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LADY DAY at Emerson's Bar & Grill

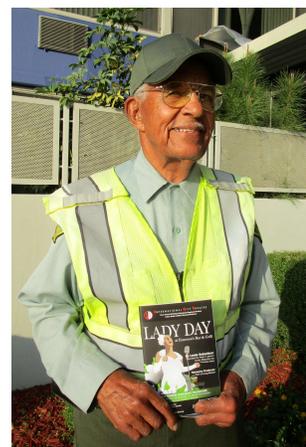
By Kim Webster

Long Beach CA – Billie Holiday was crowned “Lady Day” by musician Lester “Prez” Young. They often performed together but this particular evening Lady Day is accompanied only by her friend and pianist Jimmy Powers. Ascending to the stage is a woman dressed in an evening gown with long white gloves to hide the scars of drug use. Disoriented she approaches the mike and begins to sing “I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone.” At the conclusion she begins to sadly recall not being able to perform in her beloved New York. She talks about wanting children, an old flame Sonny Monroe, being raped as a child, and scrubbing floors at a brothel. Jimmy takes notice and delicately brings her attention back to the performance.

As a child, Billie loved listening to the music of Louis Armstrong and admiring the strong voice of Bessie Smith. She described her own sound as a “blues feeling with the jazz beat.” Billie performs hit songs like “God Bless The Child,” “Ain’t Nobody’s Business,” and “Strange Fruit” in between talking about many of her life experiences including racial discrimination in the music business, performing and traveling in the South, and her prison sentence. As her intimate performance comes to an end, Lady Day’s voice fades into eternity...

Writer Lanie Robertson’s “first lover” told him a story about seeing Lady Day perform. Although her physical appearance was ravished by years of drug use, alcoholism, and her voice diminished, she still entertained her audience. The ICT Theatre seated audience members at café tables bordering the base of the stage; giving the feeling of being transformed back in time to the Emerson. The play originally premiered in 1986 at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia and continues to be performed worldwide. Director Wren T. Brown, producer caryn desai (sic), and musical director Stephan Terry (who played Jimmy Powers) presented an intimate evening with Lady Day (played by Karole Foreman) that was spellbinding! “I think she did a great job portraying her and I congratulated her,” said theatre patron Allen Wallace, “I saw Billie Holiday in concert in Hollywood, and Las Vegas. She was very cocky and I liked that. I liked her because she was defiant.” He also smiled and said, “She was a very attractive lady.”

LADY DAY at Emerson's Bar & Grill was the ICT's grand finale for 2019. For more info please go to www.InternationalCityTheatre.org. See you next season.



Allen Wallace 94 years old