**The PRESHOW NOTES - LADY DAY AT EMERSON’S BAR & GRILL**

Written by Lanie Robertson

Musical arrangements by Danny Holgate

**This season is presented by**

State Theatre Company South Australia, Belvoir St Theatre, and Melbourne Theatre Company

The Audio Described performances will take place at 2pm on Saturday 2nd September and at 6:30pm on Monday 4th September at the Space Theatre at the Adelaide Festival Centre.

The performance runs for 1 hour 35 minutes with no interval.

There will be a sensory tour 1 hour prior to each of the Audio Described performances, and the audio describers will commence introductory notes 15 mins before each performance commences.

**SUMMARY**

It’s 1959. In a small bar in a basement in Philadelphia that’s seen better days, one of the greatest jazz singers of all-time, Billie Holiday walks onstage. Unbeknown to her audience, it will be one of her last performances. The jazz trio start to play, her incomparable voice fills the room. The songs flow but so do the stories. Tales of her youth and her heroes – of Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman and her beloved mother, the Duchess. Hard times, happy times. Love, oppression, addiction but survival, courage and grace. And to the music she keeps returning. With signature charm and wit, she laughs more than she cries, as she tells us how she came to be known as the great Lady Day.

**CONTENT WARNING**  
Adult themes, coarse language, smoking of herbal cigarettes, references to sex, assault, racism, racial slurs and depiction of drug and alcohol use.

**THE SET**

The Space Theatre is a square ‘black box’ theatre set on a diagonal. It has been transformed into an underground nightclub with a small stage positioned in the far corner of the venue, with raked seating along the left and right sides of the venue. The audience enters at the top of the seating rake, with stairs down to the auditorium floor, giving the audience a sense of entering the basement club.

Antique lamp shades of different sizes, shapes, and muted colours, with fringing and brocade, hang randomly from the rafters of the venue, with a cluster of 4 shades above the stage.

10 small cabaret tables are positioned on the auditorium floor, between the raked seating and the stage, which is about 1.5m above the floor level, with blue velvet drapes tracing the edge of the stage and covering the rise. Each table has a small lamp, a bottle of water and 4 glasses, along with 4 bent wood chairs. The table lamps of random colours glow softly throughout the show.

To the right of the stage, are coat racks, a standard lamp and picture frames on a wall of a small corridor leading to a partially concealed bar.

Stairs on the left and right of the stage, and a small, curved staircase tracing a circular dias at the front corner of the stage, provide access to the single wide landing that runs left and right of the stage front centre point. A bright white panel, 10cm high, is lit up between each step of the curved staircase to where a vocal mic is positioned our front. The same white panel traces the whole length of the step riser between the walkway landing and the main stage. The stage and landing have a black high gloss mirrored finish. Gold coloured shell-shaped sconces line the front edge of the landing and circular dias.

The walls of the basement club are rough red bricks, with some missing and a few patches of peeling plaster. The walls are lit with bright coloured wash lights that change to suit the mood of different songs, between a gold chain curtain on each side, and a blue velvet curtain that hangs across the back corner of the stage.

On the left of the stage is a black grand piano, where the pianist directs the band with his back to the audience. A whisky glass and bottle sit on top of a bar stool beside the piano. A double bass sits in the far corner of the stage, in front of the blue velvet curtain, and to the right is a small drum kit set up on a small circle of carpet. A back-lit glass brick window sits high on the back right wall, between the bass and drums, suggesting a basement window to the sidewalk above.

A high bar stool is placed mid-stage, and a mic stand sits in the centre of the circular dias of the landing, one step down from the stage.

**CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES**

**Billie Holiday**, born Elenora Fagan in 1915, was a (black) American jazz singer who began singing in Harlem nightclubs as a teenager. The nickname ‘Lady Day’ was given to her in 1937 by a friend and collaborator, sax player Lester Young. While this play is fictional it is inspired by one of Billie’s final performances at Emerson’s jazz club in South Philadelphia in early 1959. She died just a few months later of cirrhosis, aged 44.

