

As God As My Witness...

By Courtney Michelle

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Movie stars of yesteryear weren't bombarded with today's paparazzi and tabloids, leaving fans to often speculate their personal lives, full of movie premieres and fabulous parties. But behind closed doors, they're humans with flaws and abrasive character traits. Written and performed by Bettina Lohmeyer, "*Bette Davis...Fasten Your Seatbelts!*" takes a look inside the dark and lonely world of one of the largest Hollywood stars in history: Ms. Bette Davis.

For its second running under Susan Batson's direction, Lohmeyer's one-woman show follows the life and career of Davis from 1936 to 1985 — beginning with her infamous battle with Jack Warner at Warner Brothers Studio. Accused of being spoiled and overpaid, Davis wishes for more money, claiming she's just as good, if not better than Audrey Hepburn. Lohmeyer channels Davis's rage in what would be an interesting conversation — Warner hypothetically offering Davis the leading role in his book option, *Gone With the Wind*, and her dramatic mocking of it being a flop.

"I wanted to capture very private moments, behind the scenes," says Lohmeyer, "moments in her life that inspired and touched me through my research of her films, interviews and movies. *Gone With the Wind* seemed to always be a reference through her career."

From the outset, the viewer can sympathize and feel empathy for Davis; she was being underpaid in comparison to her fellow, male co-stars and *Gone With the Wind* is a timeless classic, how tragic- she could have been Scarlett O'Hara! Surely, that's a grief that followed Davis throughout her entire career — one that was a constant reminder.

Lohmeyer does an excellent job mixing fiction with facts of the time, referencing an era where actresses were rallying for more lucrative contracts that mirrored their counterparts. During the last scene, Davis wants to leave her apartment and stay at the Plaza Hotel after reading excerpts from her daughter's tell-all book, but there's a hotel strike — the New York Hotel Strike of 1985.

When asked what sparked her interest in Davis, Lohmeyer smiles and attributes the credit to Batson, "Susan Batson saw something in me that related to her."

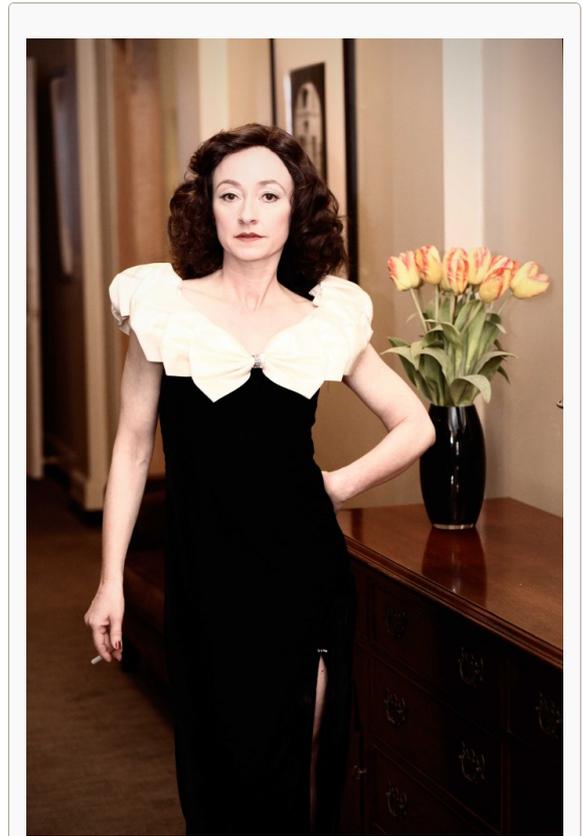
While describing her preparation and writing of the script,

Lohmeyer reflects on how just how relatable they are, "When I was still in Europe, a friend of mine died in Germany, I was very emotional and wanted to portray the same energy of fragility. At the same time, I wanted to show Bette extremely happy — her win at Cannes."

Lohmeyer's acting is quite impressive, proven by her ability to switch from a rambunctious Davis, to an elderly, fragile version of Davis in the last scene — after the publication of her daughter's book, Davis still harbors anger and resentment, resonating from beginning to end. She is able to create a dialogue with absolutely no one but the audience in attendance, at times compelling them to reply to and interact with Davis. Lohmeyer's unmistakable accent begs the question, "Was Bette Davis German?"

Seatbelts is quite long, but certainly necessary when chronicling 49 years of what Lohmeyer describes as a "tragic flaw." Buckle up and prepare for an emotional, wild and exciting ride.

Bette Davis... Fasten Your Seatbelts! is playing at The Susan Batson Studio (300 W. 43rd St, 3rd Floor) through April 27th each Friday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. For tickets and other information, contact 212-226-4630.



Bettina Lohmeyer portrays Bette Davis in her one-woman show, "*Bette Davis...Fasten Your Seatbelts!*" Top: Bettina Lohmeyer as Bette Davis. Photos by Courtney Michelle and Bettina Lohmeyer.



Lohmeyer as Bette Davis.