



Sometimes I Cry' Gives Compelling Look at Women with AIDS

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In "Sometimes I Cry," Actress Sheryl Lee Ralph's compelling one-woman show that gives an in-depth look at women with AIDS, the audience is made to understand that AIDS doesn't discriminate when it comes to race, income level, or social status. This is an ugly, insidious virus that affects grandmothers and even 11-year-old twins.

It can even affect a 45-year-old accomplished entrepreneur, who wears her sorority colors proudly, yet is left alone to die by a compassionless husband when she is discovered to have the virus. It can still leave its victims free to have sex with other partners, who are not concerned about practicing safe sex.

In D.C. recently to perform the show for two non-profit organizations that work with AIDS patients—Damien Ministries and US Helping US - Ralph took to the stage like a woman with very little time to waste. She explained that it was while performing on Broadway in the hit show, "Dreamgirls," that she saw an entire generation of gay men begin to die. "One day they had these purple marks, and the next day they were gone," she said.

Ralph wrote "Sometimes I Cry" based on several individuals that she interviewed, including a fellow soror, who was one of her best friends. Her telling of a time that her friend was horribly and numbingly humiliated after going to a swanky restaurant and soiling her expensive Chanel suit on the way to the bathroom is one of the most affecting moments in the show. We don't expect bright, well-to-do folk to be AIDS victims. Yet, as Ralph points out, even educated, pedigreed people are not free from the ravages of AIDS.

Ralph hammers this point home more when she tells about a 60-something-year-old grandmother, who marries her childhood sweetheart and remains faithful to that one partner for years. After her husband dies, she runs into his old golfing buddy, and hey begin to date. They fall in love, travel and have a great time sharing each other's company until he goes off one day and never comes back. She later finds out that he has died, and shortly finds out that she has been infected with the virus.

When her doctors ask her if she has ever had unprotected sex, she exclaims, "Of course! I have five children!" It doesn't sink in until later that only the second man that she has given her body to may have affected her with AIDS. The lesson is that if you are having sex, you should use condoms. Abstinence, or course, is even better.

Ralph has developed about a dozen characters for her piece, and rotates them so that about four are presented in each show. She did not cast the 11-year-old twins that she talks about, but lets you know that they were infected by a 35-year-old man. "They had sex to get money to get their nails and hair done," she explains.

Following her performance, Ralph took questions from the audience. "We don't talk about it enough in the church, and I would invite you to come and talk to a group of pastors who meet here weekly," one woman said.

Ralph, the wife of a Philadelphia politician, smiled broadly, obviously open to the challenge. "These are serious times, and we must come together and talk about this problem," she said. "I just pray that one of you here will have heard something that will save your life."