Billie is of medium height, a slim and curvaceous build and is brown-skinned. She has a full, wide mouth and wears bright red lipstick. Her dark eyes sparkle as she smiles and laughs. Billie uses her hands animatedly as she talks and sings.

She has black hair, pulled back tightly from her face into a high pony-tail that swings against the back of her neck. She is dressed in a white, full-length, sleeveless evening gown made of an embossed satin brocade. The fitted heart-shaped bodice has wide satin straps that form a halter top A large bow is tied at the back of her waist. The floor-length full-circle skirt of the dress hides silver, strappy, high-heeled evening sandals.

Billie wears a glittery diamante necklace with matching drop earrings. She has long white satin fingerless evening gloves, that extend to her wrists from just above her elbows, held in place with a loop over her middle finger and with decorative beading on the back of each hand. Silver rings adorn fingers on both hands. Later she adds a corsage of white gardenias to her hair which was Billie’s signature or ‘trademark’ look.

**The Jimmy Powers Trio**

The Jimmy Powers Trio, with Jimmy played by Kym Purling on piano, Victor Rounds on double bass and Kelvin Welch on drums, are onstage playing when the audience enters and remain onstage, at their instruments, throughout. The band members each have light brown skin.

**Jimmy Powers/the piano player** is ofmedium height and a solid build. Clean-shaven, he is balding with closely cropped hair. Jimmy has a round, smiling face and wears dark-rimmed glasses. He is dressed in a dark grey suit and waistcoat, jacket unbuttoned, over a crisp white shirt with a red tie. He wears shiny black patent-leather shoes with green-patterned socks.

**The Double Bass Player** is of medium height and build, with a full, clean-shaven face and wears black-rimmed glasses. He is bald. He wears a dark brown suit with matching waistcoat, jacket unbuttoned, over a crisp white shirt and yellow tie. Brown calfskin shoes complete his smart attire. He is focussed and contained, somewhat formal.

**The Drummer** is tall and thin, slightly built, with a thin clean-shaven face. He smiles frequently and often reacts agreeably to things Billie says. He wears a grey soft cap, white open-necked shirt, a dark-grey buttoned-up waistcoat with an unbuttoned, burgundy-coloured velvet jacket, over light grey trousers and brown calfskin shoes. His more casual attire matches his easy, loose, elegant movements.

**Pepe** is a honey and white short-haired chihuahua, carried onstage by Billie toward the end of her performance

**Waiter / Hal Emerson** – tends to patrons at the cabaret tables and calls out from time to time in response to Billie’s questions. He wears black tux trousers, a black waistcoat, and a white cropped waiter’s jacket.

**CREATIVE TEAM**

DIRECTOR Mitchell Butel

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR Zahra Newman

MUSICAL DIRECTOR AND

ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS Kym Purling

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER Ailsa Paterson

LIGHTING DESIGNER Govin Ruben

SOUND DESIGNER Andrew Howard

VOICE AND DIALOGUE COACH Geraldine Cook-Dafner

VOICE AND DIALOGUE COACH Jennifer Innes

**CAST**

BILLIE HOLIDAY Zahra Newman

ALTERNATE BILLIE HOLIDAY Elenoa Rokobaro

JIMMY POWERS/PIANO PLAYER Kym Purling

DOUBLE BASS PLAYER Victor Rounds

DRUMMER Calvin Welch

PEPE Hugo the chihuahua

**Getting to the Venue**

Adelaide Festival Centre is easily accessible by [public transport](http://www.adelaidemetro.com.au/), including the tram (stop at Railway Station), trains, buses and a [free bus service](https://www.adelaidemetro.com.au/Timetables-Maps/Special-Services/Free-City-Services) that operates on a loop throughout the city and North Adelaide with stops on the corner of King William Road and North Terrace.

This completes the audio introduction for Lady Day at Emersons Bar & Grill. Your Describers are Kari Seeley and Kay Jamieson.

For more information on audio described performances please contact Access2Arts using the email address [audio.describer@access2arts.org.au](mailto:audio.describer@access2arts.org.au) or speak to the describers.