

"The Lone Eagle" Captivates Local Audience

Surrounded by tropical foliage, under sunny skies with a light breeze, 40 theater-goers nibbled hors d'oeuvres and sipped drinks as they settled in for a spectacular one-man show on March 22. "Charles Lindbergh: The Lone Eagle" was performed to audience acclaim by actor, writer, and producer Steve Carroll, presented by the Island Arts Foundation and the Knights of Columbus.

It was a perfect afternoon to witness a fine drama in the open air, as the audience at the Purple Heart Theater discovered. Steve Carroll captivated the crowd with his stirring performance as the first world-renowned aviator and media celebrity.

Was Lindbergh a hero and a visionary, or a remote, controlling man who espoused racist and anti-Semitic views? The answers, "The Lone Eagle" suggests, are neither simple nor clear-cut. Without flinching from Lindbergh's misjudgments, prejudices, and infidelities, the play also explored his innovations, courage, and foresight. The final impression was of a fallible human being, fascinatingly complex, neither golden nor evil.

Steve Carroll, as Lindbergh, transfixed the crowd from the moment he swept onto the stage, dressed in 1920s aviator garb. "Lindbergh" began to speak frankly - from the afterlife - about his triumphs, tribulations, and choices. A shy and private young man, Lindy was thrust abruptly into the relentless glare of public and media fascination as soon as his plane, The Spirit of St. Louis, touched down after he pilot-

ed the world's first nonstop, solo flight from New York to Paris. From that moment, Lindbergh was assailed by unwanted attention that dogged him, and his family, to the end of his days.

Carroll captured Lindbergh's fresh enthusiasm and energy as a young man obsessed with aviation. He recounted movingly the experience of Lindbergh's first flight, spurring the youth's determination to own a plane. In scenes both touching and amusing, Lindbergh - as a college dropout - tried to persuade his father to finance the purchase of the biplane in which he started out as a barnstormer. In his early days, as "Daredevil Lindbergh: The Flying Fool", Lindy honed his aviation skills and tested his nerves with stunts and aerobatics.

Carroll's riveting description of Lindbergh's take-off and flight from New York to Paris, on a historic May morning in 1927, kept the audience mesmerized. Touching down, and winning the coveted \$25,000 Orteig Prize, marked the end of his innocence and freedom, as Lindbergh grimly explained. Hounded by newsmen and the public, Lindbergh railed against the "perverse, invasive curiosity about my life."

His romance with and marriage to Anne Morrow - the daughter of an American diplomat in Mexico - rekindled Lindbergh's enthusiasm for using flying and technology to benefit the world. He taught his young wife to fly, and imagined "we were going to change the world through aviation." Yet tragedy followed the birth of their first son, who was kidnapped and murdered at age



Actor, writer, and producer Steve Carroll, performing his one-man show, "Charles Lindbergh: The Lone Eagle" at The Purple Heart Theater

two. Embittered, the Lindberghs retreated from the U.S. and the public eye for years.

As Lindbergh described identifying his young son's body, and scattering his ashes at sea, there was surely a lump in every throat in the theater. The actor portrayed in moving depth the agony of losing a child and the torments inflicted by unrelenting media and public scrutiny.

"The Lone Eagle" clarified Lindbergh's early opposition to U.S. involvement in World War II, and his later heroism in flying 50 missions in the Pacific. The play did not shy from exploring Lindbergh's questionable judgment in accepting an award from the Nazi regime, or from recount-

ing statements he made that many interpreted as anti-Semitic. Yet it also showed how his views of humankind were transformed and broadened after he lived in the Philippine jungle with an isolated tribe.

In his later years, Lindbergh became a dedicated environmentalist, whose early infatuation with technology gave way to a wish for society to slow down and live more lightly on the planet. His love of nature resonated through the play, as clearly as his sorrow and confusion over the marital troubles that led both him and his wife into affairs. Carroll deftly portrayed a weary, wiser, even serene Lindbergh, as he faced death from cancer at age 72.

After enthusiastic applause at the end of the performance, Steve Carroll answered a wide range of audience questions. His knowledge of aviation, history, and Lindbergh's personality were evidence of how deeply the actor/writer delved into his subject.

"The Lone Eagle" was another successful event at Ft. Myers Beach's most unique entertainment venue, the Purple Heart Theater at 2915 Estero Boulevard.

The Island Arts Foundation, based at the theater, offers a number of dramatic and musical performances, and other celebrations, providing a home for the arts on Ft. Myers Beach.

Membership information is available online at www.islandartsfoundation.org; or by calling the ArtsLine at 463-218-6064.

Janet Sailian