

Sidney Poitier and Lilia Skala in *Lilies of the Field*



**Special acknowledgment and thanks to:**

**Gary Austin** for his inspiration as a teacher and for directing early works-in-progress versions of the show for Artistic New Directions.

**Carol Krishnaswami** for answering the call, for her unending love, support and dedication.

**Gabriel Barre** for his generous and skilled direction of some of the later versions of the show.

**Carol Fox Prescott** for her love, insight and vast wisdom as an acting coach, teacher and friend, and for her infectious passion for theatre and humanity.

**Additional special thanks to:**

Artistic New Directions, Kristine Niven, Jeffrey Sweet, Molly Lyons, The Green Wood Studio, Gregg Goldston, Grace Polk, Amy Marschak, Steven May and Mary & Martin Skala.

*Lilia!* was developed through Artistic New Directions' Works-in-Progress.

[www.LibbySkala.com](http://www.LibbySkala.com)

# LILIA!



Written and performed by

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**“I’ve barely scratched the surface in terms of what’s inside me - what I can give of myself to mankind.” - Lilia Skala**

In 1995, a few months after my grandmother Lilia passed on, I came across a remarkable improvisation teacher named Gary Austin. One day, in his workshop, he invited students to talk for a few minutes about someone real or fictitious who we found compelling or fascinating. I talked about my grandmother, and he cast me in a scene portraying her working in a factory, as a refugee. At that moment, the “Lilia” character was born. Later, when he learned she became an Oscar-nominated actress, he said, “You’ve got to write a one-woman show about your grandmother!”

Baffled about where to begin, Gary encouraged me to go home and write down everything I remembered about her. Each day, my goal became to write one sentence. Over the next couple of years, “Lilia” developed improvisationally in Gary’s workshop, later in acting class with Carol Fox Prescott’s and in playwriting class with Jeffrey Sweet. Gary directed early works in progress.

In 2001, Gabriel Barre directed *Lilia!* for Cape Cod Theatre Project, and the show went on to receive rave reviews internationally. It ran successfully Off-Broadway at the Arclight Theatre, produced by Mirror Repertory Company; at The Groundlings Theatre in Los Angeles, presented by Gary Austin; and was performed to sold-out houses in London, Seattle, Toronto and Winnipeg, where it was selected “Best Show” out of 118 shows by University of Manitoba Radio (CJUM) at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival. It received additional raves at Pacific Theatre in Vancouver; at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland; in London, sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Forum; in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia; and in Berlin and Dresden, Germany.

As *Lilia!* moves forward, I continue to plumb the depths of each nuance and life lesson to be gleaned from my grandmother’s experiences. She often said, “I’ve barely scratched the surface in terms of what’s inside me - what I can give of myself to mankind.” She was constantly teaching and guiding me. I wasn’t always receptive. Well, it’s never too late.

The lessons continue as I have the privilege of performing this play - not only as a tribute to my grandmother, but as an ever-evolving experience between actor and audience.



**LIBBY SKALA** (playwright/actress) has enchanted audiences internationally with critically acclaimed solo plays about her notable family members: *Lilia!*, about her grandmother, Oscar-nominated actress Lilia Skala, *A Time to Dance*, about her great aunt, dance therapy pioneer Elizabeth Polk, and *Felicitas*, about her great aunt “Lizi”, a tough-love baby nurse. *Lilia!* ran off-Broadway, produced by Mirror Repertory Co. at the Arclight, and ran 3-weeks in London, sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Forum. *A Time to Dance* won “Best Solo Performer Award” at the London Fringe Festival. *Felicitas* received rave reviews at FringeNYC and at Freight & Salvage in Berkeley. All three shows have toured internationally. Libby’s newest play *Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer* premiered at the London Fringe Festival.



Libby’s non-solo work includes readings with Rosemary Harris and Marian Seldes from books published by The Feminist Press at the Jewish Museum in NYC. Regionally, she played Viola in *Twelfth Night* at St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival. Film work includes *Birth* with Nicole Kidman. Libby is a graduate of Oberlin College and is an award recipient of The Pandella Cultural Fund in Switzerland. Upcoming performances and more info at [www.LibbySkala.com](http://www.LibbySkala.com).

**LILIA SKALA** was the first woman to have received a summa cum laude degree in Architecture and Engineering from The University of Dresden, before practicing architecture professionally in Vienna. She went on to become one of Austria’s leading stage actresses and toured with Max Reinhardt in a 1934 production of Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.



She won a special place in the hearts of audiences throughout the world as the chapel-building nun in *Lilies of the Field*, as well as Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations for her brilliant performance. This film brought Miss Skala back to the prominence she had been forced to abandon when Hitler invaded her native Austria.

Her American debut in the Broadway production of *Letters to Lucerne*, was followed by a featured role in *Call Me Madam*, which she later repeated for the screen, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in which she later toured, and the New York City Center German language production of *The Three Penny Opera*, in which she sang the role of Mrs. Peachum. Her last stage appearance was in Lorraine Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* in Washington in 1989, for which she was nominated for a Helen Hayes Award.

She was seen on virtually every major dramatic program on all of the networks for over 30 years - including roles in soap operas, in *I Remember Mama*, directed by Ralph Nelson, in *Green Acres* as Eva Gabor’s mother, and in prestigious specials like *Eleanor and Franklin* (for which she was nominated for an Emmy).

Her films include *Ship of Fools*, *Caprice* with Doris Day, *Charly*, *Roseland* (for which she was nominated for another Golden Globe Award), *Testament*, *Flashdance*, *Heartland*, *House of Games* and *Men of Respect*.