



*The
Spirit of Harriet
Tubman*

Written and Performed by
Leslie McCurdy
www.lesliemccurdy.ca

“Unquestionably one of the best performances I have ever attended!!”

The Spirit of Harriet Tubman was performed at the
2011 National Black Theatre Festival



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Born into slavery in Maryland, Harriet Tubman not only ran away alone to escape slavery, she returned to the south nineteen times to lead over three hundred other slaves to freedom in the northern United States and Canada. Her work as a nurse and a spy during the civil war was instrumental in helping the North defeat the South, thus forcing the abolition of slavery in the United States. Her entire life was spent working for the benefit of others, while asking little for herself. Now **“The Spirit of Harriet Tubman”** continues that legacy! Unable to rest as long as there are those who need guidance, **“The Spirit of Harriet Tubman”**, returns time and again sharing her life story and the things she learned along the way. Leslie McCurdy captivates her audience in **“The Spirit of Harriet Tubman”** with only a trunk of costumes and a barren stage as her landscape. For a breathtaking hour, she embodies the “spirit” of Harriet Tubman and shares Harriet’s empowering story woven with words said to have been Harriet’s own. Leslie takes the audience through Ms. Tubman’s childhood, her harrowing solo flight from slavery, her dedicated involvement with the Underground Railroad, her victorious rescue mission during the civil war and her commitment to others in her later years. This inspiring solo performance, by an artist described as being “of exceptional skill and grace”, teaches of the faith and conviction that drove Harriet Tubman to follow her dreams; the spirit of the past connecting with the present, inspiring her charges to have the courage to do the same in envisioning their future. It has been called “brilliant!”, “a powerful, must see performance!!”, “something to be experienced by everyone!”

THE SPIRIT OF HARRIET TUBMAN looks forward to visiting you!

For further information contact:
JRA Fine Arts

Toll Free: 888-939-ARTS (2787)
www.jrafinearts.com

What People are saying about
THE SPIRIT OF HARRIET TUBMAN

A Finalist National Canadian Chalmers Award for 'Best New Play for Young Audiences'

"...Brilliant piece!"

**Edgar Dobie, Executive Producer,
Mead Center for American Theatre, Wash DC**

"The Spirit of Harriet Tubman" is a high quality artistic performance...an ideal match for educational programming...that captivates students and adults alike!

**Stephen D. Finn, Dir. of Ed. & Comm. Relations
Cincinnati Arts Association**

"This is Harriet Tubman's story like you've never seen it before!"

Von Washington, Western Michigan University

"Leslie's performance of "The Spirit of Harriet Tubman" is of very high quality and extremely engaging. The audience response was overwhelmingly positive with both students and teachers commenting on how strongly the performance impacted them. The obvious connections to the social studies curriculum were augmented by follow up discussions...Leslie uses her wit and wisdom to expound upon some of the themes. More children and teachers should see history and theater art come to life through Leslie's brilliant performance!"

**David Schein, Artistic Director
Reg Lenna Civic Center, Jamestown NY**

..."It was my great pleasure to present Leslie McCurdy ...the audience response to Ms. McCurdy's performance in "The Spirit of Harriet Tubman" was overwhelmingly positive...(she) is an artist of exceptional skill and grace who has my highest recommendation.

**Kate Newby, Artistic Director,
Calgary International Children's Festival**

"I witnessed a performance that was beyond belief, completely mesmerizing, and almost indescribable in terms of the emotions it brought out in me...Ms. McCurdy's performance is one of the most amazing, compelling and thoughtful that I have ever had the good fortune of witnessing...something to be experienced by everyone...one will walk away changed forever!"

Elizabeth A. Fellows, Birmingham Mi.

"A wrenching and ultimately inspiring narrative leavened by humour...riveting...the indisputable talents of Leslie (Lorraine) McCurdy have seen to that

**Janice Kennedy, The Ottawa Citizen
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada**

“I consider myself very lucky to have been an usher to see “The Spirit of Harriet Tubman”. It was fantastic, an amazing performance, great writing, and a super story with an inspiring message. I was expecting it to be educational but instead it blew me away. It was also moving and beautiful to watch...it brought tears to my eyes.

Barbara Bryce, Guelph Ontario

“We’ve seen a lot of plays about Harriet Tubman across the country, and this is the one we like.”

Anita Peeks, Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute, Detroit, Mi.

“...What a wonderfully conceived and brilliant show you have in your talented hands...a deeply gifted actress...I was bowled over by the experience!”

Tom Kneebone, Artistic Director, Smile Theatre
Toronto Ontario, Canada

“I’ve seen a lot of Broadway shows and this is the best play I’ve ever seen!”

