

LOCAL NEWS

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'Caged' shows the unleashing of spirit

Soliloquy tells of blind woman's journey from trauma to acceptance

By CLARA HIERONYMUS

REVIEW

The show is called *Caged*, but it could as appropriately be called *Uncaged*.

Subtitled "A soliloquy about the loss of sight," it's one-woman production, an autobiography about coming to terms with an unchangeable trauma, of moving out of a cage of misery and self-pity into the freedom of acceptance. Not passive acceptance but a vigorous stepping into unfettered joy in living.

If that makes *Caged* sound ponderous or sermonizing, it isn't meant to. As written and performed by Estelle Condra it is high drama, great theater with wit and emotion, marked with style and professionalism.

Condra is blonde, beautiful, bouyant — and blind. She is a professional actress, born in South Africa and London-trained. The retina pigmentosa which would finally take her sight was developing in her early childhood as she romped and played, a happy, imaginative tomboyish little girl.

We hear her mother's voice, off-stage, loving and praying about her daughter's impending blindness. She was taken from one eye specialist to another, then to faith healers, soothsayers, and tribal elders. Condra's impersonation of the tribal storyteller is wonderful, and here it is that we hear the story of the dead bird that, held next to one's heart,

Getting there

Caged will have a final performance at 2:30 p.m. today at Darkhorse Theater, 4610 Charlotte Ave. Tickets \$15. For reservations, 297-7113.

returns to life. It becomes the metaphor for her life, presaging her understanding of herself and ultimately enabling her to come to terms with her physical deprivation.

We follow her to a girls' school, then to London and drama school, being with boys for the first time (one pompously smug boyfriend is caricatured painfully but hilariously), and subjected to medical exper-

imentation.

This is not a dry recital of a young woman's experiences. It's a live experience for the audience that filled the Darkhorse theater last night despite the capricious weather. Condra's blindness, as she learns to ski (it was painful to the female psyche to wear a jacket that said "Blind Skier"), and to adjust to living in Nashville with her loving husband (and adjusting to Nashville accents as well).

Condra's blindness is in her eyes, not in her spirit. Her smile is like a rose opening to the sun, her gorgeous voice bespeaks her inner radiance. *Caged* is theater at its best. ■

Clara Hieronymus reviews theater for The Tennessean.