

Great Barrington Public Theatre, The Mount, Lenox, MA

Representation and How to Get It, by Joyce Van Dyke. Directed by Judy Braha.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Mine eyes have seen the glory. . .”

Great Barrington Public Theatre presents a one-woman show about early suffragist Julia Ward Howe, wife and poet, philosopher and activist, a woman before her time in a time that won't be forgotten. It is the late 1860s. She is preparing a speech for the next day and having a difficult time with it. She has already published a great many things including her poem turned into a popular song “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” A woman out of her time, she resents her



Elaine Vaan Hogue as Julia Ward Howe

husband's control of her own property, her money and her voice. She will not be stilled, she will not be ignored even if this is the role of a woman in 1865.

This play, new to The Berkshires, has been seen in many places, including New York City during the past three years. It is clear from the fine performance by Elaine Van Hogue that the work is still in its formative state. Vaan Hogue was playing Howe in a much larger work when author Joyce Van Dyke and director Judy Braha decided to create this solo work for her.

In a curious twist of plot, just before the conclusion of the work, the actress strips away her nineteenth century garb to become herself, to comment on the play, on the woman and on the political ramifications of Howe's

work and what it means now, in the twenty-first century. This is the sort of reflection usually left to a rehearsal process and it is fascinating to watch Vaan Hogue examine what she has been doing. However, it is distressing to discover that the actress and the character sound so much alike. It is, perhaps, the author's contention that very little has changed in a hundred and fifty years. Women still struggle for equality, for an honest place in this world. Women's rights are being limited once again, turning back the gender clock to a much earlier time, something Howe would never have tolerated. This is the message of the play. This is what we need to hear. Van Dyke, Braha and Van Hogue set us straight and it is painful and important. BRAVI!!

+ 8/27/2023 +

Representation and How to Get It plays in The Stables at Edith Wharton's The Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts through August 27. For information and tickets go to GBPT.org or call 413-372-1980.