Student, Stratford Ontario, Canada

“I enjoyed your play on Harriet Tubman very much. Out of all of the Harriet Tubman play I have ever seen, I thought yours was by far the best. I give it five stars**out of five!”**

Eliza Mott, Grade Six Student

“I really enjoyed your performance of (“The Spirit of) Harriet Tubman”. It gave me so much new information about Harriet Tubman I never knew. It was so inspiring. I felt like I was actually watching Harriet Tubman grow up. Your acting was amazing. I think this was an amazing experience for me and I feel so privileged to have been able to see it.

Christina Swanson, Grade Six Student

“...Your show was excellent. Entertaining, educational and inspirational. “The Spirit of Harriet Tubman” was probably the single best value in theatre I have ever had. Unquestionably one of the best performances I have ever attended. Thank you for the gift of this performance.

Stephen G. Largy, Mississauga Ontario

“This should be on Broadway. I wish I knew how to get it there!”

William Stevenson, Comedian
Brooklyn, New York

“Oprah should know about this!”

Tour Guide, Baltimore Maryland

“That was so beautiful!”

George, Grade 6 Our Lady Help of Christians School
Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada

Recent Tour Highlights

DC Black Theatre Festival “Liviing Legacy” Series, Washington DC

2011 National Black Theatre Festival Winston-Salem NC

Los Angeles Women’s Theatre Festival 2011

Anchorage Alaska, Alaska Junior Theatre 2011

National Storytellers Conference, St Catharine’s Ontario Canada–Harriet Tubman’s Church!

October 2007–Public and School Performances, Northern Interior, British Columbia, Canada

Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet Illinois, (2008, 2010)

North Shore Performing Arts Centre, Skokie Illinois (2008, 2010)

Brock University, St. Catharine’s Ontario, Canada (Third Appearance!)

The Persephone Theatre, Saskatoon Saskatchewan, Canada

MASC (Multicultural Artists for Schools and Communities) Tour, Ottawa Ontario, Canada

Calgary International Children’s Festival, Calgary Alberta, Canada

St. Albert’s International Children’s Festival, St. Albert Alberta, Canada

Winnipeg International Children’s Festival, Winnipeg Manitoba

Reg Lenna Civic Center, Jamestown New York

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The Unconquerable Spirit of Harriet Tubman

JUNE 29, 2012 BY [REBEKAH NETTEKOVEN TELLO](#) LEAVE A COMMENT

Like

[Desiree P. Urquhart](#) and one other person like this.

Emotions and anticipation ran high from the start of the performance last night as Glenn Alan, DC Black Theatre Festival executive director, gave a proud introduction to the Living Legacy Series.

Leslie McCurdy as Harriet Tubman (Photo courtesy of DC Black Theatre Festival)
Hosted by the Mead Center for American Theater and Arena Stage, the new festival series highlights the, "Best of the best," in international Black theatre and portrays exquisite stories of famous African Americans by award-winning solo performers. Five one-act plays feature the lives of Fannie Lou Hamer, Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. If last night's, The Spirit of Harriet Tubman, is any indication of the caliber of this series, you will not want to miss the rest of these plays.

The basket-weave design of the Kogod Cradle Theatre at the Mead Center seemed uniquely appropriate to this production. True to its name, the 200 seat theatre cupped the performer and audience in an earthy, organic space, perfect for telling Tubman's life story. Canadian actress, playwright and dancer Leslie McCurdy filled the room with strong, rich songs, commanding immediate attention.

Using spirituals to punctuate and transition between scenes, McCurdy's performance was exquisite. Her movements, powerful and dance-like, highlighted Tubman's incredible physical strength as well as her tenacity. It was beautiful to watch McCurdy's Tubman from head to barefoot toe, skipping, tripping, even sprinting around the entire theatre. Moments of stylized physicality played off boundless childhood energy and her emotional performance emphasized the focused fragility of old age.

What unfolded over the course of 70 minutes was a tale with all the familiar highlights and plenty of forgotten anecdotes. On a bare stage with only a trunk of costumes, McCurdy brought Tubman to life, from childhood slavery on a plantation to her late years as a free woman in upstate New York. McCurdy spent most of the time as Tubman, with minimal sojourns as other characters. Said to use many of Tubman's own words, the story was a compelling reminder of her indelible legacy.

It is rare to find an audience so excited about a production before it even begins, but the buzz in the theatre was palpable. The story and themes resonated in seemingly personal ways for many present. McCurdy was right to emphasize that Tubman's journey began with, "Freedom of the mind." Tubman first had to conquer fear, anger, doubt, and slavery's dehumanizing effects before she had the strength to rise up and become a Moses for her people. More than a history lesson, McCurdy's Tubman is a contemporary voice for freedom needed yet today.

