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PICTURE: JO ZUROWSKA
LIVING DOLLS: Jessica Sedlar, left, with fellow Ruby Dolls Jenny Grove, Tara Sidall and Susanna Fiore

up to tell story of to his new life

with her family before arriving in Britain when she was seven and living in Maidenhead, Berkshire.

After reading English and drama at Bristol University, she enrolled at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and worked as an actress for seven years, mainly in classical theatre.

"The phone became a bit quiet around three years ago," Jess recalled.

So she formed the Ruby Dolls with fellow LAMDA graduates Susanna Fiore, Jenny Grove and Tara Siddall.

Jess said: "We all wanted to explore cabaret and thought this would be a really interesting way to do it. And we decided to turn to our own family histories and traced our ancestors from the past 100 years across Belarus, Italy, Switzerland and Britain.

In January last year they asked director Laura Casey and musical director Ben Cox to join their team.

They started to put their stories together and *Rubies in the Attic* was born.

Jess performs a Yiddish fold song in the piece, and tells her grandfather's story with a puppet and a paper model of late 19th century London.

The show previewed at the Riverside Studios in London this week.

Jess, who lives in south London, explained: "We use close harmony singing, puppetry, dance, physical theatre and original text to share the triumphs and struggles of the ancestors we have.

"My great-great grandfather Chaim's story touched me. He had planned to go to Cape Town, but the ship he got on docked in England and he ended up in the East End.

"He was terribly exploited and worked as a tailor for terrible wages. I am sure it is a very common story for immigrants who arrived in Britain at that time.

"I am not religious and I never will be, but by exploring my great-grandfather's story and doing the show, I am now more in touch with what it means to be Jewish.

"There is a particular humour and warmth and I know about the sufferings that have gone before me.

"It is not just about our family stories though, we don't want to come across as indulgent.

"We hope that people who see the show will stop and think about researching their family's past, too."

www.therubydolls.com

Outstanding Jewish stars

LARRY DAVID, Mayim Bialik and Lena Dunham are among the Jewish performers nominated for Primetime Emmy Awards, to be handed out on Sunday, September 23.

Dunham is nominated for outstanding lead actress in a comedy series for her role as Hannah Horvath in *Girls*.

The show, nominated for outstanding comedy series, is inspired by Dunham's experiences as a Jewish young woman in New York City.

David is nominated as outstanding lead actor in a comedy series for his role in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. The show is nominated for outstanding comedy series.

Bialik is up for outstanding supporting actress for her role as Amy Farrah Fowler in *Big Bang Theory*, which was also nominated for outstanding comedy series.

Max Greenfield is nominated for outstanding supporting actor in a comedy series for his role as Schmidt in *New Girl*.

And *Homeland*, based on the Israeli series Hatufim, has also been nominated for outstanding drama series. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is up for outstanding variety series.

Alex uses own experiences for archaeological thriller

BY ALEX ZATMAN

OXFORD-born Dr Alex Mitchell has used his experiences in archaeology to help him pen the novel *The 13th Tablet* (Haus, £8.99).

The specialist in Greek archaeology is the son of a father from the east end of London and a Sephardi mother, and he grew up in Brussels, Belgium.

His work has led to him sifting through the rivers where Greek gods are supposed to have bathed and he spent months excavating ground that few would be interested in.

But the idea for his novel came as an epiphany during a stroll in a cemetery with his brother.

Alex is aware of the "creative mix" that he has gathered from his family's heritage.

"I was brought up in Belgium as a child and was involved to an extent in the Jewish community in Brussels," he recalled.

"Also I had a connection to Strasbourg, France, where my mother's family had moved to.

"But at Oxford, I was so engrossed in my doctorate, I had very little time to be involved in the Jewish community.

"I had friends with whom I did Shabbat, but otherwise life was on hold."

A specialist in Greek archaeology, Alex's doctorate focused on the origins of visual humour.

"It was an excuse to enter the psyche of a nation and a people," he explained. "You learn more from a person if they crack a joke.

"If I ask you to tell me about current affairs, I will get a certain discourse. If I ask you to tell me jokes about it, I will be analysing your jokes and the underlying issues.

"Humour is the deforming, mirrored vision of what society really is.

"It enabled me to unravel many Greek histories and attain a little more truth



EPIPHANY: Alex Mitchell

about that society which were until know regulated."

Modern society holds it that the Ancient Greeks were the creators of democracy, due process and human rights.

But there was also a more playful side, claims the respected academic.

Alex, 38, said: "They made fun of everything, there was no limit. The freedom of expression was grand.

"They had comedies, which are still used today, such as by Aristophanes."

A seminal moment in Alex's career came in northern Greece, at Mount Olympus.

It is an area steeped in history. Greek mythology regards it as the home of the 12 Olympian gods of the ancient world.

He said: "It was a magical experience to work there for couple of years.

