



## And the Rat Laughed

Theatre-in-Music/Chamber Opera

In 10 scenes for 8 singers, girls' choir and orchestra

Based on the novel "And the Rat Laughed" by Nava Semel

Music by Ella Milch-Sherif

Libretto by Nava Semel and Ella Milch-Sheriff

Translated from the Hebrew

By

Miriam Shlesinger

**And the Rat Laughed**, is an original opera in Hebrew based on Nava Semel's book, published three years ago to rave reviews. The music was written by Ella Milch-Sheriff. This novel dealing with the horrors of the Holocaust and the influence of this harrowing chapter of human history was highly praised for its courage in employing original and unconventional literary devices.

This is the story of a nameless five-year-old girl, as told to her granddaughter years later. The child's parents entrust her to a family of farmers living in a remote Polish village. She is hidden in a dark potato cellar for over a year,

with little food, and only a rat for company - and is repeatedly raped by the farmers' son.

When the girl's parents no longer send money, the farmer's wife takes her to the village priest, urging him to kill her. But Father Stanislaw hides the Jewish child in his church and risks his life in healing her wounded body and broken soul.

Sixty years later, already a grandmother in Tel Aviv, she tries to recount her horrifying childhood to her teenage granddaughter who is preparing a school paper. Memory, buried in the darkness for so long, demands its right to emerge. The five genres of the book: story, legend, poetry, futuristic fantasy and diary, are entwined to create the libretto.

*Lima Energelly*, an anthropologist in the year 2099 is bent on uncovering the origins of the widespread myth "Girl & Rat" and is the main figure in the opera, who reveals on stage the circles of *Remembearers*, those who have the traumatic event registered in their consciousness. Futuristic Lima tries to force the memory on her partner Stash, who bears the same name as the rat who was once the only comfort of the hidden girl.

The highlight of the opera is a Mass scene, when Father Stanislaw rebels against his Lord, who abandoned His children. In an attempt to restore the girl's hope and her faith, the priest discovers he has lost his own.

Each of the characters is represented in the music with his or her own special elements. Lima, the future woman, has a robotic sound around her coming mainly from the orchestra. Nevertheless she becomes more and more human and emotional as she enters the story. The grandmother's lines are usually very melodic and mellow, full of sorrow. The girl's thoughts are sung throughout by the choir somehow monotonously, like a Greek chorus but then, as the words become unbearable, the music becomes more and more harmonic and even sweet and provides a marked contrast to the meaning, thus amplifying the pain.

The priest starts his mass in Latin with Christian musical themes, but as he goes on and denies his belief because of the evil done in this world, more and more Jewish musical motifs appear between his lines.

When the mass is over, the girl starts to sing. She is accompanied throughout by the oboe. Her musical lines are pure and simple but combine motifs from the grandmother and granddaughter. As the opera goes on, there is a kind of mixture between the musical motifs of all the characters as their lives intertwine.

The orchestra has an important role as it brings out the differences between the three dimensions in the opera but the most important part is played by the singers who move the plot forward.

The music, generally, is very communicative and comprehensible, even when heard for the first time.

The opera is 1 hour and 35 minutes long.

Originally played by **The Israeli Chamber Orchestra** and conducted by **Ori Leshman**. Director: **Oded Kotler**. Stage and Costume designer: **Adrian**

**Vaux.** Lightening Designer: **Keren Granek.** **The Moran Children** Choir is conducted by **Naomi Faran.**  
**Opening night: April 9, 2005, The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv.**

### **Characters**

**Grandmother** (Mezzo-Soprano)  
**Lima Energelly** (Soprano)  
**Priest - Father Stanislaw** (Bass-Baritone)  
**The Girl in the Pit -Grandmother as a child** (girl Soprano)  
**Granddaughter** (Soprano)  
**Stash** (Baritone)  
**Farmer's Wife** (Mezzo-Soprano)  
**Farmer** (Bass-Baritone)  
**Girls' Choir**

### **Note:**

The libretto consists of three circles of those who try to remember:

1. Grandmother - "the owner of memory" who tries, in the year 1999, to pass it on to her granddaughter.
2. The girl in the pit - who experienced this memory, accompanied by the two farmers who abused her and the Catholic priest who saved her in 1943-1945.
3. The last and most distant circle is presented by Lima and Stash - two anthropologists who, in the year 2099, dig this memory out of its burial place.

