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Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

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The Center for Performing Arts presents Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

Co-sponsored by Chicago Tribune Foundation and Governors State University
University Park, Illinois
Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

CAST

HARRIET TUBMAN  Josie Nutter
MRS. ROSS / MARY  Tatiana St. Phard
WILLIAM STILL / HENRY ROSS  Curtis Shepard
W.J. MOSES  Jeff Recker
SARAH BRADFORD  Kim Long

The play opens in the home of a Quaker woman. Harriet and her two fellow travelers find shelter there from the posse chasing them. The scene then changes to a publisher’s office. Miss Sarah Bradford is trying to persuade the publisher to print her book, *Scenes from the Life of Harriet Tubman*. She hopes to raise money from the sale of the books to provide a pension for Harriet after the Civil War. Sarah tells Harriet’s story to the publisher by recounting her interviews with Harriet. The scenes that follow represent Harriet’s life and are interspersed with further conversations between Sarah and the publisher. Harriet’s escape is then depicted and the havoc wreaked on families by slavery is dramatized by her tearful goodbye to her sister Mary.

After William Still persuades Harriet to work with the Underground Railroad, she returns to rescue some of her brothers and meets her father. He blindfolds himself in her presence - so he can truthfully say he hasn’t seen her - and they agree not to tell her mother of her presence or her dangerous work. Later, Harriet returns for her parents and the audience learns that now she is called Moses, because like the biblical Moses, she is leading the slaves to the Promised Land. In the scenes that follow, Harriet leads several more trips and shows perseverance even when her passengers are ready to give up.

At the start of the Civil War, Harriet becomes a spy for the Union Army. She also works as a scout and nurse, and teaches escaped slaves how to care for themselves. She becomes a national celebrity: Union soldiers salute her, and the government gives her a pass allowing her to ride on any train or government transport.

Unfortunately Harriet’s government pass does not change the way she is treated when she goes to visit her parents in Auburn, New York. The conductor sees her only as a black woman, and after an angry confrontation, Harriet lands in the baggage car.

Harriet receives nothing for her services during the war, and she is left with little money and a house full of homeless folks and her aging parents. Many people write letters to the government asking that she be granted a pension. Finally she receives a pension of eight dollars a month. For the rest of her life she continues to help people and serves as a symbol of freedom for all. She even appears on stage with Susan B. Anthony at a women’s suffrage meeting.

The final scene notes her death and summarizes the value of her life, a life devoted to helping others and fighting injustice.
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