moments. 619-232-3821; sdnhm.org.

Show Me Your Beads >

Celebrate Mardi Gras in the Gaslamp Quarter this Fat Tuesday, February 5, from 6 p.m. to midnight. Festivities for the 21-and-older crowd include two parades down Fifth Avenue between E and K streets (at 7 and 10), live music on several stages, Cajun eats, frosty hurricanes and, of course, plenty of bead action. Entry cost is \$15 through February 4; \$20 on event day. 619-233-5227; gaslamp.org.

Under African Skies

Commemorate African-American History Month at Kuumba Fest, hosted by Urban Warriors and the San Diego Repertory Theatre at the Lyceum Theatre, February 23-26. Highlights include theatrical performances, an African marketplace, art exhibits, music, a health fair, educational workshops, dance competition, food samplings and spiritual celebrations. Don't miss the February 26 finale, a gospel celebration. 619-544-1000; sandiegorep.com.

∨ Naval Tale for a Navy Town

Gilbert and Sullivan made a big splash with *H.M.S. Pinafore*, or *The Lass that Loved a Sailor*, satirizing the Royal Navy, Parliament and love between the classes. Lyric Opera San Diego sets sail with the comic favorite February 8-24 in the Stephen & Mary Birch North Park Theatre. 619-231-5714; lyricoperasandiego.org.

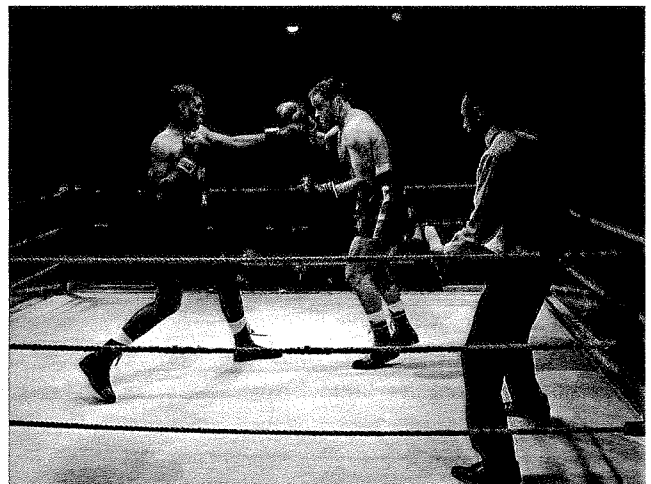
KEN JACQUES



BRETT SHOAF

Patients, Please ∨

The Old Globe rolls out two premieres, both through February 10, then adds another to round out the month. The West Coast debut of Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility* hits the main stage with the tale of a relocated psychologist attempting to heal. Steven Drukman's insightful *In This Corner* (pictured), making its world premiere, reunites German Max Schmeling and American Joe Louis decades after their famed bouts. The Cassius Carter Centre Stage hosts the fighters, who find themselves together in a psychiatric ward. Richard Greenberg's *The American Plan* then has its first West Coast appearance February 23 at the Carter. 619-234-5623; theoldglobe.org.



CRAIG SCHWARTZ



Thursday, January 03, 2008

editor@sddt.com

<http://www.sddt.com>

Source Code: 20080103tbi

Broadway San Diego presents 'Jesus Christ Superstar'

By KATHLEEN DOWLING

Thursday, January 3, 2008

Broadway San Diego presents "Jesus Christ Superstar," which opened Wednesday and will continue showing through Sunday at the San Diego Civic Theatre.

The Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber musical will feature songs including, "I Don't Know How to Love Him," "Hosanna" and "Superstar." For more information, call (619) 564-3000 or visit broadwaysd.com.

'In This Corner'

The Old Globe Theatre transforms its stage into a boxing arena for its newest show, 'In This Corner,' which opens Saturday. The story depicts the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis, boxing rivals who are reunited in a psychiatric ward.

At 6:30 p.m. Monday, The Old Globe will hold a seminar with actors, designers and directors to present ideas and insights about the production.

For more information, call (619) 234-5623 or visit theoldglobe.org.

Last week of Bodies exhibition

"Bodies: The Exhibition" is on display for one more week at University Towne Center. The exhibit will have extended hours until the end of its run on Jan. 13: 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, call 1-877-263-4375 or visit bodiestickets.com.

'The Blessing of a Broken Heart'

San Diego Reparatory Theatre presents the world premiere of "The Blessing of a Broken Heart," which opens Friday and will run until Jan. 20. The drama is a true story about a young mother who moves her family from Maryland to Israel and experiences tragedy. For more information, call (619) 544-1000 or visit sandiegorep.com.