The inner voice of the girl in the pit, until she is rescued by the priest and emerges from the pit, is provided by the Girls' Choir. The choir expresses the girl's feelings and thoughts while in the pit.

### **Voice-Over – Before the Overture begins**

In the year 2099, the future anthropologist Lima Energelly discovers in the Human Memory Archive a popular myth titled *Girl & Rat*. This myth had been wide spread in the last 100 years but its origin was lost. All Lima knows is that the myth is rooted deep in the horrors of the Holocaust – the dark era in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the Jewish people were murdered by the Nazis and their helpers, only because of their Jewish faith.

Stash, Lima's colleague, refuses to shed light on her discovery and Lima must break into his REMaker – an artificial dream machine that people in the future will program their sleep, censor nightmares and dream only sweet dreams. Despite Stash's refusal to follow the tracks of this threatening, shadowy myth, Lima forces him to join her in descending deep down into memory pit.

### **Overture**

Throughout the music of the overture we see Video-Art.

On the screen we see Lima at the Memory Archive, surrounded by images of Girl and Rat floating. She's excited and overwhelmed, holding her head with her hands, trying to direct the Implachip inside her brain towards the sleeping Stash. We see him connected to his REMaker – his own artificial dream machine, while sweet images from his dream float: angels, wings, blue sky, sun rays – a tranquil, happy world.

Lima tries to break into Stash's machine and his sweet images are suddenly transformed into dark images of Girl and Rat.

### **Scene 1**

#### **Human Memory Archive. 2099.**

Stash and Lima are located at the far high end of the stage. There's distance between them, each is "locked" in his own individual bubble. They are connected via Implachips planted in their brains, communicating by "typing/clicking" directly on their hands or body. This is how they transmit their thoughts through the Inter Brain Network.

#### **Lima.**

A girl. Girl and Rat. Rat and Girl. Girl and Rat. Girl and Rat.

An ancient story that passes through the generations.

I Lima Energelly

I Lima Energelly

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Lima. Lima. I break into your dream, Stash.

Tonight, the Night of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2099  
 And I'm infusing *Girl and Rat* into your implachip, your implachip. Girl and Rat, Girl and Rat, Girl and Rat.

**Stash backs away. He trembles. His bubble is shaking.**

**Stash**

*Girl and Rat?* No! No!

(warning her) Stay away, Lima! Beware!

**Lima (Tries to get closer)**

I have no choice but to invade your REMaker, before the ancient myth sinks into oblivion. I've discovered its roots.

And on the fifth day, The Lord created, He created...

**Stash (retreats, horrified)**

This nightmarish memory of a human cub and a rat cub has nothing to do with me. Get out of my dream, Lima! Get out, Lima!

**Lima (getting closer)**

I found the pit. I'm going down and you must join me. And there was evening and there was morning - the fifth day.

**Lima leaves her bubble and descends into the pit.**

**Stash (protests)**

The following day He created man. And God saw that it was... bad. You won't force me. You won't impose an unwanted nightmare. This Nightmare is not mine.

**Lima**

The little-girl-who-once-was -existed.

The pit-that-once-was - existed.

The Rat-that-once- was - shall be.

This is the darkness. This is the darkness. There is no other.

## **Scene 2**

**A House in Tel Aviv. 31st December 1999.**

**Grandmother and her granddaughter sit together. The**

**granddaughter is ready to write a school paper in her notebook. On the cover of her notebook there's a picture of an angel by Raphael (detail from the Sistine Madonna).**

**Grandmother**

I was a little girl, their little girl. Father and Mother. Mother and Father.

I loved them.

**Lima (Intervenes. To grandmother)**

No! No! The story cannot begin this way!  
That would put an end to it even before it began

**Lima tries to touch Stash. He's repelled, avoiding any physical contact. Turning his back to Lima, he approaches Grandma from his bubble.**

**Stash (to Grandmother)**

You are putting yourself at risk and your granddaughter too! Why, why remember?