Theatre is at its best when performance intersects reality and resonates with those present. The Spirit of Harriet Tubman is a moving experience, valuable for both its history and its call to continue freedom's journey.

Do not miss the rest of the Living Legacy Series, including two more performances of The Spirit of Harriet Tubman, now through July 1st at the Mead Center. [Details and tickets for the Living Legacy Series Tickets for all events at the DC Black Theatre Festival](#)

The Unconquerable Spirit of Harriet Tubman

Written and performed by Leslie McCurdy

Produced by DC Black Theatre Festival and Arena Stage

Performed at the Kogod Theatre at the Mead Center for American Theater

Reviewed by Rebekah Nettekoven Tello

Highly Recommended

Leslie McCurdy as Harriet Tubman, 2008

DC Theatre Scene
DC_theatrescene

THE SPIRIT OF HARRIET TUBMAN

February 23, 2006 - performance date Publish date: February 24, 2006

by S. James Wegg

History lesson should be learned year round

Leslie McCurdy as Harriet Tubman-Davis is a match made in heaven. From her opening shaky-hand entrance declaiming “Help is still needed – that’s why I came back,” to her husky mezzo rewrite of “Mine eyes have seen the glory” (“Uncle Sam is rich enough to give you all a farm”) the spirit of her hero is much in evidence.

Not surprisingly, the school performances in Niagara were quickly sold out—this kind of living history beats teachers and textbooks any day. But, inadvertently, that success, led to the only fly in the ointment: the script dwells too much on the historical at the expense of the emotional. Consequently, the onlooker’s feelings more often hover around annoyance rather than outrage at North America’s shameful (but good for commerce!) treatment of slaves.

McCurdy does best at the opposite ends of the age spectrum. The young “Minty” bursts with energy and wide-eyed enthusiasm as she recalls taking care of a baby—when only seven herself—and the dangerous consequences of helping herself to a cube of sugar from a white woman’s table.

As the indefatigable octogenarian, her passion for justice and unstoppable need to help others effectively throws down the gauntlet to the comparatively spoiled audience as they shift self-consciously in their plush seats. Lines like “We was safe from the laws of the U.S.” got nervous chuckles, where the berry in the milk pail gag reaped “er, we’re-laughing-with-you” guffaws.

As the courageous Underground Railroad conductor, the avalanche of facts and scenes slipped by so quickly that it was hard to truly gauge just how it felt to return for her husband, only to find that the already free man had no interest in following his wife and had already moved on to another partner. More might have been made of the huge irony that once safely free in Canada, Tubman realized she’d never been so alone. That sense of community played into the hands of many a “Massa,” who rationalized their subhuman values by warehousing at least the healthy and docile under the same squalid roof.

Absent too was the actual moment of liberation. How must it have felt to reach the free North? What was the first conversation with a Canadian like? What kind of silent racism was practiced in St. Catharines?

But let's be clear – these seeming criticisms are in fact high praise. With the production confined by time (more than an hour couldn't work with school boards), the desire to know the rest of the story (especially the intriguing possibility that Tubman's favourite niece might have been a daughter) is a great compliment to the sincerity and artistic skills that McCurdy brings to every line.

Screenwriters take note: here's a story with legs and a talented advocate to bring it home. JWR

Your comments are always welcome at JWR. Click below to have your say. If selected for publication, you could win a copy of JWR: The First Lustrum (2001–2006). Next draw: December 31, 2009

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Where will you travel today?

Leslie McCurdy

Recipient of the 2000 Mayor's Award for "Outstanding Performing Artist" of Windsor Ontario, Leslie McCurdy, has an honors B.F.A. in dance from the University of Michigan with teaching certification. Leslie served as choreographic and teaching assistant to Judith Jamison of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre during several of her Detroit Residencies, and was slated to go to New York to apprentice with the Ailey Company when she literally tripped, fractured her hip, and fell into acting. Now, also known as a playwright, Leslie has written two one-woman plays, which she performs touring Canada and parts of the United States seven months of the year. "The Spirit of Harriet Tubman" was a finalist for a Canadian Chalmers Award for Best New Play for Young Audiences in 1999 and her second play "Things My Fore-Sisters Saw" premiered on the Bravo Network in Canada in February 2006 and is scheduled for several more broadcasts over the next four years. Recently she returned to her dance roots performing with a small company in her home town whenever she can.



Also by Leslie McCurdy



Things My Fore-Sisters Saw

In "Things My Fore-Sisters Saw", you will meet four women of African Descent who affected change in Canada:

**Marie-Joseph Angelique
Mary-Ann Shadd
Rose Fortune
Viola Desmond**



Experience how each of these women affected change in the Canada of their time and ours.

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