

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

BY A.J. ESTA

Ever since seeing *The Bohemian Grove* in 1986, there has been no question in my mind that playwright **Gary Aylesworth** is one of the Bay Area's most prolific (with 13 full length plays) and most impressive playwrights we have. He also happens to be one of the most unrecognized. One reason could be that Aylesworth is a writer with vision using every aspect of theatre (music, dance, story-telling, religion) to create works that challenge with dense (and intense) textures in writing with ideas, word-plays, concepts, theories literally unreeling over each other. His latest work (a World Premiere playing through May 26 at the Performance Gallery) entitled *The Orphan King/Warsaw Is Mine* is a fable-like tale of writer, educator and radio personality **Janusz Korczak**, legendary for his children's novels and early advocacy of children's rights, who is now revered in Israel as one of the Thirty-Six Just Men whose compassion has held the world together. *The Orphan King* is a co-production of Aylesworth's New Plays Construction Crew with A Traveling Jewish Theatre and directed by the latter's **Naomi Newman**. The show is a marvelously innovative work which relies heavily (as does most theatre) on mythology and folk tales in which a quartet of performers (Aylesworth, **Harriet Schiffer**, **Sharon Omi** and musician **Peter Newton**) act out what to the closed mind would appear to be little more than children's theatre stories but which are frightening and incisive

visions of the period in Poland preceding the holocaust. The work uses the device of brilliantly re-enacting folk tales which eventually culminate in a rapid succession of segments interchanging the stories of "The Jew and the Thornbush" (based on the Brothers Grimm) and Korczak's fable about "King Matt the First". Newman's direction gives the complex work a finer focus (and a wry whimsy) that did not exist in some previous Aylesworth plays and the design elements—**Nancy McNally's** sets and costumes, **David Welle's** lighting and Newton's musical score—along with the considerable talents of the excellent performers make this a truly memorable



ALLEN NOMURA

Harriet Schiffer, Gary Aylesworth, Sharon Omi in "The Orphan King"

theatre-piece. Aylesworth's next project promises to be even more inviting since it will be based on the life of **Samuel Goldwyn** and the creation of Hollywood.