

## Blackhorse opens up a different view of war time

By Anne Ritchie

A poster of Rosie the Riveter, the bandana-clad female who symbolized the women toiling in munitions factories while men fought World Wars, adorns the program for Blackhorse Village Players Women and War.

This was a woman who made her mark, taking up the reins of the war machine, standing beside countrymen in the fight for freedom. So too, do the cast of Women and War, whose women bridge generations from the Korean conflict to Vietnam, from World Wars to Afghanistan, from the streets of Brooklyn where anarchists shout hate to Los Alamos where the atomic bomb was born.

Women and War is a powerful play featuring a cast representing thousands, enfolding the fear, devotion, love and despair found in war.

Radio broadcasts set the stage for war, given a stark, yet meaningful, setting. The lone voice of a broadcaster speaks volumes, introducing each period of turmoil in memorable words. As each solitary character tells their story, we hear the loneliness, longing, dedication and shock that united the soldier overseas with the family at home.

You will meet Betsy and Helen, the wives who waited for their sweethearts and husbands, and with the tremendously sensitive portrayals by Jamie Defoe, newcomer to Blackhorse, you will feel for them, years compacted into breathless moments.

Martin Buote, so intense he could speak for every soldier who has been wrenched from home and sent to war, receives the cherished letters sent by his wife and answers in kind, be it with sadness or hopes toward a return home, love or concern, dreams or reality.

Not all went to war overseas. Some fought at home, seeing America as the enemy. Such is the case with Victoria Tokarski as Axis Sally, one of many roles illuminated by Tokarski's versatile talents. She can take on the strident voice of anarchy just as touchingly as a story of an injured and sorrowing specialist 4th Class Delaney, and then offers a stirring performance of a patriotic camp follower who loved to dance.

Midst the whirlwind of roles positioning women in the crosshairs of war, we find Denise Kennedy, who brilliantly shows us the life of a Gold Star mother, Los Alamos wife, Donut Girl, Western Union and Hello Girl. The stories of each character bring to life the little known contributions of women in combat, and Kennedy, an accomplished actor, offers a stirring and creative portrayal of each woman's story.

Nurses had a unique place in the war effort, and Dorothy Schmauder inspires empathy, sympathy and love for her caring performances set in Vietnam and the Second World War. So well done is this characterization that the audience hangs onto her every word, seeing the hope given and despair present in war.

Director Harry Lavigne and producer Cheryl Phillips have outdone themselves in Women and War, opening an entirely different world to the viewer most believably, most heartfelt. It is well worth the experience, offering a memorable education and insight.

Women and War, currently on stage at Blackhorse Village Players, continues June 17 to 19, and 23 to 25. Call 905-880-5002 for ticket information.



The acclaimed docudrama Women And War by playwright Jack Hilton Cunningham offers a powerful conclusion to The Blackhorse Village Players' 2015-16 season, now playing through June 25. The cast includes (seated) Victoria Tokarski, Marion Lavigne, (standing) Denise Kennedy, Jamie Defoe, Martin Buote and Dorothy Schmauder. Photo by Karalee Stevens