'String of Pearls'

The North Coast Reparatory Theatre presents "A String of Pearls," about women who all come into contact with a certain strand of pearls. Four actresses play 27 characters in this tale of love, loss and humor for mature audiences. For more information, call (858) 481-1055 or visit northcoastrep.org.

Bridge to Terabithia

San Diego Junior Theatre opens "Bridge to Terabithia" Friday at Casa Del Prado Theatre in Balboa Park. The show, which is recommended for ages 8 and up, tells the story of Jesse and Leslie who create a fantasy kingdom called Terabithia. For more information, call (619) 239-8355 or visit juniortheatre.com.

Endangered species art exhibition

The Dr. William C. Herrick Community Health Care Library has opened its latest exhibition, which will feature Gloria Chadwick's oil, acrylic and chalk paintings of endangered animals. The exhibition is open to the public during regular library hours, which are from 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesdays, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Wednesdays-Fridays and 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays, through April 17. For more information, call (619) 825-5010 or visit herricklibrary.org.

DON'T MISS

For more listings, go to calendarlive.com; to submit a listing, calendarlive.com/submit.

Theater Openings

FRIDAY

El Verde Anthony Aguilari's serial stage play follows the adventures of mild-mannered Arturo Sanchez, a.k.a. the masked El Verde, who battles villains while trying to balance an ordinary home life. Casa 0101, 2009 E. 1st St., L.A. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; ends Feb. 2. \$10. (323) 263-7684.

The Odd Couple Reprise! Broadway's Best presents Martin Short and Jason Alexander in a staged reading of Neil Simon's comedy about mismatched roommates. Wadsworth Theatre, 11301 Wilshire Blvd., West L.A. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m. \$40-\$95. (213) 365-3500.

Victory Stephen Sachs directs the U.S. premiere of Athol Fugard's drama about the search for hope in the new South Africa. Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Ave., Hollywood. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; next Thu., 8 p.m.; ends March 9. \$25. Opening night, \$30. (323) 663-1525.

SATURDAY

Thrill Me: The Leopold and Loeb Story The newly formed Havok Theatre Company stages Stephen Doig's musical about 1920s teenage thrill killers Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb. Hudson Backstage Theatre, 6539 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 and 7 p.m.; ends March 2. \$34-\$38. (323) 960-4429.

MONDAY

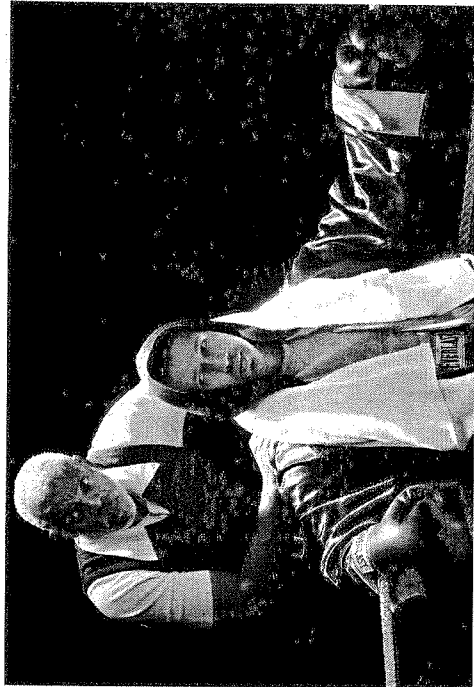
A Purple Cabaret: The "Reel" Songs of Hollywood Cast members from the national tour and Broadway productions of "The Color Purple" take part in this showcase of songs from "Footloose," "Dirty Dancing," "Beauty and the Beast," "Enchanted" and "Moulin Rouge." Inmate

(C.M.). South Coast Repertory, Jullianne Argiros Stage, 655 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa. Today-Fri., 7:45 p.m.; Sat.-Sun., 2 and 7:45 p.m.; ends Sun. \$28-\$62. (714) 708-5555.

Alice Sit-by-the-Fire J.M. Barrie's seldom-seen comedy receives a smart and finely nuanced revival from Pacific Resident Theatre. Heading a mostly stellar ensemble cast, Alley Mills and Betty Wigell play mother and daughter with an irreducible complexity that grows knottier but also more profound with each plot turn (D.N.). Pacific Resident Theatre, 703-707 Venice Blvd., Venice. Today-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; next Thu., 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 10. \$20-\$25. (310) 822-8392.

