

'Lady Day' plays Long Beach

The essentials: This dramatic re-creation of jazz great Billie "Lady Day" Holiday's final performance before her death in 1959 at age 44 reveals her monumental talent as well as her struggles with poverty, racism, sexual abuse, heroin addiction, jail and failed marriages. Across 14 of Holiday's hits (including "Easy Living," "Strange Fruit" and, of course, "God Bless the Child"), Karole Foreman depicts the increasingly inebriated singer's feisty defiance as she regales us with her life stories and teases the shy pianist (Stephan Terry) trying his best to hold her together. The more she unravels, the more impactful the songs become.

Why this? Foreman's résumé demonstrates the acting chops ("Fences" at ICT, "The Wedding Band" at Antaeus) and vocal pipes ("Caroline, or Change" at PCPA Theaterfest, California Repertory's "Next to Normal" in Long Beach) needed for the show's mix of soul-stirring music and heart-rending drama. "At a time when race, gender and the opioid crisis are being discussed loudly on a daily basis," director Wren T. Brown said, "Billie Holiday's life and career are a great example of what it means to not just survive but triumph in the face of lifelong abuse and struggle."

Details: An International City Theatre production at the Long Beach Performing Arts Center, 330 E. Seaside Way. 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, through Nov. 3. \$47-\$55. (562) 436-4610, *internationalcitytheatre.org*.