

She Cries: Actress puts heart into story of HIV-positive women

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It was not just great theater, it was brilliant. It was not just informative, it was transformative. And it was not just pure talent on the stage, it was the offer of a generous heart from an award-winning actress who asked us to join her journey - of heartache and outrage - over the ravages of HIV/AIDS and its devastating effects on women.

In *Sometimes I Cry*, veteran actress Sheryl Lee Ralph presented her original one-woman show that she also wrote. Ralph was nominated for both a Tony and Drama Desk Award for the role of Deena Jones in the original *Dreamgirls* and then went on to star in several television, film and theater productions.

It was fortunate for the country - and the world - that two years ago Ralph became sufficiently outraged over the silence about HIV/AIDS and how it kills too many people, too many women, too many black Americans. Not only did she find her voice when writing *Sometimes I Cry*. She found her calling.

This is an impeccable, every-minute-counts, 90-minute show that tells the stories of three women who became infected with HIV.

These are real stories that in the hands of Ralph become mesmerizing portraits of horror and pathos that fell on unsuspecting women.

"Ms. Chanel" is a successful career woman who, even after she learns she has HIV and her husband has left her, keeps rolling the high stakes of business deals - just to regain her former sense of confidence. In a four-star restaurant, dressed in a white Chanel suit, she soils herself after taking her medication. As Ralph tells this part of the story, tears stream down her face. Shame comes full force.

Tears come again, two more times. When Ralph inhabits the body of an 18-year-old child of the foster system who has been tossed out, raped and abused, it evokes sheer anger that a child was left defenseless in a world in which she "just wanted to feel special." We are equally appalled about the 68-year-old grandmother who, after losing her only love - a husband of more than 50 years - lets herself enjoy another man.

None of these women asked the men to wear a condom. Their need for love overcame their common sense - not unlike what often happens in many lives every day.

Breaking this silence and encouraging us to speak up are the point of Ralph's show. "Speak up!" she thunders at the close of her show. "Speak up for your sisters! Embrace them!"

Then, Ralph leaves us with a final dramatic statement: "We are HIV-positive. And sometimes, I cry."

In the end, watching her performance is a privilege.