As Much as You Can Paul Oakley Stovall's smart, rapid-fire comedy about a gay black man bringing his Swedish lover to meet the family features Tony Award-winner Tonya Pinkins as the Bible-quoting matriarch and the divine J. Nicole Brooks as an out-loud lesbian (C.S.). Celebration Theatre, 7051-B Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. Today-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; ends Sun. \$34. (323) 212-4119.

Edge In his biographical solo show set on the final day of Sylvia Plath's tragically



CRAIG SCHWARTZ

"In This Corner" Al White and Dion Graham, as Joe Louis.

Torn and the late Geraldine Page) delivers an unfinching and scrappy portrayal, a vivid grave rubbing from a brilliant, vandalized life (F.K.F.). Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., West

L.A. Today-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; next Thu., 8 p.m.; ends March 2. \$25-\$30. (310) 477-2055.

In This Corner In telling the epic tale of Joe Louis' heroic rise and sputtering post-retirement fall, playwright Steven Drukman throws jab after jab of sociopolitical interpretation. But the drama never scores an emotional knockout and Louis remains little more than a heavily annotated Wikipedia entry. Still, the production, kinetically directed by Ethan McSweeney, keeps the intellectual bob-and-weave lively (C.M.). Old Globe, Casius Carter Centre Stage, 1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego. Today-Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 2 and 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 and 7 p.m.; Tue.-Wed., 7 p.m.; next Thu., 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 10. \$47-\$59. (619) 234-5623.

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Los Angeles Times

JAN 27 2008

Also
Recommended

Alice Sit-by-the-Fire J.M. Barrie's seldom seen comedy receives a smart and finely nuanced revival. Alley Mills and Betty Wigell play mother and daughter with an irreducible complexity that grows knottier but also more profound with each plot turn (D.N.). Pacific Resident

Theatre, 703-707 Venice Blvd., Venice. Today, next Sun., 3 p.m.; Thu.-Sat., 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 10. \$20-\$25. (310) 822-8392.

@Heart J-Powers' two-person epistolary play about a young couple who keep in touch via computer instant messages after the husband's deployment to the Middle East gets a fittingly straightforward and sincere treatment by director Paul Linke (F.K.F.). Ruskin Group Theatre, 3000 Airport Ave., Santa Monica. Today, next Sun., 2 p.m.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 10. \$20. (310) 397-3244.

The Bald Soprano A sharp and frequently hilarious revival of Eugene Ionesco's absurdist masterpiece features a performance by David E. Frank that nails the surrealist vibe (D.N.). City Garage, 1340 1/2 4th St. Alley, Santa Monica. Today, next Sun., 5:30 p.m.; Sat., 8 p.m.; ends next Sun. \$20. (310) 319-9939.

Big Baby Joe Keyes' scathingly funny comedy about a religiously fanatical mother and her mentally disturbed adult son whose pathological relationship is interrupted by the dominatrix next door shows how easily love can be distorted into something closely resembling torture. Matt Roth's staging keeps the vitriol on the boil, and Danielle Kennedy stands out as a deliciously clueless mom who administers lethal psychic blows along with casseroles and sugar cookies (F.K.F.). The Lounge Theatre, 6201 Santa Monica Blvd., L.A. Thu.-Sat., 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 9. \$20. (323) 960-5563.

Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson In this sardonically frolicsome, unabashedly sophomoric emo musical, America's seventh president is transformed into a moody hipster icon. Written and directed by Alex Timbers and featuring a tongue-in-cheek score by Michael Friedman, the work follows the revisionist account of Jackson's legacy, with special emphasis on the role "Old Hickory" played in plundering Native American lands. Though the production starts on a delightfully demented note, the adventurous concept is

ultimately more winning than the execution (C.M.). Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City. Today, next Sun., 1 and 6:30 p.m.; Tue.-Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 2 and 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 17. \$20-\$50. (213) 628-2772.

The Cut Mark Ravenhill's authoritarian allegory has its sights as trained on the present as on the not-so-distant future. Director Dave Barton and his fine actors give this stark U.S. premiere a dualistic edge, wry yet disturbing, that slices across the opaque aspects (D.C.N.). Empire Theater, 202 N. Broadway, Santa Ana. Thu.-Sat., 8 p.m.; next Sun., 2:30 p.m.; ends Feb. 9. \$20. (714) 547-4688.

