

**From:** Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>  
**To:** Jeffrey Epstein <[REDACTED]>  
**Subject:** Fwd: New NYC Play Showcases Unexpected Heroes of Oslo Accords  
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**From:** Jilla Moazami <[REDACTED]>  
**Date:** July 12, 2016 at 21:37:44 GMT+3  
**To:** Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>, "Mona Juul" ([REDACTED])  
**Subject:** New NYC Play Showcases Unexpected Heroes of Oslo Accords

'Oslo' focuses not on the main political players who forged the 1993 agreement, but rather on the Norwegian couple that worked behind the scenes to help bring about a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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On September 13, 1993, on the White House lawn, U.S. President Bill Clinton presided over one of history's more awkward but momentous handshakes. A new play, "Oslo," premiering Monday at New York City's Lincoln Center, brings to life the largely unknown drama of the secret back-channel negotiations that resulted in PLO chief Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shaking hands over the first peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.

While many memories of that momentous day, and of the famous agreement, focus on Rabin and Arafat and on the personal and political chasms they and their colleagues had to cross while forging it – the play focuses on other people: those who toiled tirelessly, at great personal risk, to make it all possible.

The unlikely heroes of this version of the tale are Mona Juul and Terje Rød-Larsen, the Norwegian couple who helped orchestrate the clandestine talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, but receded into the background once the public faces of the agreements – the leaders who would actually sign them and enshrine them in history – stepped forward.

The story of Juul and Rød-Larsen, both diplomats, may have remained a historical footnote if not for a chance encounter. In 2011, while they were living in New York and working for the United Nations, they met Bartlett Sher, a theater director, when their daughters attended the same school. After learning of their involvement in the Oslo process, Tony-winning Sher introduced Rød-Larsen to J. T. Rogers, the American playwright whose production, "Blood and Gifts," Sher was then directing.

After meeting the couple, Rogers soon found himself digging deeply into their past and into the negotiations they had helped to facilitate, which he knew little about.

Few playwrights were perhaps more perfectly poised to conceive the dramatic contours of a story like the Norwegians'. "Blood and Gifts" (about U.S. involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s) and Rogers' other plays often engage with international conflicts, portraying personal dramas cast amid larger political ones.

Indeed, Rogers has written that, "As a playwright, I look to tell stories that are framed against great political rupture. I am obsessed with putting characters onstage who struggle with, and against, cascading world events – and who are changed forever through that struggle."

From left: Michael Aronov, Jefferson Mays and Anthony Azizi in J.T. Rogers' "Oslo." © Charles Erickson

## Neutral participants

The Norwegian couple's fateful relationship with the Middle East began in Cairo, in 1988, with Juul's first diplomatic posting. Taking leave from his job as a sociologist at a Norwegian think tank, Rød-Larsen joined her, and the two soon found themselves making several trips to Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, witnessing first-hand the anguish and violence of the first intifada.

Indeed, in a memorable moment in "Oslo," the characters playing them recall seeing an Israeli soldier confronting a Palestinian protester who is throwing a stone – both of the men, really boys, apparently not wanting to be there or to play their assigned roles.

In their work, Juul and Rød-Larsen – who endeavored to remain neutral when joining forces with others to help forge a peaceful end to the conflict they witnessed – met key players who would enable them to truly understand the complex situation and to be of service.

In Cairo, for example, they came to know Fathi Arafat, Arafat's brother, who worked in a Palestinian hospital in the city. The three discussed the intifada, and Fathi described the effects the violence would have on generations of Palestinian children in Gaza.

Rød-Larsen, whose institute in Norway specialized in social research, launched his own study of the lives of Palestinians in the territories occupied by Israel. In the course of his research, he was required to work with the permission and oversight of officials on both sides. He thus formed enduring relationships with various senior figures and policymakers, including Israeli politician Yossi Beilin who would play a key role in the future secret negotiations.

After returning to Norway, Juul worked for the Foreign Ministry and Rød-Larsen returned to his institute.

Meanwhile, in 1991 in Madrid, the United States began a very public peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. That process, however, was, ironically, conducted in the absence of Arafat's then-powerful PLO – a terror organization that was not recognized by either the U.S. or Israel. As such, officials from those countries were prohibited from meeting with its members.

Seeking a way into the talks, the PLO sent envoys – from exile in Tunisia – to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, hoping the neutral staff there would facilitate contact with the Israelis.

Jennifer Ehle and Jefferson Mays in "Oslo." T Charles Erickson

Because of the ongoing public negotiations, and in an effort to conduct their talks without any official imprimatur, the Norwegians worked in complete secrecy for close to a year.

Participating in Norway in the initial, clandestine negotiating sessions – perhaps the most crucial in building trust and proper rapport – were two economics professors from the University of Haifa, Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, dispatched under the aegis of Beilin. The PLO sent senior staff: Ahmed Qurei, the finance minister of the PLO, and Hassan Asfour, an official liaison.

At one point major tension erupted in the negotiations when Qurei demanded that Israel upgrade the official level of its emissaries; ultimately, Uri Savir, the director general of the Foreign Ministry, and attorney Joel Singer, who spoke directly on behalf of Prime Minister Rabin, joined the talks.

## Male egos

For her part, Juul found herself to be the only woman playing an important role among these high-powered, often feuding men. While she noted that there had been some sexism, she said the men respected her and trusted her judgment.

In an interview for the Lincoln Center Theater Review, in advance of the opening of "Oslo," Juul observed that, "Funnily enough the Israelis and the Palestinians have exactly the same kind of humor – especially the men, I think. They joked a

lot, and they gave my husband quite a hard time.”

Juul and Rød-Larsen’s keen diplomatic skills apparently had much to do with their acceptance during the secret talks; both seemed to have an understanding their job as facilitators and of the need to put themselves aside for the greater good – and greater egos. As Juul described it, “This kind of diplomacy is a lot about acting, knowing your role. Your own feelings aren’t important, [you] put yourself a little on hold, focus on making others comfortable so you can do the right thing.”

Such intriguing political processes, with possible history-altering stakes, seem a natural fit for the stage. However, the difference, for example, between “Oslo” and “All The Way” (about President Lyndon B. Johnson’s passage of the Civil Rights Act), and the upcoming production “Thirteen Days in September” (about the Camp David agreement between President Jimmy Carter, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat), is that the drama of “Oslo” does not rely on the outsized personalities of the big, familiar, players – on those carrying the actual burden and the glory of changing history.

The characters who helped bring Rabin and Arafat to the political stage in Washington on that September day may have worked, and to some extent may have remained, in relative obscurity but they are now receiving their due.

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