

# ATF 'High Dive': Her risky stories, funny & well-told

By Cathy DeDe  
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Here's what I especially liked about *High Dive*, the Adirondack Theatre Festival's current offering (through July 16) at the Charles R.

Wood Theater in downtown Glens Falls: Playwright-performer Leslie Ayvazian is a storyteller to rival one of my heroes, National Public Radio's Garrison Keillor. I liked her wry and occasionally moving delivery, sharp-edged characterizations, connection with the audience, how she wandered out into tangents that circled back in, most winningly.

In a story that is, finally, perhaps as slight as it is brief (it weighs in at just over an hour, no intermission), Ms. Ayvazian engages her audience as few others can. She has a couple of extra tricks up her sleeve. Most impressively, she is the first and only playwright I've encountered who works audience participation into the show without it coming out hokey or cringe-worthy.

Ms. Ayvazian cruises the lobby before the show, handing out highlighted script pages to select audience members invited to take small roles. "The show is called *High Dive*," Ms. Ayvazian explained to the assembled audience before launching into the show, "and I am asking people to jump in."

Her only stage direction: "There's no need to create a psychological profile. Loud is the only M.O., here."

Those amateur voices (with the exception of what I'm sure were a couple of ringers) sounding from all sides of the

audience really worked. (The woman playing the playwright's son delivered her sizable portion of lines with such pitch-perfection, I'd peg her for an ATF intern.)

"I've always wanted to do a solo show with a very large cast," Ms. Ayvazian deadpans. She also says that everything we are about to hear is exactly the truth, entirely unembellished.

The centerpiece of the story is Ms. Ayvazian herself, on the verge of her 50th birthday, perched on the high dive at a Greek resort during a record-breaking heat wave, paralyzed by fear while her husband and, most importantly, her young son urge her to "Jump in!"

Ms. Ayvazian characterizes herself as pathologically risk-averse, to say the least. Several times, she introduces a sticky situation she's been talked into by explaining, "I thought I was, perhaps, without my knowing it, a person who would like to do that."

Her stories are a diversion, a means of avoiding the cool pool hovering threateningly beneath her. She tells of inappropriate jobs, vacations that typically involve

freakish weather (a cold snap in Florida, for example, that ends with frozen fish deposited, wave by wave, on the beach). It's all told in a conspiratorial voice, very funny, occasionally touching.

Whether she takes the final risk — jumps into the Greek pool or not — that's for you to find out. What you get, as the show progresses, is how much Ms. Ayvazian enjoys the life she reveals through her stories. And it's an added bonus for the actress, to have voices from the past thrown back at her from the audience, night after night. Ones that hit particularly well would solicit from the actress herself a happily raised eyebrow, or a rise of joyful laughter.

Having undertaken several slightly misguided adventures at the behest of my own adventuresome husband and chil-

dren (hiking the Grand Canyon comes immediately to mind), I could relate exactly to both the inner quaking voice the actress reveals — the shocked acknowledgment of having ventured unwillingly into uncomfortable territory — and to the immense pleasure of telling about it afterwards.

**The Adirondack Theatre Festival's production of *High Dive*, written and performed by Leslie Ayvazian, continues through Saturday, July 16, at 8 p.m. nightly at the Charles R. Wood Theater in downtown Glens Falls. Tic: \$25. Box office: 798 WOOD.**

**Up next: *Madagascar*, a mysterious drama starring Mary Beth Peil (and having nothing to do with the Disney movie), opens on Wednesday, July 20.**

