



£12.00

Concessions: £6.00

Dates

Wednesday - Saturday, **Wednesday 10th March 2010 - Saturday 27th March 2010** 8.00PM

BSL interpreted performance Thursday 25 March 8pm, with Jacqui Beckford

Audio Described performance Friday 26 March 8pm, with Ruth James and Alison Clarke

Running time

1 hour

Venue

Upstairs

Restrictions

Age 15+

Access



Extras

Email this page to a friend

Please note that the advertised times are the start of the actual performance, not the time when doors open: please arrive in good time to collect your tickets and take your seats as, in most cases, we CANNOT admit latecomers for whatever reason. If you arrive after the start of a show you will NOT be entitled to a refund, so why not come early instead and enjoy a drink or a meal in our licensed Cafe/Gallery beforehand.

Memoirs of a Hermaphrodite

Created, written and performed by Sarah Leaver

Directed by Denise Evans

For centuries the concept of the hermaphrodite has been shrouded in mystery, and feelings towards them have ranged from prophet to freak.

Inspired by the true story of Herculine Barbin, Sarah Leaver brings us a remarkable story of the struggle of an individual born between genders.

Raised as female in the bittersweet safety of a nunnery, the young Herculine's true identity as a hermaphrodite is discovered when she falls in love with a girl. Forced to move to the city, she is pushed to the fringes of society and the dark, seedy underworlds and freak shows of 19th century Paris.

Herculine's poignant and enchanting story is performed with humour, passion and pathos by Sarah Leaver, weaving her own evocative, poetic writing with a dynamic physical performance and Jason Pegg's new musical score.

SUPPORTED BY ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



What The Press Say...

One-man shows are always an intriguing spectacle, I feel. You have your productions with a cast of four or five and, more often than not, you'll get a couple of..." (read full review)

Jafar Iqbal — 12th March 2010

This intimate one act, one women (one hermaphrodite?) show is an exercise in transformation, rejection and the articulate search for acceptance. Familiar to most of us but a painful daily..." (read full review)

Eric Page, |G-Scene — 12th March 2010

[More...](#)

What You Have to Say...

Very powerful play. I was deeply moved not only by the script but also by the quality of the work: the acting, the direction, the lights, the music, the costumes,..." (read full review)



Oval House

[HOME](#)

Box Office
020 7582 7680

THIS IS
Oval House Theatre!

IN OUR
theatre

youth
ARTS


ARTS
education

support
US

ARTISTS'
advisor

theVENUE
theGALLERY
theCAFE
aboutUS
gettingHERE
contactUS
forHIRE

Back



Buy Tickets

£12.00

Concessions: £6.00

Dates
Wednesday - Saturday,
Wednesday 10th March 2010 - Saturday 27th March 2010 8.00PM

BSL interpreted performance Thursday 25 March 8pm, with Jacqui Beckford



Audio Described performance Friday 26 March 8pm, with Ruth James and Alison Clarke

Running time
1 hour

Venue
Upstairs

Restrictions
Age 15+

Access

Extras
Email this page to a friend

Please note that the advertised times are the start of the actual performance, not the time when doors open: please arrive in good time to collect your tickets and take

One-man shows are always an intriguing spectacle, I feel. You have your productions with a cast of four or five and, more often than not, you'll get a couple of stand-out performances and the rest plodding along; the good performances balance out the average ones and everyone's happy. In a one-man show, though, all judgement is reserved for just the one person. That one performer who has the courageous task of providing you with enough enjoyment and entertainment to leave you feeling like you've had a good night out at the theatre.

One such individual taking on that challenge is Sarah Leaver, writer and performer of *Memoirs of a Hermaphrodite*, playing now at the Oval House Theatre. Now's a good time to point out the irony that I'm referring to one-man shows during the review of a production about a hermaphrodite; and, to be fair, this irony is one facet of what the play seeks to explore.

Memoirs... is the true story of Adelaide Herculine Barbin, born in France in the 19th century. It was at a time when the idea of hermaphrodites was seen as freakish and abnormal, setting the course for Barbin's turbulent life. It is through Barbin's own memoirs that the story has been told, from her time as a girl in a Catholic school, to his time as a man living alone in Paris. We see the transformation from innocent, naïve child to insecure, isolated adult, finally ending with Barbin's suicide at the age of thirty.

You could argue that giving away the ending to the play is a bad move, but this isn't a play looking for twists and turns and surprising climaxes. It's easy to see from the very beginning that the eventual end is an inevitability – we already know that Barbin's life did not end happily, it is the 'how' part that shapes the narrative.

your seats as, in most cases, we CANNOT admit latecomers for whatever reason. If you arrive after the start of a show you will NOT be entitled to a refund, so why not come early instead and enjoy a drink or a meal in our licensed Cafe/Gallery beforehand.

