

# *The Lorelei* captures historical and psychological aspects of Bavaria

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What is insanity? Nobody can really be insane if they create a world to support their insanity, can they? These are some of the questions raised in the Independent Eye's production of *The Lorelei*.

Set in 19th century Bavaria, *The Lorelei* retells the last days of Ludwig of Bavaria (Whit MacLaughlin). At the age of 19 he became King in 1864. He was king of a kingdom in a time period where the political powers wanted to do away with monarchies. He is "a political entity torn between monarchy and modern statehood..." in the midst of the battle of democracy and social darwinism.

A bare room stripped of all regality leaving behind an overpowering sense of reality is where we first encounter Ludwig.

He is screaming, ranting, raving and acting like a child yet he has a sense of dignity. After all, he is the king; he descends from a superior lineage.

Ludwig has been committed to an assylum and declared insane by members of his court. This is partly because his grip on reality is questionable. Ludwig's conspirators finally have him out of their way.

The only person Ludwig has left to rely on is his faithful servant Ostrauer (D.D. Delaney). Ludwig forces Ostrauer to wear a mask because he doesn't want to see his face. The mask prevents Ostrauer from having an individual identity. He lives life as if it were a stage and he is Ludwig's puppet. Ostrauer removes his mask when Ludwig imagines he is talking to others; an Oriental despot, Marie Antoinette, Broom Hilda, and various friends and family of Ludwig's life.

Ludwig is childlike at times. It seems that he is a victim of the "Peter Pan Syndrome" because he refuses to grow up. His life is a fantasy world that has become

real to him.

It is this fantasy world that Ludwig's psychiatrist Dr. Von Gudden (Stephen A. Spiese) is trying to destroy. He says that he wants to cure Ludwig so he can be an effective ruler, but his constant referral to Darwin's theories and his belief in the forming of states indicates that he is for the new Bavaria and against everything Ludwig represents.

Ludwig may indeed be sane but chooses his fantasy world over reality. Whatever Gudden may suggest to Ludwig, he always finds a way to counter it. Obviously, this leaves Gudden frustrated.

Ostrauer does everything he can to reinforce the king's madness. He admits to Gudden that he prefers Ludwig the way he is, it makes him beautiful.

Ludwig may be beautiful, but he can also be downright nasty. His mood swings go back and forth like a swinging pendulum. One minute he is kissing and hugging Ostrauer and the next he

is whipping him with the end of a towel.

Ludwig's end comes when he is taking a walk with Gudden around the castle pond. When he runs straight for the pond's deep water Gudden chases after him and stops him. Ludwig grabs Gudden's head in a fit of fury and forces his head under the water until he drowns. Ludwig then heads for the deeper water and drowns himself.

Perhaps Ludwig was living in the fantasy of the lorelei, the faeries which supposedly live in the Rhine River in Germany.

*The Lorelei* was written by playwright Ann Chamberlin. She fell in love with the story of Ludwig as a child when she lived in Germany.

According to actor Whit MacLaughlin, Ludwig wasn't an easy man to portray. He read biographies, improvised on character, and had to put the pieces of the puzzle together. He "played Ludwig like a flaming homosexual, sort of like Liberace." He added, "*The Lorelei* may be a historical drama, but it's very psychological as well."