



Appearance of Life

A solo show written and performed by Jennifer S. Jones

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you so much for your interest in the critically acclaimed show *Appearance of Life*. This is a pdf version of the more extensive online press packet. The full online press packet, along with video clips and photography, may be found at www.letterstoclio.com/presspackets.

Appearance of Life tells the story of an Argentine woman named Margarita whose daughter, Rosa, becomes one of the many *desparecidos* (disappeared) of the Dirty War (1976-1983). The piece has done well when presented in academic settings where funding and presentation needs may be shared across departments, such as women's studies, anthropology, Latin American studies, and theater. The show may be paired with an immediate post-show discussion or a workshop on the art of storytelling.

The piece begins in Buenos Aires, Argentina on March 24, 1976. A military coup has overthrown the existing democratic government, pushing into place a reign of terror to crush any and all perceived "subversives". One afternoon Margarita, an ordinary housewife in a country ruled by the culture of *machismo*, waits at home for her 20-year-old daughter, Rosa, to return. But Rosa never comes home. Margarita pursues every avenue she can think of, the police, the church, the politicians, all in the hopes of finding her daughter. The piece then follows Margarita as she finds a group of women who call themselves *Las Madres*, the Mothers. With no other hopes of locating her daughter, she joins them. Wearing a white kerchief on her head and carrying a photo of her missing daughter in her hands, she marches with *Las Madres* every Thursday in the Plaza de Mayo, asking again and again "¿Ha visto a mi hija? Have you seen my daughter?".

Appearance of Life comes from years of research and a desire to form an archetypal story of these women's losses, experiences, and ultimate triumphs. The words in this play come from my own imagination and my own interpretation of the research I encountered, the interviews I conducted, and the stories I read. For touring purposes, *Appearance of Life* was created to be performed on a simple unit set with only two tables and one chair.

The following pages feature a complete description of the *Letters to Clio* project, more information on *Appearance of Life*, and past reviews of this critically acclaimed show. **For booking information** please contact: booking@letterstoclio.com. For general information please contact: info@letterstoclio.com. To inquire by phone please call Jennifer S. Jones at 917-971-7817.

Best Wishes,



Jennifer S. Jones

www.letterstoclio.com

Appearance of Life

**The critically acclaimed
solo show written and
performed by
Jennifer S. Jones**

Directed by Jessica Lefkow



A riveting thriller about one woman's search for the truth, *Appearance of Life* is the story of an Argentine woman, Margarita, whose daughter becomes one of the many *desaparecidos* of the Dirty War. Over the course of this 70-minute show Jennifer S. Jones transports the audience to 1970's Buenos Aires, Argentina. A military coup has overthrown the exiting democratic government putting in place a reign of terror to crush any and all perceived "subversives." Adorning different characters, Ms. Jones presents a captivating picture of one woman's transformation as she moves from her role as wife and mother to that of political advocate. Based on the author's years of research and dozens of in-depth, in-person interviews, *Appearance of Life* is a story of brutality and loss – but also a story of survival, new life and triumph.

Editor's Pick "With its combination of discipline and passion...worth watching" – The Washington Post

"A deeply moving piece....I hope it's produced in many venues" – NYC Stage Review

"Judging from this piece, Jones has embarked on a project that matches her talents as writer and actor" – The Philadelphia Inquirer