Edge In his biographical solo show set on the final day of Sylvia Plath's tragically short life, Paul Alexander tries to scour clean any trace of victimhood from his suicidal subject while demonizing Plath's poet husband, Ted Hughes. Angelica Torn delivers an unflinching and scrappy portrayal, a vivid grave rubbing from a brilliant, vandalized life (F.K.F.). Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., West L.A. Today, 2 p.m.; Thu.-Sat., 8 p.m.; next Sun., 7 p.m.; ends March 2. \$25-\$30. (310) 477-2055.

Harm's Way Part two of Shem Bitterman's trilogy about the Iraq conflict, this study of a career Army prosecutor, his disturbed daughter and a private suspected of a war crime has obvious pertinence. Steve Zuckerman deploys his strong cast to engrossing effect (D.C.N.). Circus Theatricals Studio Theatre at the Hayworth, 2511 Wilshire Blvd., L.A. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; ends March 15. \$25. (323) 960-1054.

In This Corner In telling the epic tale of Joe Louis' heroic rise and sputtering post-retirement fall, Steven Drukman throws jab after jab of sociopolitical interpretation. Although the drama never scores an emotional knockout, the production keeps the intellectual bob-and-weave lively (C.M.). Old Globe, Cassius Carter Centre Stage, 1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego. Today, next Sun., 2 and 7 p.m.; Tue.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Thu.-Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 2 and 8 p.m.; ends Feb. 10. \$47-\$59. (619) 234-5623.

PLAYBILL

For contact information on these shows, please cross reference with accompanying directory. For more Playbill listings, go to utstreet.com.

THEATER/OPERA

CRITIC'S CHOICE

"The Daddy Machine" The children of a lesbian couple make a "daddy machine" and get a lot more daddies than they can handle. This charming world-premiere musical features slapstick humor broad enough for kids, wit to crack up adults, and songs that get viewers of all ages joining in sing-alongs. Closes Sunday. *Diversionsary Theatre*. (Janice Steinberg)

LONG RUNNING

"Triple Espresso" This highly-caffeinated comedy is about three guys, a coffee house and an utter lack of common sense. Through Feb. 17. *Horton Grand Theatre*.

"When There's a Will...There's a Wake!" Mystery Cafe Dinner Theater brings back the days of the old speakeasies with this gangster, game and dame-filled production. *Imperial House Restaurant*.

RUNNING

"Anton in Show Business" Go backstage and witness the fast-paced and remorseless world of theatre. Closes March 2. 6th @ Penn Theatre.

"Guys and Dolls" San Diego Musical Theatre presents this play about a missionary who is wooed by a gambler during a bet. Opens tomorrow; closes Feb. 3. *East County Performing Arts Center*.

"In This Corner" Besides his archrival Max Schmeling (and an even more potent foe, racism), the legendary boxer Joe Louis takes on a regular pa-looka-palooza of lesser fighters in this Globe-commissioned world premiere. The play's fight card is a little mixed, too - Steven Drukman's colorful dialogue sometimes achieves a pug's poetry, but it may leave you punch-drunk on purple prose (and alliteration). Great staging and a versatile cast keep this clever but wobbly-kneed venture standing. Closes Feb. 10. *The Old Globe*. (James Hebert)

"Ordinary People" A son's accidental death inflicts emotional damage upon the remaining family members. Closes Feb. 9. *OnStage Playhouse*.

"Pericles" UCSD Theatre & Dance presents this play about Prince Pericles, who seeks to escape from answering a dangerous riddle. Opens tomorrow; closes Feb. 2. *Mandell Weiss Forum Studio*.



RIGHT-HAND MAN Max Schmeling (Rufus Collins, right) lands some serious glove on Joe Louis (Dion Graham) in the Old Globe Theatre's "In This Corner." The play riffs on the rivalry between the two boxers, who fought two famous bouts in the 1930s but eventually became friends. *Crissy Pascual / Union-Tribune*

"The Pillowman" Ion Theatre presents a story about a writer who is interrogated over the content of his short stories, which bear similarities to a series of recent murders. Closes Feb. 16. *The Lab at the Academy of Performing Arts*.

San Diego Opera: "Tannhauser" Tannhauser flees the Goddess of Love and returns to earthly life. Opens Saturday; closes Feb. 3. *Civic Theatre*.

"Sea of Tranquility" Howard Korder's story of New Englanders struggling to reinvent themselves in Santa Fe has wit and bite but, as presented at the Globe, a lack of zest. Script and staging don't always feel in the same emotional gear, although when things are in sync the play can sing (with humor in a decidedly minor key). Closes Feb. 10. *The Old Globe*. (James Hebert)

"String of Pearls" A pearl necklace touches the lives of a series of women. While Michele Lowe's script makes some missteps, this is a tour de force of acting, with four actresses taking 27 roles. Closes Feb. 10. *North Coast Repertory Theatre*. (Janice Steinberg)

"Sweet Charity" Charity Hope Valentine, an eternal optimist, Dance Hall hostess and unlucky romantic, searches for true love. Closes Feb. 17. *Coronado Playhouse*.

