

BILLIE HOLIDAY SIZZLES ON HARTFORD STAGE  
BONNIE GOLDBERG 203-397-5433 8/13/09

To jazz performer Billie Holiday, singing was the way she communicated, the way she gave love. "When people applaud," she was known to say, "it's the only time I feel loved." With a sweet, mellow, rich voice, she had a special way to manipulate tempo and phrasing in a personal and intimate style that characterized her as an American jazz singing legend, as Lady Day, Queen of Song.

You're invited to get reacquainted with the great and gifted soul sister until Saturday, August 22 as "Yesterdays an Evening with Billie Holiday" by Reenie Upchurch and directed by Woodie King, Jr. swirls its magic onto the Hartford Stage.

Despite her happy upbeat sounding name, which is said to have come from an actress she admired Billie Dove and her probable father Clarence Holiday, she led a sad life. Her childhood was marked with birth from an unwed thirteen year old mother, poverty, rape and imprisonment for prostitution. No wonder the lady sang the blues.

Billie Holiday sang about love but she never had anyone to cherish her, not her family and certainly not the men who befriended her and left her addicted to a drug habit that eventually cost her her life.

With a traditional gardenia in her hair and a glass of liquor in her hand, Vanessa Rubin truly becomes Billie Holiday, performing in May 1959 at a New York nightclub destined to be the last and final moments in the spotlight for a woman who was unforgettable.

Stirring songs like "God Bless the Child" which she wrote herself, "My Man, "Pig Feet" and "What a Little Moonlight Can Do" punctuate her uncensored memories from the past. Calling Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong the icing on her cake, she acknowledged she "can only sing the way I feel" and that there was something about singing that "sets you free." The incomparable Vanessa Rubin is wonderfully accompanied by Levi Barcourt, pianist and musical director, Bernard Davis on drums and vocalist and David Jackson on bass.

For tickets (\$26-65), call Hartford Stage, 50 Church Street, Hartford at 860-527-5151 or online at [www.hartfordstage.org](http://www.hartfordstage.org). Performances are Tuesday – Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., with matinees Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.

Spend an evening with Billie Holiday and let her croon about her heartbreak of a life where she learned at a very young age that love is a faucet that can be turned off and on.

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