

Ken Ludwig's *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*: A Dramaturg's Note

Eighty years before you are sitting down to watch Sock & Buskin Theatre Company's production of *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*, by Ken Ludwig, World War II was in the process of ending. Nazi Germany had already surrendered unconditionally on 8 May 1945. And on Aug. 6 and 9 of that same year, the US would drop atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leading to Japan's surrender on Aug. 15. Japan's surrender marked the end of the bloodiest military conflict in human history.

Many of us know the major events of WWII—the invasion of Poland, Pearl Harbor, D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and, of course, the Holocaust. But what histories of the war miss when they focus exclusively on major events is the personal experiences of the individuals involved, both serving in the military and on the home fronts of various nations. Ken Ludwig's epistolary play brings us a sense of some of those experiences. As Jack Ludwig and Louise Rabiner write back and forth, they express their hopes, their fears, their dreams, and their deep desire to survive the war and together live the American Dream. These letters are especially poignant when performed aloud, because the living voices and bodies of the actors bring the unique personal experiences of the characters to the stage. We get to witness their hopes, their joys, their fears embodied, and that embodiment strengthens the emotional experience.

Much of this play takes place during 1942-43. These were not good years for the Allies, including the US. The Japanese controlled much of the Pacific, and the Nazis dominated Europe and North Africa. The Allies suffered a number of serious setbacks during these years. And while the American public was firmly behind the war effort following the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, people were also aware that the war was not going favorably. Jack and Louise's letters show these concerns. The letters also reflect the transition to greater optimism as the war moved further into 1944, especially after the D-Day invasion—in which Jack participates—helped Allied troops liberate France and Belgium. But, again, what makes this play such a beautiful reflection on one of the darkest periods in human history is the individual stories of two people hoping against hope for a brighter, freer future.