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Joyfully Shedding the Invisibility Cloak: “Activities of Daily Living,” A Solo Performance by Joanna Lipari

BY FRANCINE ROBY ON JANUARY 14, 2020

REVIEWS

As the audience wandered into the Kahilu Theatre’s Mike Luce Studio for the second show of “Activities of Daily Living,” performed and written by Joanna Lipari, I couldn’t help but notice most were middle-aged and up, but also very vibrant—smiling, eagerly looking for friends who had saved them seats in the sold-out venue, wearing bright aloha tops or large, stylish silk scarves, and practical shoes, just a couple canes, braving another windy, rainy Waimea Sunday afternoon. Most were women, but some men, and all talking and laughing away, until the entrance hall curtains were drawn and the actor appeared in a spotlight stage left, slightly bent over, wearing a housecoat, glasses, and ruffled hair, much as we may have seen on local aunties or our own mothers.

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Lipari has said that her solo performance, inspired by monologues and performances that first caught attention on YouTube, is about being invisible as an older person in our culture, and challenging that public perception. Through a series of 7 personal stories and two narratives, bookended by Prologue and Epilogue, interspersed with slam poetry, and accompanied by original silent animation by Anna Bron, the seasoned actor, and accompanying images led the audience on a timeline from kindergarten to getting the standard ADL geriatric assessment brochure after age 65.

The Prologue ends in a rallying cry, and the 10-foot screen behind Lipari erupts with bursting colors, as Lipari begins to “...reconsider everything!” Tales from Catholic school kindergarten, and youth entrepreneurship give insight into an emerging personality and approach to life, boldly facing crimes she could not forgive, and asking for forgiveness for her own. The animations are artfully integrated with the stories, and Lipari sometimes turns to direct their action, or interact with silent characters, or pace in front of the story. Humorous and touching tales from acting school days, early romance and a one-night stand, getting “woke” to feminism and public protest, motherhood, a Montana ranch, lead to a suddenly slower-paced vignette of possible voodoo, mid-life betrayal and divorce—“The Story That’s Hard to Write”—and an emergence into grieving, self-

awareness, and transformation. With the help of ‘four angels’ on a solo journey to Sicily, Lipari retrieves belief in herself again. Then, calling up Life’s cruel trick of yanking the rug out from under us, a familiar daily activity of finding one’s parked car resurfaces insecurity, despair, and redemption from unexpected sources, like a garage attendant. The Epilogue recalls the Prologue, but with new awareness, restored personal power, and inspiration to fellow travelers in the grateful audience, showing their gratitude with a very visible, standing ovation.

Along the way, Lipari artfully intersperses triumphant spoken word pieces, narration with American Sign Language, a Hemingway quote, and interacting with the animated images of hope, metaphors of our common “twigness,” and magical opening blossoms— actor and animation perfectly choreographed and lighted, in the seamless 90 minutes. Lipari’s performance is polished, but personal, engaging the audience to identify with her life stories and to take heart for their own journeys from the invisibility of old age into seizing the passion inside each of us.

Bravos are due to Director Beth Dunnington as well. *ADL* was developed in Dunnington’s writer workshops over a three-year period, and Beth co-conceived the show with Lipari. The wonderful well-timed visuals came together with the assistance of animator Anna Bron.

Francine Roby does copyediting at *Big Island Music Magazine* and lives in Ahualoa HI.

Photos: Steve Roby

Read an interview with Joanna Lipari [here](#).

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