



Jun
03
2009

A Time to Dance 'disarmingly honest'

By Dottie Ashley
Post and Courier Reviewer

When Libby Skala alights on the stage, her arms covered with a pink pashmina, she moves as gracefully as a butterfly.

It's then you realize her delicate movements serve as an integral part of the play "A Time to Dance," which opened Tuesday at the Footlight Players Theatre as part of Piccolo Spoleto.

The playwright and actress, who lives in Berkeley, Calif., tells of the fascinating life of her great-aunt Elizabeth Polk, known as "Lisl," who was a modern dancer in Austria, and who, after coming to America in 1939, taught dance and introduced dance therapy as a treatment for deaf children.

Skala fills the stage not only with the persona of Lisl but also portrays numerous other characters. As she says "To move is to express individuality and express life."

Skala's Austrian accent is convincing but not overwhelming, and her character is matter-of-fact about the poverty Austria faced after World War I as children were sent to Denmark to live so they wouldn't starve.

During the performance, Skala beats on a small drum and shakes a tambourine, varying her choreography and moving freely in her black tunic and long pants.

Skala's characterization is disarmingly honest and belies her angelic countenance, when as Lisl she describes her mother's coldness toward her when it was feared she would die as a baby. But when she didn't die, and there was another mouth to feed, her father strove to become successful in a new business, which ultimately enabled the family to escape the Nazis.

Humor emerges when Lisl confesses she married her boyfriend because she fell in love with his enormous bathroom!

Shortly after, as Adolf Hitler marched into Vienna, Lisl expresses terror and then suddenly, peace. "I always believed I existed before birth, and that I will exist after death," Lisl says. "It is the strong inner core I possess."