**Grandmother ignores the future beings. She's aware of their words only as her inner voices.**

**Grandmother (to granddaughter)**

I was a little girl.  
I did not choose to be born.  
What would you like to know?  
Why now?  
Now?

**Granddaughter**

I'm a big girl, big girl. We're a different generation. Nothing's hidden any more. You can see the worst atrocities live on TV, even on entertainment shows. Planes crashing, entertainment shows. Buses exploding, entertainment shows. And people cutting each other's heads. What could you possibly tell me that I don't already know?  
I'm a big girl.

**Lima**

She's a big girl. She's a big girl.

**Stash (to Grandmother)**

Why not choose forgetfulness? Sweet Sleep, cleansed of dreams or free of nightmares.

**Grandmother (to granddaughter)**

I had a mother.  
I had a father.  
Won't you make do with that?  
I loved and I lost.  
I loved and I lost.  
That's the end. The beginning too.

**Granddaughter**

Grandma, tell me. Tell me, please. Whatever you remember.

**Grandmother**

I lost it.

I lost everything.

**Granddaughter**

Not everything.

**Grandmother**

Almost everything.

**Granddaughter**

All young people in Israel prepare a school project about their ancestors. I must submit mine tomorrow. I even brought a special notebook. Look. On the cover, what a sweet angel. Such colorful wings. And he raises his eyes up. Grandma, Grandma, do you believe in miracles?

**Grandmother**

No! I loved and I lost.

**Granddaughter**

But you were saved.

**Grandmother**

A little Holocaust. I loved and I lost. Lost and loved.

**Granddaughter**

I'm a big girl. A big girl.

**Scene 3****Stash**

My REMaker, my REMaker has been invaded.

You've broken into my dream machine.

What have you done, Lima Energelly? How dare you poison my sweet dreams? Closeness is dangerous, go away!

**Lima (tries again to reach him)**

Stash!

**Stash (Angry. Turning his back to her)**

My Remaker has been hacked!

**Lima (tries to "seduce" Stash into listening to her story)**

Stash, do not be afraid. In the deep of every pit, the origin rests. The first memory ever. The one that came before all others, preceding all dreams, before turning into nightmares. Don't be scared, Stash.

I must plant the week after the Creation in your implachip. The following Sunday, all beasts lined up, clamoring for the same traits that man had been given. The Creator gave into their pleas and granted them the gift of weeping too. To this day the female turtle cries when she lays eggs on a lonely beach on a summer night, and the cats and dogs cry after mating, except they do it without tears.

**Option: the voice of the priest is heard as an echo to Lima who tells the beginning of the myth - a hint that he's the one who originally told it to the girl in the pit.**

**Stash**

Weeping? What is weeping?

**(It is strange to him, for in the controlled future there is no weeping and no tears)**

**Lima**

I'll teach you.

**Stash**

Weeping, what is that? Tears? What are they?

**Lima**

Go down with me to the pit, Stash. **I will protect you!**

**Stash (horrified)**

Nightmare! Nightmare! Nightmare!

**Lima**

Go down with me to the pit, Stash.

**She recalls/summons the deepest layer of this memory from 1943.**

**Lima**

A big city. Heavy snow in winter. The river is frozen over.

**On the Video-Art screen we see images of snow falling, winter European landscape.**

**Grandmother (in 1999)**

**(Echoing)** A big city. Heavy snow in winter. The river is frozen over.

For my birthday, I got a pair of skates.

Who was it that held my hand so I didn't fall?

Father? Mother? Was it the servant?

**Granddaughter (happily)**

A servant. What a promising beginning.

**(she lies on her stomach, writing in her notebook)**



**On the Video-Art screen we see the girl's parents - the same actors/singers who will later play the parts of the Polish farmers - bidding farewell to their little girl. They hug her, trying to comfort her, but she's in a fit, hitting them with her fists, kicking, struggling with them, in refusing to leave.**

### **Grandmother**

I screamed. I kicked. I broke things.  
 Why are you giving me away to people I don't even know?  
 I'm a good girl.  
 So why are you throwing me out of the house?  
 You're a bad father and mother.  
 In the end I hit them.  
 Now I really am a bad girl.

### **Granddaughter (Tries to comfort her grandma)**

A horrible beginning doesn't necessarily mean a terrible end.