★★★★ "Impassioned and intelligent" – DC Theatre Scene

"An affecting and well-orchestrated one-person show" – NYTheatre.com

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ARTISTS' BIOS

JENNIFER S. JONES – WRITER / PERFORMER

Jennifer S. Jones is a writer and actor with a diverse background in education, community development, and intercultural training. She holds a BA (Theater) from Connecticut College and an MFA (Playwriting) from the Department of Dramatic Writing at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, where she received a full scholarship and the Chair Graduate Award for Distinguished Achievement. Her plays include *Sunday's Child*, winner of Pandora's Box Festival, 2009, Reston Players Festival, 2010; *The Well*, a finalist for the Barter Theatre's Appalachian Festival in 2007; *Yellow Rose*; *Ship of Lights*, finalist for the Goldberg Award for Excellence in Playwriting in 2004; *West of Wyoming*; and her one-woman show *Letters to Clio*, most recently seen at the All for One Festival, NYC 2012 ; the Capital Fringe (Editor's Pick) and the New York International Fringe Festivals, 2010 ; and at the Women Playwrights International Festival in Mumbai, India, 2009. *Letters to Clio* also received the Kennedy Center's KCACTF Regional Award for Best One Act as well as the Alberto Vilar Fellowship nomination. Jennifer has been commissioned by Hildebrandt International, resulting in the play *Inside-Out*; Hildebrandt International & Thomson Reuters, resulting in the screenplay *Reputation at Risk*; Beazley, resulting in the screenplay *A&E Risk Management*; and the Stanford Symphony, resulting in *Transfigured Night*.

In performing her one-woman show, *Letters to Clio*, Jennifer has been consistently struck by the impact a personal story can have on others. Jennifer bases her plays on real-life experiences. First, she goes into communities, researches their history and interviews individuals. This research then becomes the basis for her storyline and characters, giving communities insight into their values, strengths and weaknesses. Through this process, the plays' audiences are able to empathize with the characters, while learning about others' lives and experiences. Believing that through theater, we create our own reality, Jennifer creates stories that give voice to people whose voices are not being heard.

In addition to her work onstage, Jennifer worked for eight years as the International Coordinator for Stage Entertainment BV (seeking new properties to produce in Stage Entertainment's eight other countries) and as the Events Manager for New World Stages. Jennifer has been a teacher of English as a Second Language to corporations that are managing multi-national companies. Expanding on her work as an ESL teacher, Jennifer has also organized individual and group seminars on Intercultural Training for a Cross-Cultural World.

JESSICA LEFKOW – DIRECTOR / DRAMATURG

Director Jessica Lefkow lives outside her native Washington DC, after many years abroad with her journalist husband and three sons. She has lived, directed, performed and taught theater across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Since returning to the United States in 2003, she has worked extensively with playwrights on bringing new scripts to production.

A performer and director collaborating extensively on new works, Jessica directed the world premiere of the Helen Hayes Award-winning *Honey Brown Eyes* by Stefanie Zdravec, (Best New Play 2009). Other Washington-area directing credits; *Hercules In Russia*, *TETHER*, (Doorway Arts Ensemble); *Frida Vice Versa*, *Margarita*, *Tales of Doomed Love*, *Not Your Granny's Revolution*, *Letters to Clio*, *Part Two*, (Capital Fringe Festivals); *Red Herring*, *Mousetrap* (1st Stage), *The F Word*, (Workshop Production with The Inkwell); *Dear Sara Jane*, (The Hub Theater); *House of Blue Leaves*, (Montgomery College, Rockville); *BENCHED* (independently produced with Allyson Currin, Beth Hylton & Liz Mamana). Jessica's directing work has also appeared in the Kennedy Center's 'Page to Stage' Festivals, the Source Ten-Minute Play Festivals, Theatre Lab, Playwrights Forum, and Calliope Productions. Readings and workshops include projects with Theater J, Washington Shakespeare Company, GMU's Theatre of the First Amendment, Spooky Action Theatre Company, WWIT. She is a co-conspirator with dog&ponydc, appearing in their productions of *Courage* and *Beertown*, and serving as a creative conspirator on *Separated At Birth*.

Jessica holds a BFA Acting degree from The Catholic University of America. She is a Teaching Artist with Young Playwright's Theater, a working mom and a proud member of SAG-AFTRA. www.jessicalefkow.com

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THE “LETTERS TO CLIO” PROJECT A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

“Why *Letters to Clio*?” is a question I’m often asked.

Several years ago, knowing of my interest in women’s history, a friend passed along some tapes consisting of interviews conducted by Sandra Boston at the Beijing Women’s Conference of 1995. Though I was quite familiar with the history and politics of the feminist movement, the lives I heard on these tapes were stories I knew nothing about. Girl trafficking in Nepal, abortion rights in Ireland, the protests of mothers in Argentina, the list went on and on. How could it be that I, an educated, politically aware person, did not know these events were taking place?

And so it all began. Months of sitting in libraries conducting research, going over first-hand accounts, anthropological studies, poetry, short stories, children stories, fables, anything I could get my hands on that would allow me a better understanding of who these women were and where they came from. I read their stories. I heard their voices. And I was, to put it simply, overwhelmed by the power of the female voice.