And when it comes to the narrative flow of the piece, Leaver is extremely successful (and so begins the first round of praise I will shower at the actor). The script is wonderfully written, a beautiful mesh of poetry and wit, painting Barbin as a misunderstood artist. It is not just Barbin that has been written so well though; brief cameos from other people in her life are also well-defined and distinguished, adding to the spectacle.

This brings us nicely, then onto Leaver's performance. In one word, it is sensational. Leaver takes full command of the stage, bringing out a performance that is at times both heart-warming and heart-wrenching. The young woman has written and devised the whole performance with director Denise Evans, and this intimacy with the piece shines through an assured and extremely confident performance. It is by no means a simple acting role – Leaver plays not only Barbin but everybody else in the piece, cleverly using her posture and positioning to create these new characters. Costume changes occur frequently, often needing to take place in a matter of seconds, but Leaver has control over it all.

Kudos also must go to the technicians in the back, aiding the performance with a fantastic use of music and lighting. Light plays an integral role in the production, mirroring Barbin's own emotions, and it used very intelligently too as a device to establish space and location. The music, as well, does a fantastic job of throwing us into the world of the play, moving in tone in parallel with Barbin's mood.

I could go on and on about Memoirs..., as there is so much to praise, but I prefer to encourage you to see it than read about it. When the only faults I can pick up on are the accidental loss of two props, a trivial concern with all live performance that doesn't actually affect the play in any way, I can't really give a more glowing response than that. This is a piece of theatre that I would happily go to see again, and cannot urge you enough to do the same. Leaver's performance, and her handling of the subject matter, is sensational. This will definitely rank up there as one of the best pieces of theatre I have seen. Please go and see it.

Jafar Iqbal — 12th March 2010

[Back](#)[Home](#)[Top of Page](#)

Oval House Theatre. 52-54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 5SW. T. 020 7582 7680
© Copyright Oval House Theatre 2010. All Rights Reserved. E&OE [Sitemap](#)

design by 

HOME

Box Office
020 7582 7680

THIS IS
Oval House Theatre!

Oval House

IN OUR
theatre


youth
ARTS

ARTS
education

support
US

ARTISTS'
advisor

theVENUE
theGALLERY
theCAFE
aboutUS
gettingHERE
contactUS
forHIRE



£12.00

Concessions: £6.00

Dates
Wednesday - Saturday,
Wednesday 10th March 2010 - Saturday 27th March 2010 8.00PM

BSL interpreted performance Thursday 25 March 8pm, with Jacqui Beckford



Audio Described performance Friday 26 March 8pm, with Ruth James and Alison Clarke

Running time
1 hour

Venue
Upstairs

Restrictions
Age 15+

Access

Extras
Email this page to a friend

Please note that the advertised times are the start of the actual performance, not the time when doors open: please arrive in good time to collect your tickets and take

This intimate one act, one women (one hermaphrodite?) show is an exercise in transformation, rejection and the articulate search for acceptance. Familiar to most of us but a painful daily reality and struggle for anyone born Intersex as was the protagonist of this play. Intersex people are treated as freaks, prophets or lewd entertainers but rarely are their own voices heard. This true story of Herculine Adélaïde Barbin is dramatized here by Sarah Leaver (who also wrote this interpretation of Herculines memoirs). Herculine wrote the memories as part of an early 'therapy' session. Interestingly the actual real memoires were rediscovered in the French archives by the great philosopher & sexual theorist Michel Foucault, who then published them (buy it here:)

The play, at the Oval House Theatre, London, follows the development and education of Adelaide during her convent school years, before exploring her tender, romantic first blushing of love, the judgment of the church and then the expulsions, brutal examinations, sex role change, humiliation and forced relocation to another city, gender and life. She becomes He and Sarah Leaver's wide eyed, painfully vulnerable and searching acting is (in the very cosy Oval House Theatre) breathtakingly real and occasionally uncomfortably direct. She moves the story on with a collection of wonderful simple lighting changes, rapid costume changes and the inevitable explored gender change.