### **Grandmother**

I did not give in. I refused to pack. Not even my doll with the braids.  
 Mother said: It's for your own good  
 And Father told me: It's just for a short time.  
 Lies! Grown-up lies.

### **Granddaughter**

Grown-up lies?

### **Granddaughter & Grandmother**

Grown-up lies.

### **Stash (bluntly at Lima)**

Lies!

**On the Video-Art screen we see the girl all alone. She throws away her doll.**

### **Grandmother**

All night long I cried. My last tears.  
 Mother sat by my bed, trying to hold my hand  
 I pushed her away.  
 What is a Jew?  
 If it's such a terrible thing to be a Jew, why did you make me one?  
 The servant rinsed my hair with peroxide.  
 It's so you don't look too Jewish, they said.  
 If there's such a thing as too Jewish, there's such a thing as not Jewish enough too.

**Granddaughter**

If there's such a thing as too Jewish, there's such a thing as not Jewish enough too?

**Grandmother**

If being Jewish is such a terrible thing, then being a Jewish little girl is the worst thing in the world.

**Granddaughter**

If being Jewish is such a terrible thing, then being a Jewish little girl is the worst thing in the world?

**Grandma turns her back to her granddaughter and gazes at the Video-Art screen, directly to the girl. She sees her own reflection as a young girl. Once their eyes meet, the girl drops herself down and the light turns off.**

**Granddaughter discovers that grandma is watching something, but she herself cannot see but an empty screen. She's puzzled.**

**Grandma turns around.**

**Grandmother**

Mother turned her back to me.

Didn't say a word

Didn't touch either.

Mother did not turn around.

I didn't take the doll. Didn't take.

Black braids. Black braids.

**Granddaughter (understands at last)**

A Jewish doll.

**Grandmother**

Will you come to take me back? Will you come?

And they promised they would.

**Lima**

They, they promised.

**Stash (sarcastically)**

They always promise.

**Lima (in despair)**

They did promise.

**Stash (sardonically)**

They always do.

**Stash turns his back to Lima. She reaches his bubble with her hand.**

**Lima (pleading)**

They promised.

**Stash gives in and turns around. Again, Lima tries to enchant him with her story.**

**Lima**

All beasts were pleased, so pleased. Weeping agreed with them. Only the rat wasn't satisfied with what God had given him and didn't give any thought to what God had taken away. The rat didn't want to cry. An insolent creature he confronted the Creator and demanded the gift of laughter.

**Scene 4**

**Poland. 1943-1945. A small, remote village.**

**The choir appears from the dark.**

**Choir**

Mother, Father, Servant - three

A little girl - a family

Servant's gone

Father and Mother

Gone one after another

Little girl, no one's around

Lives alone beneath the ground.

**The two farmers bring the girl on stage and push her into the pit.**

**Farmer's wife**

Right into the pit! This is where you stay, little sinner.

**Choir**

End

I so much want to be dead

How can I get to be dead?

It isn't enough to want to be dead...

**Stash**

Get this story of me! My REMaker is breaking down, breaking down.

Everything, everything is fading... is fading... fading...

A world without light, deep down the pit. I don't want to remember. Who needs an origin( a beginning)? A sweet world I want. No weeping, no laughter either.

**Lima**

But the rat demanded laughter.

**Grandmother**

I was in the dark. A muddle of time. I don't know when it began or when it was over. Darkness even has a taste and when the light goes out for good, I might teach you to feel.

**Granddaughter**

Perhaps... to feel darkness... I'm not sure I want to.

**Choir**

One two three  
That's that.  
One girl  
One rat.

**Grandmother**

He groped his way in my direction, first sniffing, then biting.  
I didn't scream, because I was the one who had disrupted his order. Later we grew used to each other. I petted him and he grew fat. The glimmer in his eyes was my only light.  
I called him Stash.

**Choir**

Stash... Stash... Stash... Stash...

**Stash hears his name being echoed from the past. He's trembling. His bubble is shaken and starts to tear. Now he begins to "enter" the story.**

**Granddaughter**

A rat!

**Grandmother (tenderly)**

He was with me.