Though in depth research plays a major component in compiling my work, much of the content in *Letters to Clio* stems from first hand interviews I conducted. Be it in the streets of Buenos Aires, in a tented refugee camp in Uganda, or in a neighborhood café right here in Washington, D.C., I have sought these women out. I have encouraged them to share their words and the result is an archetypal story of these women’s losses, experiences, and ultimate triumphs.

Theatre is not a passive art form. It is what separates it from other mediums. I believe in creating stories where the audience must play an active role with their imaginations fully engaged, so very little set and props are used to create the story. There is only one voice and one actor.

The piece derives its name from the ancient muse of history, Clio. Ultimately, the piece *Letters* will consist of eight to ten stories of women’s voices from all around the world. *Part I, Neela*, is the story of 14 year old Neela who reveals her archetypal story of being trafficked into a brothel in Bombay, India. *Appearance of Life* is the second in this series. The third, *Annie*, tells the story of a Liberian woman’s move from political refugee, to resident of Northern Virginia, to community leader of the very country she once escaped. *Annie* is currently in development and is set to premiere next year.

For too long the voices of these women have made neither the evening news nor the history text books; I thought it was time they did.



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FULL REVIEWS FOR *APPEARANCE OF LIFE*
(FORMERLY TITLED *LETTERS TO CLIO – PART II, MARGARITA*)



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★★★★ “Impassioned and intelligent” – DC Theatre Scene

“An affecting and well-orchestrated one-person show” – NYTheatre.com

“A captivating picture of a woman's struggle and growth” – TheatreOnline

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NYC Stage Review – September, 2012

“Appearance of Life”: A Political Awakening | Reviewed by Beatrice Williams-Rude



The “All for One” theater festival now in progress at the Cherry Lane Theatre shows that the solo performance has evolved into a specialized art form, a category unto itself.

This celebration of one-person offerings does not mean one character: “Each in his time plays many parts.” And so it was on Saturday with “**Appearance of Life**,” written and performed by Jennifer S. Jones.

The deeply affecting work centers on the political awakening of Margarita, a housewife in Buenos Aires, who was quietly accepting the military junta even while frightened at the soldiers in dark glasses “so you couldn’t see their eyes” who increasingly policed the marketplace. When people “disappeared,” she echoed her husband’s view that “there must be a reason.” Even when her daughter’s boyfriend is taken into police custody she says “there must be a reason.”

But when her daughter, Rosa, the lovely virtuous university student whose leisure hours are spent working in a soup kitchen, fails to arrive home for her 21st birthday celebration, the situation changes. The emotional trajectory from confusion and disbelief, to panic and frantic activity—from police station to police station, to churches, again and again-- at once futile but necessary, give way at last to political awareness.

This deeply moving piece in which Jennifer S. Jones plays the mother and all the characters with whom the mother interacts—the daughter, the father/husband, other mothers, the police—are effectively portrayed. Anyone who picked up a US newspaper during this time period (1975-1983) read about the “mothers of the disappeared” who ceaselessly marched at the Plaza de Mayo seeking to find their children. La Pasionaria, the Republican heroine of the Spanish Civil War, might well have been the role model for the founders of Las Madres de los Desaparecidos a la Plaza de Mayo, three of whom were thrown into the ranks of “disappeared” and whose remains were only uncovered in 2005.

In the course of the play a contented, well-off, submissive woman, Margarita, finds strength and purpose as well as the courage to exercise her conscience in the quest for justice not just for herself, but for all the victims, estimated to be some 30,000. There is triumph, bitter and late, but triumph at last, after years of marching and seeking. Disappointed that those guilty of torture and executions will never be called to account, they were given amnesty, the women express their displeasure in shunning their nemeses in social situations.

So bound to their cause and one another, many of the “Madres” continue to further their mission by supporting those in other nations who are facing the same agony—“disappeared” loved ones.

While this work is from the Argentine perspective and “war” is only alluded to briefly, it would seem that more attention should have been paid to the British victory in the Falklands War because that’s what led to the overthrow of the brutal Galtieri dictatorship.

