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# Johnson magnificent in Curtainbox's 'Wit'

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David Burke | Posted: Thursday, August 19, 2010 2:00 am | **No Comments Posted**



There's no other way to say it: Corinne Johnson is simply masterful in The Curtainbox Theatre Company's production of Margaret Edson's "Wit."

It would be easy to play the role of an ovarian cancer patient for sympathy and tears, but Johnson and director Philip Wm. McKinley don't let themselves or the audience get by that easily.

Johnson's Vivian Bearing is an erudite doctor of English literature, arguing the poetry of John Donne while serving as the narrator and Greek chorus to her own story. Vivian tells us she's going to die within the two-hour time frame of the drama (it's about an hour-forty) and doesn't have any time for sentimentality or pondering the Great Beyond.

From the minute she wheels her IV cart onto the stage until her final breaths, you can't help but feel enthralled. I didn't get the chance to see Johnson's previous portrayal of Vivian for New Ground Theatre in 2003, but it should serve as a recruiting tool for potential theater students at St. Ambrose University, where she's the department chair. This woman could be teaching you.

Johnson is surrounded by excellent cast members as well, particularly Jessica Sheridan as a sympathetic nurse and Eddie Staver III as a medical resident who occasionally shows touches of humanity. Sheridan brings a believable humanity to the role, and Staver (taking a break from year-long stint at a theater in Virginia) makes a welcome return as the torn physician with strong subtle undertones.

Corinne Johnson plays Vivian Bearing, a woman dying of ovarian cancer in The Curtainbox Theatre Company's production of Margaret Edson's "Wit."

**If you go**

**What:** "Wit" by The Curtainbox Theatre Company

**When:** Through Sunday, Aug. 29; performances at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and



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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Tuesdays; 3 p.m. Sundays

**Where:** Village Theatre, 2113 E. 11th St.,  
Village of East Davenport

**How much:** \$20 for adults, \$15 for seniors, \$12  
for students

**Information:** (563) 322-8504 or  
[www.TheCurtainbox.com](http://www.TheCurtainbox.com)

Rounding out the excellent cast are David Bonde, as Vivian's physician; Dee Canfield, as her academic mentor; and Jeremy Mahr, Allison Costello Johnson, Seth Kaltwasser and Erin Churchill filling multiple roles, some with lightning-quick backstage costume changes.

McKinley and the cast and crew have an incredible eye for detail - four physicians and nurses are listed in the program as medical advisers - with realistic-looking medical exams, IV hookups and hordes of

interns accompanying the checkups.

The script, direction and series of white curtains that comprise the set give the playwright, director and cast a chance to make a statement about the sometimes-robotic health-care system. Lighting effects also help add realism to Vivian's never-ending series of X-rays.

Curtainbox's "Wit" is uncompromising and unflinching, will hit you hard and even make you smile once in awhile.

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