**Granddaughter (repelled)**

A repulsive animal! The most disgusting there is. What a nightmare living with a rat! To spend days and nights with a rat! I wouldn't have survived.

**Lima**

The Creator told the rat: I've given you teeth to gnaw with, and claws to scratch, and a sense of hearing and a wonderful sense of smell.  
And you ungracious creature keep demanding more and more and more.

**Stash to Lima (opening the tear in his bubble)**

But the rat was extremely stubborn, exactly like the Creator, and he kept insisting "I want" and "I've got to have". Don't you understand that the rat was given a surplus of human traits?

**Note: For the first time Stash identifies with the rat who bears his name, getting involved in Lima's story.**

## Scene 5

### Choir

The lice are free  
To roam the place  
From my hair  
To my forehead  
And all over my face  
I lie there  
And I feel them tug  
On my face  
On my body  
For me -  
That's a hug.

### Grandmother

The sounds above ground I learned to recognize too. The lowing and the growling. The footsteps of cows. The croaking of frogs in a faraway lake. The farmers working in the field.

### Granddaughter

Did the farmers have sons?  
You played with them, didn't you?

**Grandma is totally shaken by her misunderstanding.**

### Choir

Up there  
Farmers  
Further up  
Birds  
Furthest up  
Parents  
Down here  
Jews  
Further down  
Children  
Furthest down  
Children  
Of Jews.

**Farmer (to his wife)**

What did we need this for, you fool! And for next to nothing too.  
Jesus, Maria, that little Jew is endangering us all.

**Farmer's Wife (to the girl)**

You're not coming up until you know.

**Farmer (to the girl)**

We should have asked for more. What a price you cost us!

**Grandmother (to her granddaughter)**

What it was I was supposed to know, I didn't know.

**Farmer's Wife (to the girl)**

Pray hard that the money will come.  
Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum  
Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus.  
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
Nunc, et in hora mortis, mortis nostrae.  
Amen.

**Choir and Grandmother joins**

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum  
Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus.  
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
nunc, et in hora mortis, mortis nostrae.  
Amen.

**Farmer**

I've had it. I'm handing her in. Enough of this story.

**Stash (echoes angrily)**

Enough, enough. Enough of this story. I've had it.

**Lima**

The Creator had had it too. And because He wanted to get rid of that pesky rat, he promised him: "So long as you don't hear some other creature laughing beside you underneath the ground, you will not laugh either."  
And then the Creator threw that subterranean animal out of Heaven, once and for all, thinking that the rat had a short memory.  
But the rat remembered the promise, and he kept looking for laughter in the pit, but he saw only dead people and they weren't laughing.  
And the rat cursed the Creator who had cheated him.

**Note: At this point when the Rat curses God, Stash identifies completely. Now he's indeed involved in Lima's legend and responds. He goes out of his bubble.**

**Stash**

And the next generations of rats were telling each other that God makes promises but never keeps them. They even started looking for a different God, but they didn't find another one, another one.

**Lima**

Until the night the girl came down into the pit. And suddenly the rat was filled with hope. He was sure that the creature who followed the girl down would fulfill the Creator's old promise. But this was no beast, but another creature created in the divine image and he did not make her laugh.

**Choir**

Why potatoes?

**Girl**

Because.

**Choir**

Why lice?

**Girl**

Because.

**Choir**

Why darkness?

**Girl**

Because.

**Choir**

And why Stefan?

**Lima**

The footsteps of the farmer's son. The Stefan is coming down, he's getting closer.

**Grandmother**

Ave Maria, Holy Mother, make him stumble and crash.

**Choir (whispering)**

Ave Maria, Holy Mother, make him stumble and crash.

**Lima**

And God saw that it was....

**Choir**

Good that you're a he-rat

And not a she-rat  
 Lucky you're a he-beast  
 And not a she-beast  
 Because only a he-rat  
 Can get out and move on  
 And every she-rat  
 Is prey for the Stefan.

**Three girls from choir**

I'll never be cold  
 For my blanket is mud  
 I'll always be warm  
 For I'm covered with blood

**Three other girls from choir**

I'll never be cold  
 For my blanket is mud  
 I'll always be warm  
 For I'm covered with blood

**Lima**

The little-girl-who-once-was existed.  
 The pit-that-once-was existed.  
 The Rat-that-once- was shall be.  
 This is the darkness. This is the darkness. There is no other.