"We woke up early each morning for a cold shower. The excavation would begin at 4.30am because of the temperature, but

you'd finish at 12pm and sleep for a couple of hours.

"You feel like you're climbing on the weight of history. It's awe-inspiring."

The father-of-one decided to look at a new direction following a walk in London's Brompton cemetery with his brother.

"He is a businessman and was always very interested in the many stories I had to tell him about academia," Alex explained.

"I decided to build on my academic background, share my specialist knowledge with non-specialists, just as I had with him. The same evening I started writing."

His debut novel *The 13th Tablet* follows Mina Osman, an American archaeologist of Iraqi descent, as she attempts to protect Iraq's antiquities at the height of the recent war.

Looters are plundering all before them as lawlessness grows and the country suffers daily suicide bombings.

Set in 2004, Mina heads to Iraq's University of Mosul. While reprimanding one of her students for conspiring with the looters, a cuneiform tablet, dating back 3,000 years, is handed over for restitution.

The tablet holds a remarkable secret about the deluge described in the Gilgamesh epic.

It is not long before Mina and former US Army major Jack are on a treacherous journey to Jerusalem.

Alex explained: "I hope I would never have to be in her position. She is a typical second generation immigrant who is lost with no identity to speak of.

"Her parents were Iraqi, moved to New York, and wanted to be more American than the Americans.

"They didn't speak Arabic to her, but she still had a longing for Iraq.

"When all the plundering happens she drops everything and goes there."

The 13th Tablet is the first instalment in a trilogy. Alex has already begun working on the next part, set in India.

Jo completes her father's book of namedropping

BY JOHN FISHER

CECIL Korer's television credits included *It's a Knockout*, *The Good Old Days*, *Jeux Sans Frontiers*, *Ask the Family* and *Top of the Pops*.

And when, in 1981, Sir Jeremy Isaacs offered him the job of programme buyer on the soon to be launched Channel Four, Cecil said he preferred to be in light entertainment.

So Isaacs suggested he did both and Korer accepted.

Cecil died aged 86 in September 2011, just before finishing the final chapter of his book of anecdotes *Namedrops Keep Falling From My Head*.

Now his daughter Jo has picked up where her father left off and, with additional material and vintage photographs, is due to have the book about her father's



NAME DROPPING: Jo Korer, left, hears memories of Cecil from former Proscenium Players Rosalyn Silvertown and Cecil's wife Jean Korer, right

life in TV and theatre published later this year.

Costume designer and supervisor Jo has recently finished working on the feature film *Therese Raquin* based on the novel by Emile Zola and starring Jessica Lange and Elizabeth Olsen.

She was in Leeds this week to glean further information from a handful of Cecil's friends who knew him when he co-founded Leeds drama group The Proscenium Players in 1948.

"The idea for the book came in 2008 when I suggested to dad he write his autobiography," Jo said.

"Who'd want to read about me?" he asked. 'Well, I certainly would', I replied, 'and so would your grandchildren'."

Cecil said he would rather pen a book of personal anecdotes.

"Dad was a brilliant raconteur and knew so many

big names in showbusiness," Jo added.

"He had an amazing catalogue of wonderful stories to tell, so he started the book, slowly at first and then with gentle prodding from me added more as time went by."

Jo, 53, wanted to have the book published by his birthday on October 17 last year. Sadly Cecil was never to see the book in published form because he died just a few days after Jo had finished editing.

As C4's first commissioning editor for light entertainment Cecil helped import the then unknown American programme *Cheers*, the pilot of which had been seen by both ITV and BBC.

It went on to become one of the channel's best loved shows.

He also introduced game show *Countdown*, where he

gave his name to the random number generator 'Cec', apparently an acronym for Countdown's Electronic Calculator.

Stockport-born Cecil, the son of a Russian immigrant tailor, was six when the family moved to Leeds.

During the Second World War, he served in the RAF as a trainee pilot and flight engineer.

Cecil became a key member of The Proscenium Players. He appeared in the group's first production of *The Little Foxes* at the Jubilee Hall.

Rosalyn Silvertown, who is one of a handful of remaining founder members said Cecil was one of the most humorous actors in the group.

"He only had to appear on stage and the audience fell about laughing.

He was marvellous in revue and comedy and strong on pathos as well; some of his performances could tug at the heartstrings. He had terrific stagecraft.

"Together with the late Cyril Livingstone we used to go around as a threesome and with their wit and joie de vivre, there was never a dull moment."

As Jo puts the finishing touches to the book, which has an introduction by Michael Parkinson, she hopes to get the book published in time for her father's birthday.

"I want to turn the anniversary into a celebration of his life, so there'll be lots of family there with friends, champagne and laughter."



ANECDOTES: Cecil Korer in a scene from *The Proscenium Players* production of *The Dybbuk* in 1950