

A PLAY TO INSTILL PEACE...

by Robin Blackburn / Herald Zeitung – New Braunfels
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A newcomer to New Braunfels will present an original one-man play at Christian Youth Theater this weekend.

Mike Maria, an Austrian-born actor and director, will perform his show "The Patriot" at the theater at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and at 3 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are pay-what-you-like.

Maria moved to New Braunfels with his wife and daughter in early 2016.

"My wife and I love the small city feeling of New Braunfels," he said. "We have a 2-year-old daughter, Lila-Lucia, and we love the river, Landa Park ... it is a family oriented city. Plus, I like bringing theater to smaller cities. People still have the time to get to know you."

Maria moved to the United States in 1990 and lived in Miami and New York. He wrote several plays and directed several comedies. In 2009, he moved to Berlin, where he met his current wife, and worked in both theater and film. He wrote and directed "Ruth Berlau," a play about the life of a key player in Bertolt Brecht's life.

After relocating to New Braunfels, Maria became active in theater in San Antonio and became connected with the Christian Youth Theater in New Braunfels.

"I taught theater at the Shakespeare Festival at Trinity High in Dallas, plus I taught workshops at Saint Mary's Hall. So I was looking for a theater job in New Braunfels," he said. "I love teaching and to help people find their full potential while I discover my own."

Maria said the New Braunfels theater gave him approval to perform "The Patriot" in their space, and that Christian Youth Theater Artistic Director Josh Scott has been tremendously helpful.

"He is hands-on supportive, as much as his schedule allows," Maria said of Scott.

"The Patriot" is part of a trilogy of plays and shows slices of Maria's seemingly restless life, drawing parallels between personal issues and national affairs and encouraging the audience to embrace peace. The 60-minute play includes live music by composer and singer Yleana Wooten, whom Maria calls "the second half of the play."

"I am lucky to work with a highly talented singer and composer, Yleana Wooten, and she lightens up the play with some beautiful and heartfelt songs," he said.

Maria said he hopes the play will help audience members understand the importance of self-reflection and asking about their roles in the world.

"I try to entertain, but also, I try to dig beneath the surface. And after all is written and said by peacemakers, prophets and peace prize laureates, why are we not at peace? I take myself, look honestly at me, and try to create a world in the play of which the audience can say, 'Yes, that is true' -- all while having fun."

Christian Youth Theater is located at 1389 Industrial Dr. in New Braunfels. For ticket information, call (407) 989-3323.