**Granddaughter (to Grandmother. Horrified)**

That's not the story, that's not the story I wanted.

**Stash (attacking Lima)**

No one wants this story.

**Lima (sadly and in despair)**

No one wants this story.

**Grandmother**

It's not up to us.

**Granddaughter to Grandmother and Stash to Lima**

But I don't want this story.

**Grandmother to Granddaughter and Lima to Stash**

There is no other.

**Choir**

No other.... No other... No other...

**Lima**



The little-girl-who-once-was...  
 The pit-that-once-was...  
 The Rat-that-once-was...

**The two farmers peep into the pit from above.**

**The farmer and his wife**

Stefan! Stefchu! Stefanel!

**Farmer**

Stefan, what are you doing down there?

**The farmer and his wife**

Stefan, where are you?

**Choir**

I have a big pit outside me  
 I have a little pit within  
 The big pit is mine  
 And the little pit is the Stefan's.  
 Stefan's.  
 Stefan's.

**Granddaughter (horrified. screams)**

Stop it, Grandma!

**Stash (attacking Lima)**

Stop it, Lima!

**Grandmother to Granddaughter and Lima to Stash**

It is too late to stop now.

**Lima**

And the rat in the pit did not lose its hope that one day the human-cub would laugh. And he desperately tried to make the girl laugh...

**Directorial options:**

**1/ The priest will appear as Rat on the video-Art Screen**

**2/ The priest will appear as Rat in the pit, trying to make the girl laugh.**

**3/ The voice of the priest is heard, singing: "Laugh, little girl and I will laugh with you."**

**Grandmother**

Maybe the sun doesn't go up  
 And the night doesn't go down  
 Maybe beyond the pit  
 The world doesn't go round

Darkness isn't black  
 The sun doesn't set  
 And I'm the only one left  
 But I don't know it yet

**Granddaughter**

Grandma, grandma, where is Stash?

**Choir, Grandmother and Lima**

Stash... Stash... Stash... Stash...

**Stash responds physically.**

**Granddaughter**

How long did it last?

**Lima**

How long did it last?

**Grandmother and Choir, the girl in the pit joins**

Maybe the sun doesn't go up  
 The night doesn't go down  
 Maybe beyond the pit  
 The world doesn't go round  
 Darkness isn't black  
 The sun doesn't set  
 And I'm the only one left  
 But I don't know it yet

**Option:**

**The Priest-Rat can join their singing as an echo, or his shadow can be seen on the screen.**

## Scene 6

**The two farmers descend into the pit.**

**Farmer**

She's putting us all at risk. We'll hand her over to his reverence, the priest, and he will know what to do with her.

**Farmer's wife (to the girl in the pit)**

You Jews, you take up all the places in Heaven, in Heaven. Because of you, we'll all have to go to Hell.

**Farmer**

Ave Maria tells Jesus: Move aside, Son. Too many Jewish children are coming out. Coming out, coming out of their holes, and we have to make room for them. Ha, ha, ha. Amen.

**The farmer's wife starts lifting the girl.**

**Farmer**

What a horrible stench! Wash her first.

**Farmer's wife (To the girl)**

Cross yourself! You stink to high heaven. Even Jesus would hold his nose. Ask for forgiveness. You stink, you stink so badly.

**The farmers drag the girl up.**

**Granddaughter**

How did she come up all of a sudden?

**Grandmother**

A black angel... emerged.

**Granddaughter**

An angel? Like the one on my notebook? Grandma, grandma, but you don't believe in miracles.

**Church Bells are ringing. The entire stage changes. It is flooded with light. The girls' Choir enter, dressed as nuns. The priest follows, wearing his dark robe. The nuns bow to him and become a church choir.**

**Scene 7**

**Catholic Church in Poland. 1944. Solemn Mass.**

**The farmers stand in front of the priest, pulling the girl along.**

**Choir**

Vidi aquam egredientem de templo

A latere dextro

Alleluia

Alleluia

Et omnes ad quos penevit aqua ista salvi facti sunt,

Et dicent:

Alleluia, Alleluia.

