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Theater

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Rock around the bloc

by [Brooke Allen](#)

On *Rock 'n' Roll* at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre, *The Farnsworth Invention* at the Music Box Theatre, *Pumpgirl* at the Manhattan Theatre Club, and *Speech & Debate* at the Roundabout Theater.

Tom Stoppard, apparently the most English of playwrights, is in fact a Czech. When he was a baby, in 1939, his Jewish family fled Czechoslovakia just ahead of the Nazi invasion, ending up in Singapore and eventually in England. His father stayed in Singapore to fight, but was captured, dying in a Japanese prison camp. His mother later married an Englishman named Stoppard, who adopted the boy.

What might Stoppard's life have been like if he had returned to Czechoslovakia? His new play *Rock 'n' Roll* is an attempt to imagine such a life. Jan (played by the almost indecently charming Rupert Sewell) was taken to England during the war just as Stoppard was, but goes back to Prague in 1968 to participate in the Velvet Revolution. An ebullient, easy-going young man, he has studied political philosophy at Cambridge with an old-style Communist don, Max Morrow (Brian Cox) and just can't bring himself to ...

Brooke Allen's latest book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Ivan R.

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