Inside A Legend: ambitious, exciting, informative

INSIDE A LEGEND: IMAGES OF ST. JOAN
Conceived and performed by Mari Novotny-Jones. Technical direction and design by Bob Raymond. Video by Dan Lang. With David Miller.
At Mobius, 354 Congress St., Boston.

BY SIMMON L. GARSTINE

We were requested to arrive half an hour before curtain so that we could experience the introductory installation. As we entered the outer room, a tape began playing telling the story of St. Joan of Arc, the teenage heroine who led the French in victory over the English at the battle of Orleans in 1429. The fifteen-minute tape repeated twice, detailing St. Joan's life from the day she first heard voices while playing tag with her friends until the day she was burned at the stake by the Inquisition. ("They removed her heart from the ashes. It would not burn.")

Accompanying the tape was a slide show with images of St. Joan, a toy-soldier mockup of the Battle of Orleans, a confessional booth with tape recorder, burnt food, cheese, and newspaper clippings featuring reviews of Joan of Arc performances and advertisements for the supernatural.

The contrast between the taped narrative and the advertisements selling magical holy water from France was profound. The installation established a conflict between the historical St. Joan and modern impression of her and Catholicism in general. This conflict is perpetuated throughout the piece.

Novotny-Jones' performance begins with a short narrative of St. Joan but shifts immediately to her childhood memories ("The first time I met Joan of Arc I was seven years old..."). Her first communion, and descriptions of growing up in the Catholic school system. As we follow the story of her life, we are taken back again and again to incidents and happenings in St. Joan's. Never does the comparison appear to be strained. The presence of St. Joan in Novotny-Jones' life becomes tangible to the audience.

The performance, which lasted over two hours, featured many key elements of Joan's experience, including the confessions, visions, ordeals, and赣州 deaths. The line between the history of Joan of Arc and the history of Mari Novotny-Jones remained clear at all times, but the distinction became less important as the evening progressed.

Unfortunately, the piece was too long. It could have been shortened without a loss of purpose by elimination of the references to "Joan of Arc Brie Cheese" and a few other incidents. Additionally, a video on Vietnam during the segment "Joan of Arc: The Heroic" seemed strongly out of place; it wasn't the purpose of the performance to make a statement on Vietnam.

Technically, the orchestration of sound, lights, video, and props was well performed, except that Bob Raymond should not have needed to cue for successive slides. Despite these reservations, Inside a Legend was an exciting and informative performance by a very powerful and talented actress. Clearly Mari Novotny-Jones gave of herself and deeply cared about her subject. There is no much higher praise to be given.

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