BIGOTRY FUELS DRAMA ON SAN DIEGO STAGES

OPERA SEASON KICKS OFF WITH WAGNER

BY JEFF BRITTON

In This Corner

Gay folks are all too familiar with the sting of discrimination, whether subtle or blatant. Perhaps that's why we often find ourselves rooting for the underdog when prejudice rears its ugly head.

Two dramas now playing on San Diego stages address the consequences of bigotry from very different angles, one an historical snapshot of race prejudice and the other a recent tragedy attributed to nationality and religion.

The Old Globe Theatre's intimate Cassius Carter Center Stage has *In This Corner*, a play about the rivalry between boxers Joe Louis, "the brown bomber," and German wunderkind Max Schmeling.

Schmeling carried the burden of representing Hitler and the dictator's firm convictions that the Aryan race was physically and mentally superior to any other. Louis, though touted as

light-skinned, clean, Bible-reading and well-mannered, was really an enigma whose real feelings were kept carefully tucked away from public view. For America, he symbolized a nation who would have an African American win the world heavyweight title for them, yet was still relegated to a segregated unit when he joined the Army. Schmeling symbolized Hitler while Louis was portrayed as an emblem of democracy, 20 years before the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Playwright Steven Drukman opens his play in 1970 when the two retired boxers meet in a most unlikely place: a psychiatric ward. The action travels back in time to certain pivotal moments, none more notable than the two matches in 1936 and 1938. The first match saw Schmeling the winner after twelve grueling rounds in the ring and marking the first time anyone knocked out Louis. It was an eerie

prelude to Hitler's hosting of the Olympics that year, where he turned his back disdainfully on another African American athlete, Jesse Owens.

The contrast and the public perception is evident in the British announcer's voice of the 1936 fight that accompanied the TV broadcast. Schmeling was described as a huge underdog with a private persona of politeness, refined and ever the gentleman. Louis was described as delivering "low blows" to his opponent, despite no penalties from the referee, and after an admirable endurance was dismissed as "in trouble on the ropes." The racism is barely concealed.

But two years later, Louis regained his title before a boisterous crowd who braved the rain at Yankee Stadium in New York. Billed as "the fight of the century," Hitler's boy was TKO'd in the first round. It was also the first first-round knockout in a world championship. Louis continued setting records for number of title defenses and longevity as a world champion that still stand. In 27 fights he knocked out 23 opponents.

Nonetheless, the two boxers lived in totally different worlds. Schmeling had a Coca-Cola franchise in Germany and sat on its board of directors. Yet in the democratic United States, Coke wouldn't sponsor Louis because he was black. *In This Corner* traffics in many ironies like this. Adding to the authenticity, the play is staged in a boxing ring with the audience on all sides, one of the Carter Stage's advantages. It also marks the last play in this venue as construction is scheduled to begin soon to replace it with a larger facility.

In This Corner is not the first play about boxing. Jack Johnson was the first black heavyweight champion of the world, who was tried and convicted for violation of the Mann Act in a sham trial that smacked of racism. He was the subject of the Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Great White Hope*, which became a film starring James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander.

If You Go — Performances now through February 10. Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego. 619.23.GLOBE or theoldglobe.org.

The Blessing of a Broken Heart

It's not easy to bare one's soul in a time of personal anguish and put it on a stage for all to see. The Greeks, who invented theater, started



(Left) Al White as "Blackburn" and Dion Graham as "Joe Louis" in The Old Globe's world-premiere production of *In This Corner* by Steven Drukman, directed by Ethan McSweeney, playing in the Cassius Carter Centre Stage January 5–February 10. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

COMMENTARY

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'In This Corner' a Memory

By Neil Morgan

Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2008 | Like others still driven by youthful aspirations, I have assured myself that four bound volumes of diaries that I penned from grade school through college in North Carolina -- and through the agonies of adolescence and of peace and war -- may some day serve some frantic historian seeking a vision of the Southern past.

That hope is rekindled by the Old Globe Theatre as the Cassius Carter Stage becomes a nighttime boxing ring for the world premiere of Steven Drukman's play, "In This Corner."

