

'Silent Witnesses' an uplifting tale of Holocaust survival

Written by

Deborah Allen, Special to The Times

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The one-woman play 'Silent Witnesses' is written and performed by Stephanie Satie. The show, which tells the story about about Holocaust survivors, begins tonight at Bossier Arts Council's East Bank Theatre in Bossier City. The performances are a benefit for River City Repertory Theatre. / photo by Rick Friesen

"Childhood memories are intended to be a treasury of golden moments. But for some people, the story of their childhood was darkened by the Holocaust"

— Patric McWilliams, artistic director,
River City Repertory Theatre

"Silent Witnesses," the one-woman play, written and performed by Stephanie Satie, attempts to preserve the personal tales of four young Holocaust survivors. It opens tonight at 7:30 at Bossier Arts Council's East Bank Theatre, 630 Barksdale Blvd. in Bossier City with other nightly performances Friday and Saturday at 7:30 and a matinee at 3 p.m. Sunday.

"Silent Witnesses" is based on interviews and conversations with child survivors of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany during World War II. Years after the Holocaust, a group of women meet with their therapist. They all have something in common: They survived the Holocaust as children but never have opened up to anyone about their experiences until now. Their stories are not like most Holocaust narratives. They were children who were hidden and sheltered as much as possible from the events around them. Only one of them actually spent time at Auschwitz concentration camp.

The others were hidden away by friends and family members.

Though one of the women cannot recall much of her childhood, their memories as children molded them into the adults they've become. These women are as different as their experiences, but they share one common thread, they never identified as victims. Instead they triumphed over the terror and brutality they endured even through the most traumatic circumstances any child could live through. The women retain their memories during young childhood but with layers of wisdom and humor of adulthood.

"Their stories are different because they were children, some who do not have any memories of that part of their childhood," Satie said. "I felt a huge responsibility to be true to those memories. I felt as if I was given a gift of their lives and their memories."

Satie said she understands how the backdrop may intimidate some, but "Silent Witnesses" isn't about painful memories.

"It's not about, oh, how I suffered, but it's about survival. It is uplifting, and contains lot of humor as well."

Stephanie Satie has an exquisite talent for storytelling through four compelling characters that easily transitions between them. She seamlessly transforms from one character to the other, differentiating her characters through tone of voice, body movement, expression and subtle change of costume.

She weaves back and forth from Dana, the central figure who is the therapist as well as being a child survivor, to Hannah, who is uneasy but thoughtful. Then she transforms into the feisty powerhouse Paula, and Amelie, who is the protective analytical woman of the group.

Satie moves effortlessly as if all four were in the same room. Though the setting is far from uplifting, Satie brings the characters alive as they open their lives up for examination for the world to see.

"Silent Witnesses" is Satie's third solo play, following the critically-acclaimed "Refugees" (published by Samuel French and Best in Fringe in Edinburgh) and "Coming to America — Transformations."

Proceeds from "Silent Witnesses" will benefit the River City Repertory Theatre. Last year was an ambitious year for River City Rep and this year will be just as exciting.

"Each show has progressively brought in a bigger following and audience, said McWilliams. "The financial take has grown with each audience, and we feel like we have found our home at East Bank Theater. People are starting to catch on to what we are doing here."

River City Repertory Theatre has featured the talents of nationally renowned actors such as Tony Award winner, Donna McKechnie, Academy Award nominated Margaret Avery, West End star Jeremiah James, and television and stage veterans Rosemary Prinz and Anne Lockhart accompanied by local and regional actors.