

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill

- *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* is a jukebox musical written by Lanie Robertson with musical arrangement by Danny Holgate. This production is directed by Mitchell Butel, with Zahra Newman as Associate Director and Musical Direction by Kym Purling.
- *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* runs for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, with no interval.
- *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* is set in a seedy bar in Philadelphia on one night in 1959. The show portrays one of Billie Holiday's last performances, given four months before her death. Billie Holiday is also known as and referred to as 'Lady Day'.
- Two actors play the character of Billie Holiday on alternate performances – Zahra Newman and Elenoa Rokobaro. Billie is accompanied by a three-piece jazz band who play live music throughout the production. The pianist, Kym Purling, plays the character of Jimmy Powers. The Assistant Stage Manager, Sean Proude, sometimes appears as Hal Emerson, the proprietor of the bar.
- The action of the play is one act, in real-time. Billie is performing for the patrons of 'Emerson's Bar & Grill' and in between songs tells the story of her life and music career. The anecdotes are told through monologue, directly addressed to the audience.
- The style of the production is naturalistic. It is designed and performed to make the audience feel they are attending Billie's performance. Some audience members are seated on the Belvoir stage at cabaret tables. There is a small amount of interaction between the actor playing Billie and audience members seated on the stage. At one point Billie asks an audience member for a light[er]. Later Billie ambles through the cabaret seating searching for her drink, walking through the tables.
- The actors and musicians speak in American accents for this performance. The dialogue is in keeping with 1950s idioms and contains some expressions not used in 2023 which students may find jarring. Including using the term "colored" for African Americans or phrases like "gassin' my fat ass out playin' 'em." which she uses to mean 'she was binge listening to jazz records to exhaustion'. Billie uses outdated terms referring to sex work - growing up around "whore houses or sportin' houses" or her brief time working at a "chaise lounge".
- This play contains references to racism and social injustice, including segregation and incarceration, and the exploitation of black women in the sex work and in black artists the music industry. In one story Billie recounts an event where she was refused use of a toilet in a restaurant while on tour, escalating to her protest - relieving herself on the floor of the kitchen.
- This play contains references to traumatic life events, including abuse and sexual assault. Anecdotes are shared in a nonchalant tone and often to rationalise struggles from her life and career. In one story Billie shares "one guy hurt me so bad I bled solid for a week", later normalising being hit by a lover or father in the song '*Ain't Nobody's Business if I Do*'. In another story she describes finding her grandmother has died one morning as "almost the worst things that ever happened to me" and stoically comments "that and bein' raped when I was ten" before breezing past the statement and moving on to another story.
- The play contains strong language, spoken in a conversational tone to the audience, and at times to display anger and hurt. 'B*tch' is used to refer to women, in both derogatory and empowered contexts.
- The play contains references to excessive alcohol and drug addiction and the depiction of heavy intoxication on stage. Billie drinks 'whisky' on stage and appears increasingly intoxicated throughout the set. She refers to heroin as "hair-on" and moonlight. Late in the set Billie leaves the stage and returns with visible track marks on her forearm. Her arm is caringly covered with a glove by Jimmy. Drug use is *not depicted* on stage.
- The production contains the use of herbal cigarettes, at times in proximity to the on-stage seating.
- The production features a real chihuahua carried on stage by the actor playing Billie. (The dog is a trained performance dog with a handler backstage at all times).
- Students may need to be briefed about theatre etiquette. Please turn mobile phones off completely and refrain from eating in the theatre. Students need to know that the performance is live and that the actors see and hear them in the audience. Taking notes shouldn't happen during performances. Schools shows are followed by a Question and Answer session with the cast. Students will have a chance to ask question about anything they don't fully understand afterwards.

Schools performance tickets are not sent out beforehand, please collect your tickets from the Box Office in the foyer of the theatre upon arrival on the day.

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