Based on the fabled 1930s bouts between the American champion Joe Louis and the German Max Schmeling, the play led me to search out a smooth black diary with the word RECORD imprinted in gold leaf, a wistful souvenir of Depression-era hopes.

As a boy, I must have felt obliged to provide coming generations my views of those frightening years. (One result is my lifelong respect for a nickel.) The diary entries, which I recognize now as amiable but less than notable, are scrawled in blue ink with my first fountain pen, a mottled red Schaeffer.

It was a Christmas gift from my father, a scholarly minister who kept diaries for a record-breaking 70 years, and it carried his suggestion that it was time I begin preparing myself for adulthood.

In a Chicago ring in 1937, the champion Joe Louis, about to become known as the Brown Bomber, had knocked out James Braddock to become world heavyweight champion, which he remained until he retired as champion in 1949. That fight went eight rounds, according to my rather breathless diary entry and other news sources. (Braddock looked remarkably like the film actor Russell Crowe, who played the role of "Cinderella Man.")

The intriguing Old Globe play focuses on the 1938 bout between Louis and the German boxer Max Schmeling. With Hitler on the march, the ethnics of the match between the American black and the German drew world attention.

In victory, Louis was no longer a black prizefighter but an American idol. Babies were being named Joe Louis, or even Josephine.

Coming as Americans struggled to recover from a long and frightening Depression, that night's fight became a lasting totem for its generation. My father, a peace-loving man who frowned on prizefighting, followed the match raptly that evening as we sat beside our family's first radio, an Atwater Kent tabletop.

Snoozing at our feet was the fearless stray Beagle that had been sniffing around our house; he became my first dog. We honored him with the name of Joe Louis, and he lived and moved with us for 11 years, gleefully guarding whatever parsonage the family was then occupying.

"In This Corner" plays until Feb. 10. Neil Morgan is a member of the board of directors of [voiceofsandiego.org](http://www.voiceofsandiego.org).

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Neil Morgan

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SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
SD Union Tribune

JAN 24 2008

PLAYBILL

For contact information on these shows, please cross reference with accompanying directory. For more Playbill listings, go to utstreet.com.



RIGHT-HAND MAN Max Schmeling (Rufus Collins, right) lands some serious glove on Joe Louis (Dion Graham) in the Old Globe Theatre's "In This Corner." The play riffs on the rivalry between the two boxers, who fought two famous bouts in the 1930s but eventually became friends.
Crissy Pascual / Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Living In Style

JAN - - 2008

In This Corner
1/5 to 2/10 • Cassius Carter Center
Stage • 619-23GLOBE

In This Corner
1/5 to 2/10

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Navy Dispatch

JAN - 3 2008

Old Globe presents world-premier of 'In This Corner'

Old Globe CEO/Executive Producer Lou Spisto and Co-Artistic Directors Jerry Patch and Darko Tresnjak are pleased to announce the world-premiere production of *In This Corner*, by Steven Drukman, directed by Ethan McSweeney (A Body

of Water), to run in the Cassius Carter Centre Stage Jan. 5 - Feb. 10. The Globe commissioned this exciting new play to be featured in the Carter's unique arena space, which will be transformed into a boxing ring setting.

In 1938, there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis. World War II is about to change how Americans view the world around them and this fight el-

evated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward.

The Cassius Carter Centre Stage becomes the ultimate arena and every seat is ringside

as the decisive battle begins - for honor, country, and for self-respect.

The cast of *In This Corner* includes Katie Barrett as Nurse/Female Reporter/Girl/Anny/Tutor/USO Girl, Rufus Collins

as "Max Schmeling," David Deblinger as "Reporter/Jacobs," Dion Graham as "Joe Louis," John Keabler as "Boxer," T. Ryder Smith (Lincolnesque) as "Announcer/Hitler/Ref/Officer" and Al White (Two Trains Running) as "Blackburn/Pastor."

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Gay & Lesbian Times

JAN - 3 2008

Sunday, Jan. 6

In This Corner In 1938, there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis. World War II was about to change how Americans viewed the world and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward. The Cassius Carter Centre Stage becomes the ultimate arena, and every seat is ringside as the decisive battle begins - for honor, country, and for self-respect in the Old Globe Theater's world premiere of *In This Corner*. Tickets for the show, which runs through Feb. 10, range from \$42-\$54. Showtimes vary. The Old Globe Theater is located at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. www.oldglobe.org

JAN - - 2008

▶MUST DO◀

1 Through January 8, the Maritime Museum of San Diego is featuring some of the most notorious pirates in history who prowled the world's largest ocean. The **Pirates of the Pacific** exhibit will satisfy people's timeless fascination and insatiable curiosity about these outlaws of the ocean with a marvelous collection of artifacts, pictures and hands-on exhibits. \$8-\$12. www.sdmaritime.org.