**Priest**

In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti

**Choir, farmer and wife**

Amen.

**Priest**

Confiteor Deo omnipotenti

Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.

**He notices the abused girl in his church.**

**Choir and farmers**

Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.

**Choir**

Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus

Et dismissis peccatis tuis

Perducat ad vitam aeternam

Amen.

**Priest**

Kyrie eleison.

**Farmers and Choir**

Kyrie eleison.

**Priest**

Christe eleison.

**Farmers and Choir**

Christe eleison.

**Choir**

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi.

**Farmer's wife pushes the girl towards the priest.**

**Farmer's Wife**

This is his reverence, the priest. Kiss his hand. Confess, you little sinner.

**Choir**

When Stefan the Saint

Was as small as an elf

He was snatched from his bed

By Master Satan himself

A horrible monster

Was what his parents found

Their sweet and cuddly baby

Disappeared in the ground

I want the first Stefan

To come and hunt down  
 Master Satan who owns  
 The bed-pit in the ground  
 Cause if rats were creatures  
 That Saint Stefan adored  
 He'd have Heaven summon  
 A hundred saints or more.

**Priest**

Give me the child, woman. I will know what to do with her.

**Farmer's Wife**

Beware your reverence. She will defile the House of the Lord, the little sinner.

**Priest**

I'll pay the price.

**Farmer's wife**

If it weren't for Stefan, we would have turned her in long ago. A good lad, Stefan. Knows how to appreciate a good thing. But now the Germans are offering ten thousand for every Jew. We could mend the roof of the church, so it doesn't leak in winter.

**Priest**

**(Bribes her with a golden chalice)**

Woman! Hand over the girl!

**Farmer's wife**

Slaughter the little Jew with your own hands, and avenge the blood of our Savior. But be careful, Father Stanislaw, make sure she doesn't infect you, the little sinner, when you use the knife.  
 Soon we will be celebrating a solemn mass for a world cleansed of Jews.

**Farmer's Wife and choir**

Ave Maria  
 Gratia plena  
 Dominus tecum Benedicta tu in mulieribus  
 Et benedictus Fructus ventris tui Jesus.  
 Sancta Maria Mater Dei  
 Ora pro nobis Peccatoribus  
 Nunc et in Hora mortis, mortis nostrae  
 Amen.

## **Scene 8**

**Stash stands outside the pit. Lima is inside.**

**Stash (still hesitating)**

Why not leave memory buried for good? It is not too late. No one would ever dream it, no man would remember.

**Lima**

Both you and I are in the pit. (pause) All of us are.

**Stash's hand reaches to the girl in the pit. Now he's emotionally involved, watching her, full of compassion.**

**Stash (compassionately)**

What will she remember beyond the pit?

How did she survive?

Death seems preferable to a life with such a memory.

That rat... Created in the divine image. He re-created the world for her.

That little girl...

The Stefan...

My REMaker is good for nothing. It's lost. I will never be able to dream again.

Lima, Lima, What have you done to me?

**Lima gets closer. She touches Stash. He lets her and gives in to her touch.**

**Lima (with love)**

Stash, Stash.

I'm your *Remembearer*.

With my very own hands, I pull out my implachip.

Now we are truly joined. Nothing will separate us.

K-0005275...

Stash, Stash

Inside the pit...

I will carry the memory and now you too will never forget.

There, in the darkness, you'll forever recall...

**Stash (repeats like an echo)**

We'll forever recall.

**He enters into the pit.**

**Lima (amazed)**

Stash, you're weeping!

**Lima hugs Stash. There's no distance between the two. Now they're both in the pit, circling the girl. Lima gently tries to pull Stash out, but he refuses to leave the girl. Still in her arms, Lima leads him out, leaving the girl to face the priest. Now the girl and her human rat are alone.**

**The priest kneels down before the girl.**

**Priest**

Do not bless me, Father, for I have sinned. Do not absolve me.  
 I have been your faithful servant all my life, but now I am forsaking you and succumbing to the sin of despair. Do not forgive me, Father. I cannot fulfill my duty, and I have no faith. But pardon this little girl, who has no name. Embrace her, and grant her salvation.  
 What new day awaits a girl who is nothing but night?  
 I am Your chosen one. A man is born into Your world as a creature of light, but other humans pour darkness into him.

