***A SHAYNA MAIDEL***

By BARBARA LEBOW

The setting of the play is the stylish Manhattan apartment of Rose Weiss, the time 1946.

Although born in Poland, Rose, now in her 20’s, came to the United States with her father,

Mordechai, at the age of 4. She is now completely “Amercianized”. The plan had been for Rose’s mother and older sister Lusia to come with them. However, shortly before departure, Lusia fell ill with scarlet fever, the mother stayed behind to care for her, and eventually the rise of the Nazis cut off their escape. Their ordeal in the concentration camps, which only Lusia survived, has brought a burden of guilt to the aging Mordechai. He has deeply mixed feelings as he awaits Lusia’s arrival, who has, at last, found her way to America. With her halting English and Old World ways, Lusia is a striking contrast to Rose, who is somewhat embarrassed by her rediscovered sister’s presence, and fearful that it will threaten her own hard won independence. Distraught, and concerned that she may never be reunited with her young husband, Lusia embraces a series of memories and fantasies which recreate the real joys and horrors of her life before the war. When Mordechai gives Rose a letter from her mother—a letter left many years earlier with a non-Jewish Polish friend—a “proof” of family is somehow restored. Old barriers and griefs give way to a renewed sense of hope and mutual dependence, and the conviction that a better future may yet arise from the bitter ashes of the troubled past.

**MAMA (MRS. WEISS):** (Mid 30’s; Again in her late 40’s) We first briefly meet Mama in a memory scene of Chernov, Poland, 1932. Several lines allow us to quickly observe that she was a giving, caring, loving mother. Hanna remarks to Lusia, “I love your mother. Only I wish she wasn’t so sad. Even when she’s joking, like now, I can see she’s sad underneath.” Lusia replies, “She misses my sister, and Papa, I think. But mostly my sister.” Mama does indeed live for family, especially for her children. Mama is a fatalist, believing all that happens to her family is “God’s will”. In her words, she is “not a learned person”. She is, however, capable of great love and great sacrifice. Mama later appears in the present (1946) as a fantasy in Lusia’s imagination. She now looks late 40’s, the age she would have been had she not died at Nazi hands. In a powerful scene, we learn she had a chance to escape to safety, but would not leave her daughter and granddaughter. She maintains her beliefs, telling Lusia “If God wanted us to be in America, you would never have caught scarlet fever. Your father would not have had such business troubles.”