2 Feeling feisty? In 1938, there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis. World War II was about to change how Americans viewed the world around them, and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. The Old Globe presents the world premiere of **In This Corner** from January 4 to February 10 at the Cassius Carter Centre Stage. www.theoldglobe.com

3 From January 11 to February 3, the Del Mar Fairgrounds will host **Corteo-Cirque Du Soleil**. Corteo, which means "a train of attendants" in Italian, is a festive parade imagined by a clown. The show brings together the passion of the actor with the grace and power of the acrobat to plunge the audience into a theatrical world of fun, comedy and spontaneity situated in a mysterious space between heaven and earth. Tickets range from \$50 to \$205, with discounts for students, seniors and children. www.cirquedusoleil.com

4 Head to La Jolla for the fourth Annual **Motor Car Classic at the Cove** on January 13. This event, free to the public, features exotic and classic vehicles, as well as a tribute to pre-1916 horseless carriages. \$75 registration fee for competitors. The judged show gives awards in 10 categories, including People's Choice and Excellence in Design. All proceeds benefit the Monarch School and the Promote La Jolla Foundation. Scripps Park, 1100 Coast Blvd. www.lajollabythesea.com

5 Esteemed pianist and composer Ramsey Lewis is set to captivate audiences in the second concert of the **La Jolla Music Society's Jazz Series**. The performance is Saturday, January 26, at 8 p.m. at the Stephen & Mary Birch North Park Theatre. Tickets may be purchased by visiting the La Jolla Music Society website at www.lajollamusicociety.org

6 Experience cuisine that delights the palate and defines the art of dining during **San Diego Restaurant Week**. More than 130 of the city's best restaurants are participating. Enjoy a three-course dinner for either \$30 or \$40 per person, depending upon the restaurant. January 27 to February 1. www.sandiegorestaurantweek.com -EMILY WURGLER

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
North County Times
Escondido

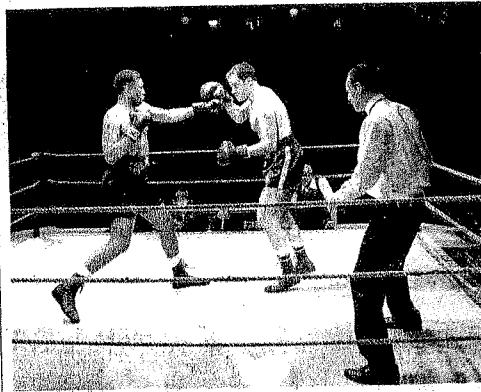
JAN 28 2008

**Students attend
Old Globe play**

NORTH COUNTY — Students from Twin Oaks High School in San Marcos and the Vista Academy of Visual and Performing Arts in Vista will be among the students throughout San Diego County chosen to take part in a free matinee program offered by the Old Globe Theater in San Diego.

They will see the Globe-commissioned play, "In this Corner" by Steven Drukman, directed by Ethan McSweeney. Student performance dates are Jan. 23 and 30, and Feb. 6.

The free matinee program, which began in 2006, is part of the Old Globe's educational outreach program.



CRAIG SCHWARTZ/Old Globe

EPIC MATCH: Joe Louis (Dion Graham), left, takes on German Max Schmeling (Rufus Collins) in "In This Corner."

THEATER REVIEW

'Corner's' hits outscore misses

The dramatic arc of Joe Louis' tumultuous life unfolds — where else? — in the ring.

By CHARLES McNULTY
Times Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO — Boxing has long served as a metaphor for theater. Bertolt Brecht, the grand innovator of 20th century political drama, envisioned spectators sitting around the stage puffing on cigars as they watched characters attempting to knock each other out with contrasting viewpoints.

"In This Corner" — Steven Drukman's play about the great heavyweight champion Joe Louis, premiering here at the Old Globe — follows Brecht's lead and literally transforms the stage into a boxing ring. The result is a swinging if not entirely walloping way to start the theater's new regime, led by CEO/Executive Producer Louis G. Spisto, now that Jack O'Brien has assumed the title of artistic director emeritus.

In telling the epic tale of Louis' heroic rise and sputtering post-retirement fall, the playwright throws jab after jab of sociopolitical interpretation. We learn about Louis' origins in the red clay mountains of Alabama, the racial obstacles he encountered throughout his career even after his victories transformed him into a rousing national symbol, and his middle-aged descent into drugs, debt and mental illness.

