

NEW YORK, Oct. 15, 2009

Landers Was A Lady With Almost All The Answers

Review: Judith Ivey Stars As Ann Landers - A Lady With Almost All The Answers



(AP) Being "The Lady With All the Answers" was an enjoyable yet serious responsibility for Ann Landers.

It's also the title of a one-woman biographical play about the advice columnist now playing at off-Broadway's Cherry Lane Theatre.

Drawn from the letters of readers and the answers Landers provided, playwright David Rambo has pieced together a touching portrait of Landers and of the domestic issues, large and small, that concerned post-World War II Americans.

Judith Ivey is absolutely charming as the indomitable Esther "Eppie" Pauline Friedman Lederer, the popular, humorous and down-to-earth person behind the inherited name of "Ann Landers," who wrote the column for nearly six decades, starting in 1945.

With a near-constant twinkle in her eye, a broad Midwestern accent and a perfect, bouffant, helmet-flip hairdo, Ivey flits about the stage, enacting one seminal evening in Landers' life in June 1975. She's trying to write "the most difficult column" of her career. It's a personal letter to her 60 million readers that she fears could end her beloved career, but she's pushing through it, trying all the tricks she knows to make her deadline.

Artfully directed by BJ Jones, Ivey injects humor and vitality into everything her character does and says. Landers reads aloud from columns she's selecting for a book, interspersed with anecdotes and witty comments about columns, readers and her personal life.

Landers covered a lot of controversial subjects, forcing her readers to think about things such as marital satisfaction, divorce, suicide, homosexuality, contraception, the warning signs of cancer _ and more.

The mundane also got a lot of reader attention. Landers joyfully shares how she uncovered the secret that a lot of people liked doing their housework in the nude, and how she generated a storm of mail about the proper way to hang a roll of toilet paper.

Ivey ruefully conveys the whirling emotions Landers has about her husband and family, including the way her twin sister, called Popo, copied the Ann Landers idea and created rival columnist, "Dear Abby." "Blood may be thicker than water," she says briskly, "but it boils faster, too."

Rambo includes fascinating statistics _ Landers sorted and counted all her reader mail _ and saves some very serious stuff for the second act. Proud of her many accomplishments at helping people, Landers says: "I'd rather have my columns on a thousand refrigerator doors than win a Pulitzer Prize."

This homage to a hardworking lady, who acknowledges that she doesn't always have all the answers, runs through Nov. 29.