



Theatre Review:

'Remembrance Day' at the 13th Street Repertory Theater

by Jacquelyn Claire, September 12, 2016

On the Remembrance Day of 9/11, I had the honor of watching a remarkable play about 11/11/1945 – both occasions solidifying my gratitude for the freedom I experience on a daily basis.

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We are in England in a village churchyard in 2005, where 80-year-old Nancy Ballinger is attending a Remembrance Day ceremony. She is holding tightly onto her secrets of war-time code breaking at Bletchley Park, where she served as a 'Wren' during World War II. In the face of impending dementia, she reveals a life journey fraught with love, grief, and honor-bound oaths.

In this play, Nancy is played by her real life daughter, June Ballinger, who was inspired to write this story after she found a box of Nancy's letters, keepsakes, and a diary after her mother's pass-

ing in 2013. These stored memories are dusted off and form the cipher system of one woman's life that we are invited to decode. It is a series of old sepia photographs coming to life in vivid theatrical color.

Bletchley Park was once Britain's best kept secret, where the German's "Enigma" cipher system was broken by geniuses like Alan Turing (beautifully played by Benedict Cumberbatch in the film "The Imitation Game"). But it was also the birth place of modern information technology, with the creation of the first electronic computer, "Colossus," that could decode Hitler's personal messages sent to the battlefield. Our Nancy Annan Ballinger was one of the intelligent women on the team that brought "Colossus" into being. Its arrival signaled the end of the war by at least two years.

Nancy is working hard on her duties under the mentorship of Max Newman, credited with creat-

ing “Colossus” and being Turing’s mentor. She has signed the Official Secrets Act and knows how to hold her tongue. She will take the secrets learned in this environment to her grave as she was proud to be one of Churchill’s “geese that never cackled.” While in the throes of the war effort, she falls in love with three men whose life paths will alter her own. After the war, we follow Nancy across the ocean to her new life in America, which will call her to housewife duties and a constant struggle with identity. It is a captivating story.

June Ballinger handles her mother’s story with respect and affords her a dignity and depth that is beautiful to watch. She has elevated her mother’s war efforts into a meaningful memoir of feminism struggling for air in 1950’s America. Nancy Ballinger will now be forever remembered as a feisty code breaking independent woman, capable of keeping secrets and loving long. This is a gift of immortality from the daughter to her mother.

Ballinger is an impressive performer, playing all of the ages from youthful 20’s to wise-crone 80. She also portrays a few of the men with boyish charm and impetuous gallantry. She slips in and out of characters like a DuPont nylon stocking – graceful and smooth. I was totally captivated with her resonant vocal presence and commanding stature on the stage. I could have stayed for another act. Perhaps when all of the information about Bletchley Park’s projects are revealed, we might get to have another episode.

Director Janice Goldberg has crafted a precise and textured ode to mother/daughter relationships. The physicality of the blocking was economical and executed with glorious finesse. She has created a truly classy production that enthralls the audience.

In the talkback session after the show, June Ballinger shared even more stories of her mother, and the audience could have stayed there all evening listening to the incredible anecdotes from her family album.

“Remembrance Day” is a production that leaves you feeling satiated and profoundly content.

Running Time: 65 minutes, with no intermission.

“Remembrance Day” plays through September 22, 2016 at the 13th Street Repertory Theater in New York City.