But the drama, which shifts back and forth in a span that runs from 1930 to 1970, never scores an emotional knockout. And unfortunately, Louis the man remains little more than a heavily annotated Wikipedia entry.

Still, the production, kinetically directed by Ethan McSweeney, keeps the intellectual bob-and-weave lively. A prizefight atmosphere dominates even when the only thing happening is an expository swirl of reporters, managers, announcers and trainers.

Drukman may not have anything revelatory to say, but he treats the slangy speech of each character as though it were part of a hip-hop poetry slam. This can grow tedious at times. But McSweeney ingeniously converts the old-school word-spinning into modern-day the-

A ring war

At the center of the story are the bouts between Louis (Dion Graham) and his formidable German opponent, Max Schmeling (Rufus Collins), who had the misfortune of being a star athlete during the Nazi era. The Third Reich had a vested interest in Schmeling's success. Aryan superiority was on the line. Drukman spells the point out by having Hitler (T. Ryder Smith, in one of his many roles) make a cameo in which he menacingly advises Schmeling to be a good son of the Fatherland.

Of course, Louis understood as well as anyone the crushing weight of race. Nicknamed "the Brown Bomber," he was always bumping up against bigotry and its burdensome reverse — a desire to see him as a transcendent example.

The play introduces Louis as a shy young man with a bad stammer who wants to please his mother and lead a peaceful life as a musician. A team of boxing king-makers, however, decides he's the next champ.

Before they even lay eyes on his hulking frame, the members of this group are determined to manufacture a new pugilist prince. And why not, since they have all the bases covered? There's a sportswriter to supply the buzzwords and hype, an announcer to rev up the crowds and a trainer to teach all the necessary moves. The only thing missing is a

"great villain to come along and oppose him," and the Nazis take care of that by allowing Schmeling to fight abroad.

Though reluctant at first, Louis turns out to be easy to mold. He's repeatedly warned by his no-nonsense trainer, Blackburn (a solid Al White), to follow a number of rules. He shouldn't speak in public, he shouldn't have his picture taken with a white woman, he should never go into a nightclub alone, and he should never gloat over a fallen white opponent if he wants whites to keep attending his fights. These were mistakes that Louis' openly contemptuous predecessor Jack Johnson made, and Blackburn vows that "the last smile is gonna be ours."

Most important, he reminds Louis of his ABC mantra: "Always Be Clean." This becomes increasingly hard as the years go by and the boxer's dwindling celebrity proves a weak anaesthetic for the pain of a life whose

Linked by history

Not surprisingly, the man who understands Louis' plight best isn't his psychiatrist but Schmeling, who has flourished as a businessman in Hamburg after the war. Though their fates diverge widely, their histories intersect in crucial ways that extend beyond laying each other flat.

Graham and Collins are effective as the main combatants, but their roles have all the internal specificity of animated figures. Instead of nuance, Drukman bestows on them Significant Cultural Meaning, which would be fine if it were more organically earned.

From the beginning, Graham emphasizes the heavy tread of Louis' embattled spirit. There's not much development in the characterization as written, and the performance mostly highlights the various notes of sadness. Still, the poignancy is genuine if a little static.

Collins, whose German accent seems as ostentatious as the fur coat he wears when he sweeps into Louis' psych ward as an older man, certainly makes a vivid stand-in for Schmeling. But like Graham, all he can do is zero in on the softer aspects of his broadly conceived part.

The supporting cast has zestier material to work with. In darting from character to character, Smith, David Deblinger and especially Katie Barrett are allowed to gallop away with most of the fun, turning "shinola into Champagne," to borrow period vernacular from one of the reporters in the play.

The production design, dominated by Lee Savage's boxing ring set, is crackling good across the board. Tyler Micolleau's lighting helps create the excitement of a much-anticipated brawl, as does Lindsey Jones' sound design, which cleverly layers radio play-by-play with booming microphone commentary.

McSweeney's direction finds the energetic soul of Drukman's drama, which may not be one for the ages but definitely provides a brisk theatrical workout for actors and audience alike.

charles.mcNulty@latimes.com

'In This Corner'

Where: Cassius Carter Centre Stage, the Old Globe, Balboa Park, San Diego

When: 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays

Ends: Feb. 10

Price: \$42 to \$59

Contact: (619) 234-5623 or www.theoldglobe.org

Running time: 2 hours