While “**Appearance of Life**” (I wish there were a more descriptive title.) could use some judicious editing, and there were passages which were inaudible, so effective, so wrenching is the piece that I don’t think there was a dry eye in the house. I hope it’s produced in many venues.

It was ably directed by Jessica Lefkow. Sound was by Christopher Jensen and lighting by Graham Kindred. Executive director, Michael Wolk also served as host. There are talk-backs after each of the productions.

The festival, Sept. 14-30, is at the Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce Street in Manhattan.

The Washington Post – July 20, 2010

By Nelson Pressley

***Editors' Pick**



Fringe Festival's 'Letters to Clio' tells of Argentina's disappeared

In "Letters to Clio -- Part II, Margarita," writer-performer Jennifer S. Jones is rigorous and efficient. In 55 minutes, she summarizes the agony of Argentina's "dirty war," the period in the 1970s and '80s when thousands of citizens suspected of subversion were abducted and "disappeared."

It's a lot to take on, but Jones concentrates it by assuming the role of a well-to-do woman named Margarita, whose cardigan, pearls and pulled-back hair suggest comfort and confidence. Without changing costume, Jones also voices the rest of the characters in this drama -- Margarita's husband, their daughter and the people Margarita encounters as her daughter disappears, shattering Margarita's

tranquility.

Jones's assured acting is cool and unforced, which puts the emphasis squarely on the fruits of her firsthand research. The story is based on interviews, and though this scenario is already deeply familiar, the aftershocks are still being hashed out, and Jones still feels it all urgently. The show is unabashed activism: Each playbill has a photo of one of the desaparecidos (the disappeared) on the back, with biographical details on the "Letters to Clio" Web site.

"Part II," which runs through July 24 at the low-ceilinged Bedroom in Fort Fringe, means this is a series chronicling women's issues around the world (Jones has already grappled with India and next turns her gaze to the Congo). This installment, with its combination of discipline and passion, suggests the ongoing project will be worth watching.

DC Theatre Scene – July 20, 2010

By Steven McKnight

*4 out of 5 Stars



Few nightmares rival those of a parent whose child has gone missing, even if that child is a young adult. Yet this nightmare was far too common in Argentina during the 1970s following a military coup as police frequently picked up young people suspected of being anti-government subversives. Writer-performer Jennifer S. Jones chooses this setting for *Letters to Clio – Part II, Margarita*, the second in her international series about the voices of suffering women.

After the unfortunate opening cliché “Life can change in an instance,” Jones sketches out an upper class Argentine family. Margarita, the concerned mother, is the main voice of the drama. She is devoted to her husband Alberto and her daughter Rosa. When Rosa’s boyfriend Fernando becomes one of “the disappeared” (“los desaparecidos”), she focuses on her daughter and tries to rationalize her civic apathy (“You don’t know him, what he might have done”).

Once Rosa fails to come home from the soup kitchen for her birthday dinner, however, Margarita is cast into a world of anguish and rumor. She ultimately finds strength by uniting with other mothers in the same situation.

As a performer Jones is skilled at using a few minor clothing items and props to create the diverse characters and settings of her story. Her dramatic vocalizations are adequate and she effectively conveys the passion and pain of the characters. Jones has a nice gift for expressing personal details.

At times the story seems to have the occasional plot hole or implausibility, and Alberto disappears for too long once she has turned her focus to the story of the Argentine mothers. Nonetheless, this tragic story does engulf the audience.

One of the ways to judge a play is if the story makes you want to know more about the characters and the setting. Even though this story is a familiar one, it may entice many to learn more at her website www.letterstoclio.com.

Theater Online – August, 2010

**New York International Fringe Festival - LETTERS TO CLIO - PART II,
MARGARITA**

Written/Performed by: Jennifer S. Jones; Directed by: Jessica Lefkow

Buenos Aires, Argentina. March 24, 1976. A military coup overthrows the democratic government. Their goal is to crush any perceived “subversives”. In her home, Margarita waits for her 21-year-old daughter Rosa to return. But Rosa never returns.