Confiteor Deo omnipotenti  
 Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.

If You do not love Your creatures, how dare You demand from us to love one another?  
 A world where children need to be placed in hiding ought to be destroyed completely and started from scratch.

**The priest pretends to be a rat. He gets down on all four, imitating the movements of a rat, and waves his tail. Now the girl trusts him and she finally responds.**

**Priest**

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

**Girl**

I give you a name  
 First just Rat  
 Then My Pet  
 Then I give you one with panache  
 Like Stanislaw or Stash.  
 Or Stash.

**Stash (to Lima)**

She named her rat "Stash".

**Stash kneels down in front of the pit. Lima stands behind him. They watch the girl and the priest.**

**Priest (takes the girl in his arms)**

Do not bless me, Father, for I have sinned.  
 Do not absolve me.  
 A girl-child...  
 I had never held one in my arms.

## Scene 9

**Girl**

Don't want to be Jewish any more.

**Priest**

Jesus was Jewish too.

**Girl**

Is that why they killed him?

**Priest**

In the beginning, our Father created... Our Father...

**Girl**

Stash, promise me He isn't a Jew.

**The priest is silent.**

**Girl**

Promise me, promise that He can laugh.

**Priest**

My child, it does not say anywhere that God created laughter.

**Girl**

So who created it?

**Priest**

Laughter is a miracle, wrought without the Creator having any part of it.

**Girl**

What is a miracle?

**Priest**

Something unusual, that never happened before.

**Girl**

Who causes miracles?

**Priest**

God. God.

**Girl**

And who is God? Who is God?

**Priest**



Our Father. Our Father.

Creator of this world. Creator of Man. Creators of all the Stefans, Creators of the rats too.

**Girl**

And where is He?

**Priest**

In Heaven.

**Girl**

Heaven – is that above us or below us?

**Priest**

I don't know.

**Girl**

When does He make the miracle?

**Priest**

My child, God saw that it was good, and left the flawed world as it was, because whenever we laugh we remind Him up there of our presence down here and repair the damage that He Himself wrought.

**Girl**

Teach me how to laugh, Stash. Please teach me how to laugh.

**Priest**

Without our laughter, God Himself would be no more.

**The girl opens her mouth, she tries to laugh, but her laughter refuses to come out.**

**Priest (Embracing her)**

Do not bless me, Father, for I have sinned. Do not absolve me.

But now I am forsaking you and devoting myself to this girl.

Her agonized cries cut through me. All night long she pleaded with me not return her to her people.

I will know no peace, day or night.

Mother, Mother, Mother, why have you forsaken me!

Thus cry all of the nameless children.

**Girl**

Mama, Mama, why have you forsaken me?

**Priest (raises his gaze up)**

Forgive this girl who has no name. Embrace her and she will teach You how to laugh.

And there was evening, and there was morning...

**The priest retreats. The girl tries to follow him, but he forbids her. He keeps moving away.**

**Priest**

Perhaps some day a miracle will happen, and you will find the strength to remember me. I will rise out of the darkness and void within you, I will stretch out my tail (In the German translation: I will open my mouth), and I will laugh to you.

Forgive me, my daughter. Bless me, for I have sinned.

## **Scene 10**

**Granddaughter**

Grandma, Should I turn on the light?

**Grandmother**

Not yet.

**Granddaughter**

But it's almost dark.

**Grandmother**

Almost.

**Grandmother rises suddenly.**

**Granddaughter**

Where are you? I can't see you. Give me your hand.

Grandma, hug me. Grandma, you are laughing!

**Grandma hugs her granddaughter. They watch the girl who stands alone by the edge of the pit. Grandma and the girl laugh at each other. Grandma hugs her and pulls her back into the pit. Now the three unite and they leave the pit together, entwined by their embrace.**

**Stash is crying, hugged by Lima. They enter the empty pit and watch Grandma, granddaughter and the girl walking slowly away.**

**At the far end of the stage or on the Video-Art screen we see the priest as rat – laughing!**

**Only when Grandma laughed, the old promise of God was fulfilled and finally the rat too is granted the gift of laughter.**

## **The End**

New Expanded version, August 2006