There is a genuinely thrilling moment of horror in the first part of the play as Adelaide confesses her love for another girl and transforms into and is then rebuked by a rabidly, rancid, rancorous and revolting rotten alliterative nun. A whore appears from a scarlet finger nail and a fight where the assailant is only visible from the blows he reigns down is frighteningly real. The constant interplay of characters and

your seats as, in most cases, we CANNOT admit latecomers for whatever reason. If you arrive after the start of a show you will NOT be entitled to a refund, so why not come early instead and enjoy a drink or a meal in our licensed Cafe/Gallery beforehand.

roles, all played by Leaver, could have become confusing but by keeping the narrative clear and progressing it only from Adelaide's experience and point of view Leaver keeps us on board. I loved the no-good nasty nightmare nun, she stayed with me all the way home.

The simple staging, atmospheric lighting and 'Parisian' music by Jason Pegg added to the feeling of being in a garret and there was doom in the air, the mounting hiss of gas reminding us of the flickering lighting & spirit of Herculines' tragic end.

Although ultimately there is no redemption in Herculines story, there is an honesty and vulnerability in this performance that perhaps goes some way to testifying to the uniqueness of this individuals fascinating life and today, 150 year's later it challenges us, as it no doubt challenged Sarah & the director Denise Evans, to look at the roles we perform for the amusement of others, the roles we perform for ourselves and the roles we perform without realising.

Sarah Leaver's ingenious Herculine is is a passionate mix of Orlando, Chatterton and Hedder Gabbler, in control of nothing but his/her choices, buffeted by suffocating opinions and judged by the strict conformity of rigid society, but a true intersex voice none the less.

Eric Page, |G-Scene — 12th March 2010

Back

Home

Top of Page

HOME

Box Office
020 7582 7680

THIS IS
Oval House Theatre!

IN OUR **theatre** | **youth** ARTS | **ARTS education** | **support** US | **ARTISTS' advisor**

theVENUE | theGALLERY | theCAFE | aboutUS | gettingHERE | contactUS | forHIRE

Oval House



Back

“Sarah Leaver performs Herculine and a bevy of assorted characters with magnificent gusto and huge sensitivity. This is a captivating performance; full of atmosphere, vivid and fast moving all laced together with particularly beautiful writing. There truly was a “wow” element at the end of the show, when the applause went on and on”

Total Theatre

Back

Buy Tickets

£12.00
Concessions: £6.00

Dates
Wednesday - Saturday,
Wednesday 10th March 2010 - Saturday 27th March 2010 8.00PM

BSL interpreted performance Thursday 25 March 8pm, with Jacqui Beckford

Audio Described performance Friday 26 March 8pm, with Ruth James and Alison Clarke

Running time
1 hour

Venue
Upstairs

Restrictions
Age 15+

Access




Extras
[Email this page to a friend](#)

Please note that the advertised times are the start of the actual performance, not the time when doors open: please arrive in good time to collect your tickets and take

Home Top of Page

your seats as, in most cases, we CANNOT admit latecomers for whatever reason. If you arrive after the start of a show you will NOT be entitled to a refund, so why not come early instead and enjoy a drink or a meal in our licensed Cafe/Gallery beforehand.

Oval House Theatre. 52-54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 5SW. T. 020 7582 7680
© Copyright Oval House Theatre 2010. All Rights Reserved. E&OE [Sitemap](#)

design by 

HOME

Box Office
020 7582 7680

THIS IS
Oval House Theatre!

Oval House

IN OUR
theatre


youth
ARTS

ARTS
education

support
US

ARTISTS'
advisor

theVENUE
theGALLERY
theCAFE
aboutUS
gettingHERE
contactUS
forHIRE



[Buy Tickets](#)

£12.00
Concessions: £6.00

Dates
Wednesday 10th March 2010 - Saturday 27th March 2010 8.00PM

Venue
Upstairs

Restrictions
Age 15+

Extras
[Email this page to a friend](#)

Please note that the advertised times are the start of the actual performance, not the time when doors open: please arrive in good time to collect your tickets and take your seats as, in most cases, we CANNOT admit latecomers for whatever reason. If you arrive after the start of a show you will NOT be entitled to a refund, so why not come early instead and enjoy a drink or a meal in our licensed Cafe/Gallery beforehand.

Very powerful play. I was deeply moved not only by the script but also by the quality of the work: the acting, the direction, the lights, the music, the costumes, the change between characters. Everything seems to have been very well thought through. And it is quite obvious that the actress has worked really hard for this. Congratulations Sarah! Keep up the good work! Finally, some good theatre!

Ioanna Petropoulou, (Guildford), 15th March 2010

[Back](#)

[Home](#) [Top of Page](#)

Oval House Theatre, 52-54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 5SW. T. 020 7582 7680
© Copyright Oval House Theatre 2010. All Rights Reserved. E&OE [Sitemap](#)

design by 