

Ines shows up shortcoming in capitalism

By
Kenny Mathieson

INES Warth was born and brought up in Croatia in the days when it was part of the old Communist Yugoslavia under General Tito. She now lives in California, the very epitome of western capitalism, and the stock assumption might be that the actress counts her blessings in the bosom of

freedom and wealth. Not a bit of it. As the provocative title of her all-singing, all-dancing solo show "I Miss Communism" proclaims, Ines can see both the benefits of her old way of life and the limitations of her new one, as well as vice-versa.

The play, which is based on her own experiences and those of previous generations of her family, takes a darker turn with her return to

Croatia during the war which followed the break-up of the familiar old Yugoslavia of her childhood, an infinitely worse time than either of the polar alternatives she had already experienced.

Ines's first taste of the west came in London rather than the USA.

As a teenager she travelled to the city frequently from the age of 13, and moved there after finishing high school in Croatia. She began her acting

career with Compass Theatre in London, where her classic roles included Nora in Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and Vanya in Chekov's "The Cherry Orchard".

She moved to California to attend the University of California's School of Theatre, Film & Television, where she graduated before joining the award-winning Zoo District theatre company. It was while working with the company that the

seeds of "I Miss Communism" were sown.

"It started in a workshop I was involved in through the company," she explained. "They had arranged for Paula Killen, who is a pretty famous solo performer from Chicago, to come and work with us. There were five of us who signed up for the workshop, and the idea was that we would each write a piece that we then workshopped with Paula.

"That went on for three or four months, and we came up with a 15-minute piece each — actually, mine was a little bit longer, maybe 20 minutes. All five of us performed them in front of an audience of invited friends and so on in someone's house, and people just loved what we did.

"They were saying you have to keep going with this. My agent and my

manager were encouraging me to develop the show further at that point, and I started to do that."

Initially, Ines continued to meet up with two of the workshop participants, trying out ideas on each other to see what would work for their respective projects. She continued writing for a year, and reached something of an impasse which was resolved when she asked a co-writer, Mark Soper, to work with her on the project.

"By that stage, I had so much material that I didn't really know what to do with it," she said. "At that point Mark came on board. He is a very experienced dramatist and he wanted to help me out because he really liked the material, and he is also very oriented to history and politics, so he loved all of that stuff."

They joined forces and

wrote for another year, refining and adding to the material that eventually emerged as the performing version of "I Miss Communism". The whole process ran for around two-and-a-half years before it finally saw the light of day at the Edinburgh Fringe last year, where it was well-received by the critics. A further 10 minutes or so of material has now been added to the show.

"The basic idea stayed much the same throughout all of that," Ines said. "Basically, the show is about freedom, and what freedom really means in the world. It opens up the question to the audience of what is freedom, and it compares living under the communist regime with capitalism in America. We all know how restricted and messed up America is in some ways. It looks at all of this through some personal

stories, and it looks at personal freedom and spiritual freedom, and various social and psychological issues. Oh, and 'Oliver Twist'."

Sorry?

"It was about the only western movie that was brought into communist Yugoslavia," she explained. "They thought it was a condemnation of the capitalist system. We weren't allowed to have much western influence, and I guess it was one of the few that was approved to be shown. It was my favourite movie as a kid, and I figured I would like to work some of it into the show as well."

Ines plays 15 characters in the course of the show, which uses humour, song and dance in tracing her journey from Croatia to the land of her dreams, and her subsequent realisation that it was not quite as she

imagined. The play takes a darker turn with her return to war-torn Croatia in the years after the fall of Tito ("a dictator, sure, but a cool one"), and a painful confrontation with her past.

"The big change in perception for me came when I finally moved to America and saw the downside of what capitalism was, and realised that it wasn't as ideal as we had been led to believe," she added. "In communism the system provides basic needs. Mother government owns everything."

Her career could have followed a very different path had she opted as a teenager to pursue her other major love at that time, ice skating.

"I was a fanatical skater as a kid," she confirmed. "I started when I was about two, and it was a huge passion in my life for many years. Eventu-

ally I just came to the point where I had to decide whether I was going to go professional with it or focus on my education. Both of my parents are intellectuals, and they were kind of against my becoming an athlete — it is a very short career, especially in ice skating, where you are pretty much done by the time you are 25. I decided that going on to college was a better option.

"Actually, I was thinking of incorporating something from my ice skating in this show just because I love it so much, but I don't know how I would do that. I'll have to wait until we can afford to raise the production levels a lot higher!"

● "I Miss Communism" can be seen at the Spectrum Centre, Inverness (13th June), East Grange Loft, Kinloss (16th June), and Craignellachie Village Hall (17th June).