Based on first hand interviews, this one woman-show tells the riveting tale of the voices of the Mothers of Argentina, *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Adorning different characters **Ms. Jones** presents a captivating picture of a woman’s struggle and growth as she moves from her role as wife and mother to that of political advocate. Wearing a white kerchief and carrying a photo of her missing daughter in her hands, Margarita marches every Thursday with other women like her. They circle the Plaza de Mayo, their voices representing hundreds of missing faces.

nytheatre.com review – August 21, 2010
Reviewed by Heather J. Violanti

Letters to Clio is a eight-to-ten part series of plays by Jennifer S. Jones. Each one takes place in a different part of the globe and revolves around a woman who triumphs over tragedy. Jones focuses on women whose stories have been overlooked by mainstream American arts and media—girls trafficked in Nepal, mothers protesting the 1970s dictatorship in Argentina, women forced into prostitution in India, and so on.

In *Part II, Margarita*, an Argentine housewife named Margarita finds her voice after her only child is abducted during the military dictatorship that ravaged the country from 1976 to 1983. During this time, thousands of people were kidnapped or "disappeared" by the government and subsequently tortured and killed. In the play, the formerly timid Margarita finds courage in her despair, joining the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, a grassroots organization founded by mothers whose children and other family members were "disappeared."

Jones has crafted a moving one-person show about one woman's quest to find her daughter. She's not only the playwright, she's also the actor, playing all the roles in this heart-rending story: the tragic Margarita, her lively daughter Rosita, her somber husband Alberto, gruff soldiers, the Madres who band together to help topple the dictatorship. Jones makes the transitions between these different characters clear, yet it's frustrating that apart from Margarita, the other voices get so little stage time. Jones is an adept writer and actor—and I wanted to see more of her versatility in evidence. I wanted to hear more from the other characters, to see more of this world.

Still, Jones's often poetic script paints a compelling story of an ordinary life changed forever. Margarita used to live a comfortable yet politically isolated existence; when she loses her daughter she is spurred to fight against injustice. Her transformation is subtly and powerfully portrayed. As Margarita evolves, Jones's voice deepens and she stands a little taller, to show how this once retiring woman learns to assert herself.

Director Jessica Lefkow has crafted seamless transitions between the multiple characters and settings in Jones's script. The action is played swiftly with just a few set pieces—two tables and a chair. In all, this is an affecting and well-orchestrated one-person show that educates its audience about a painful time in

Philadelphia Inquirer – September 05, 2002

By Douglas J. Keating

"Letters to Clio - Part II Margarita" – Philadelphia Fringe Festival

They were the mothers of los desaparecidos, the disappeared. Demanding information about sons and daughters seized by Argentina's repressive military government from the mid-1980s into the 1990s, the mothers bravely marched weekly on the central plaza of Buenos Aires until the government fell.

It is the story of one of those women that local actress Jennifer S. Jones tells in Letters to Clio - Part II Margarita. A skillful and effective blend of historical fact and personal reaction to a terrible personal tragedy, Jones' dramatic monologue offers an engaging account of a woman evolving from passive domesticity to political activism, from despair over her beloved daughter's disappearance to defiance against those responsible for it.

Local actress Jones is an accomplished performer, and her portrayal of a fictional mother is nicely developed within the story, even if her Margarita often seems more American than Argentinian. Letters to Clio (the muse of history) is a proposed series of monologues about contemporary women and their struggles. Judging from this piece, Jones has embarked on a project that matches her talents as writer and actor.

Final performance tonight at 8. Brick Playhouse, 623 South St. \$10.

All Arts Review 4 U - July 2010

By Bob Anthony

"LETTERS TO CLIO-PART II, MARGARITA" is a one woman show by Jennifer S. Jones that presents the story of the military takeover of Argentina which originally offered hope to the downtrodden citizens but ended up with many young adults being arrested...for no apparent reason sometimes...and ending up as filler as the base of superhighways or thrown into the ocean. Even today after more than 30 years, their mothers continue a crusade to find out what crimes their children were charged with and where their bodies lie. There are many poignant moments in this story-telling as the actress truly lives the role of one of the mothers who lost a daughter. Ms. Jones has an elegance about her acting suggesting that it was not the usual underclass that suffers under such horrible political suppression. Director Jessica Lefkow's hands-on was obvious throughout with her perfect direction. (Reviewed by Bob Anthony)