

Gloria Reuben Lends New York Some Heart

By Iris Wiener

As a young girl, Gloria Reuben wanted to be a firefighter or a ballerina. Then came her dream of rock stardom in all of its glory. Luckily, she stuck to acting and singing, modes of performing that have consistently brought her roles only complementing an inherent talent and incessant energy. Reuben is best



Gloria Reuben

known for her heart-wrenching work as Jeanie Boulet, a health care professional traumatically battling HIV and AIDS on "ER," a role that garnered her multiple Emmy nominations and a Golden Globe nomination in a five-year run from 1994-99. Currently making her New York stage debut at The Flea, Reuben once again brings heart to an issue that so desperately needs it.

A Heartbeat To Baghdad (running through November 23) was inspired by firsthand accounts of returning soldiers serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as the stories of wives, widows and families. Playwright Glyn O'Malley interviewed soldiers of all ranks of the 101st Airborne Division, who went to Iraq and made it back home. Reuben takes on the role of Claire, a social worker that isn't a part of the military community.

"Her husband is an attorney and she has two kids, and she's kind of inadvertently brought in to help this community and this group of soldier's families," says Reuben. "My first thoughts when reading this script were, 'Oh my God.' This is really fantastic and very powerful. The first time that I read through the whole thing front to back without stopping, emotionally the impact was overwhelming on all different levels."

Reuben is very excited about this play, because she believes that it's something for people to look at with fresh eyes.

into that a couple of times."

No stranger to acting through difficult themes, Reuben feels that this story is close to her – as it should be to anyone.

"I recently had a flu and I was exhausted, and at the end of the day of rehearsals I had a tough time shaking the emotions off of me." Reuben says her character is also affected in a unique way. "Because this character is one that is kind of the sounding board for all of these emotions (and actor or not), as a human being you feel this stuff when it's coming to you. It's intense. And I decided that next morning that I have to not read the newspaper every day until we open," Reuben says adamantly.

Originally from Toronto, Reuben got introduced to the theater world through her brother, also an actor.

"I went to a couple of auditions for commercials or whatever, and there was this one casting director who looked at me at one point and said, 'I really think you have more to offer than just doing commercials.' And so she invited me to join this workshop that she was having for female actresses, and she brought me in on some small parts in television shows that were shooting up there. And that's how it started ... bit by bit really slowly."

Soon Reuben debuted in film, when she starred in *Time Cop* and *Nick Of Time*. After "ER" and a slew of other television projects, Reuben let the world hear her voice by singing backup for four months on the North American leg of Tina Turner's "24/7" concert tour.

With a new CD on its way, Reuben speaks very excitedly about her current album, *Just For You*.

"I don't really know how to put it in a category; it's kind of a little bit of Sadé with a lot of guitar, yet very groovy. People are very surprised that I sing, especially so when I sang 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Giants Stadium. And that's a great place to show people!" she grins. "You can check out pieces of each track of the album at www.GloriaReuben.com. I'm really proud of it!"

As the burgeoning star looks forward to New York's reaction to her current show, she takes a moment to reflect on the fame she once had with her work on television.

"That period in my life was everything. Exciting, overwhelming, frustrating. Everything changes in good ways. People come out of the woodwork that used to not even talk to me in high school. Yet there's a great abundance of appreciation for one's work which is the beautiful side of it," she says, a giant smile spanning her face. "I'm almost kind of ready for a little bit of a resurgence of that. Earlier this year I took a lot of time off, now I'm kind of ready to get back into it. I think I'm in a better head space now than even maybe I was when 'ER' was at its peak. I'm more mature now, I'm more prepared to handle it, the things that come at you from all over the place, in expected and unexpected ways. It's really quite weird!"

Reuben's maturity and toned talent certainly shines in *A Heartbeat To Baghdad*, and she promises that audience members will be

I hope that people that are for this war, that are pro-Iraq war, might not stay on that mighty horse for so long after seeing this. It's just the kind of play that dives into viewpoints or issues about the Iraqi civilians."

Reuben compares the tough content of this play with the images flashing across the televisions of America.

"This is something we don't see in the news at all, which is frankly horrific, I think. I mean, it's not just about American soldiers, in the bigger picture – of course it is about that, but it's not *just* about that. And this play taps

promises that audiences will be in for a treat. Directed by Jim Simpson, the acclaimed director of *Mrs. Farnsworth* and *The Guys*, this play is a must-see.

"You have to think about the individual stories. They made me realize that things are not so cut and dry or black and white. There's something about seeing and hearing these stories live, actual stories, that you don't see too many of, there's more of a connection to it, not just something that you're reading or watching on television. That's the magic of theater. It's just more in touch with things." ■