

LIFE & LEISURE

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THEATER REVIEW

A one-act worth seeing twice

By Melonie Magruder

Sidewalk Studio Theatre's production of "The Crossing" exemplifies why "black box" theater can offer the best of live drama, starting with a funny, precise performance by author-actress Rachel Ogilvy.

She is so nuanced, so pitch-perfect, you can believe the voices of all the different characters she plays while quietly discovering the inner integrity and suffocating sadness of Rose, our narrator.

Add to it an Equity-waiver venue that is so intimate, you can see an actor's pupils dilate in orchestration with the action's intensity.

And finally, a smaller setting perfectly frames one-act pieces such as this, a flawlessly written, achingly resonant

story of a daughter coming to terms with a parent's suicide.

It's no mean feat, commanding an audience's full attention for nearly an hour, with little more than a stack of books and a model of the Golden Gate Bridge as set pieces. Ogilvy fills the job description with absolute authority.

To the disquieting sounds of wind blowing through steel girders and an ominous splash, we learn the mathematical equation that is Rose's mantra as she struggles to place the death of her father in a context she understands: If a body falls from a height of 100 meters starting at a rate of 9.8 meters per second, will it reach its terminal velocity before it hits the water below?

"My dad taught me how to

FYI

WHAT: "The Crossing" — One-woman one-act, written and performed by Rachel Ogilvy.

WHEN: 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday until Oct. 3.

WHERE: Sidewalk Studio Theatre, 4150 Riverside Drive, Burbank

TICKETS: \$20

CONTACT: (818) 558-5702 or visit www.SSTproductions.org

swim," Rose tells us. "Because in deep water, you have to know how to save yourself."

With that, Rose slowly unveils the childhood tragedy that stunted any adult emotional development. Ogilvy's Glaswegian roots are well plumbed when voicing the distinctly different and funny characters that take her from being the slightly looked-down-upon substitute teacher

in a rural Scottish high school teachers' lounge to an emotionally wrenching discovery in a second-hand bookstore.

Along the way, we meet Rina, a less-than-accommodating library attendant; some disrespectful students; and Ian, a well-intentioned schlub whose persistence might be Rose's saving grace. Ogilvy embodies each character with beautifully tuned accents and



Courtesy of Marc Hauptert

Rachel Ogilvy is an actor and writer of "The Crossing," showing at the Sidewalk Studio Theatre in Burbank.

not one extraneous word or gesture.

Because there was so much left unanswered in her childhood, Rose is a bit didactic, and her righteous rants about respecting her position are perfectly reasonable, while giving voice to her frustration with a world that owes her no

explanation. So Rose's fascination with the Golden Gate Bridge is a safe metaphor for the unanswered question of guilt she feels about the loss of her father.

"Maybe if I had said just the right thing, he wouldn't have

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"This is the kind of theater the community should support."

"...a flawlessly written, achingly resonant story..."

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"...see this example of perfect small theater..."

THEATER

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done it," she agonizes.

I could have listened to more of Rose's story, but Ogilvy — a British actress and playwright who has performed on London's West End, as well as starred in long-running British television series and BBC radio programs — leaves you with just the essentials, a sweetly sad tale of loss, redemption and hope.

Director Paul Christie stages Rose's hourlong monologue with spare, spot-on influence, and the sound design is an ideal highlight. The only prob-

lem with the production is that not enough people will take the opportunity to see this example of perfect small theater.

There are only 32 seats in the Sidewalk Studio Theatre, and if each one of them is not filled for "The Crossing's" three-week run, it would be an embarrassing display of cultural malaise.

This is the kind of theater the community should support.

• **MELONIE MAGRUDER** is a journalist and screenwriter who founded an English-language theater company in Paris, a project undertaken for the art, not the money.