Lady Day: The Many Faces Of Billie Holiday Essay, Research Paper

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The movie Lady Day: The Many Faces Of Billie Holiday paints an interesting, and thought provoking portrait of one of jazz and blues most charismatic, and influential artists. The incomparable talent of Billie Holiday, both truth and legend are immortalized in this one-hour documentary film. The film follows Holiday, also referred to as ?Lady Day? or ?Lady?, through the many triumphs and trials of her career, and does it?s very best to separate the facts from fiction. Her autobiography Lady Sings The Blues is used as a rough guide of how she desired her life story to be viewed by her public. Those who knew her, worked with her, and loved her paint a different picture than this popular, and mostly fictional autobiography.

Interview footage of her colleagues, fellow musicians, and friends such as Annie Ross, Buck Clayton, Mal Waldron, and Harry ?Sweets? Edison look back on their years of friendship and experiences with the woman they affectionately call ?Lady?. Their anecdotes, fond memories, and descriptive way of describing Holiday?s unique talent and style, show the Lady that they knew and loved. The film also makes interesting use of photographs and orignal recordings of Holiday, along with movie footage of different eras. With the use of these devices, we get a feel for what Holiday?s music meant for the audience it reached. The black and white footage from the thirties of groups of people merrily swing dancing, paired with a bumptious, and swingin? number Billie Holiday performed with Count Basie called ?Swing Me Count?, makes one wonder what it might have been like to actually be there. To wildly swing dance to the live vocals of Billie Holiday must have been an amazing experience, as this film demonstrates.

The most enduring and alluring part of the film is the live footage of Holiday performing, either in a band with one of her idols, Louis Armstrong, or in her first film role as a maid, or in her later televised performances in the fifties. It was not Lady?s vocal talent that made her what she was. It was her delivery, performance style, charisma, and impeccably beautiful dramatization of even the most banal little number that made an impression on audiences. The footage of her singing the song ?Strange Fruit? is one of the most amazing and alarming things in the film. As the audience looking in, we feel every word she sings, with a bit of awe, tinged with the horrid reality of what the song is about. This particular song was not recorded for many years due to the subject matter; lynching of African Americans in the South.

This film shows Holiday as a enduring symbol of her art, a student of a life that was seldom kind or easy, a talented and alluring performer beloved by her audience, and a master of musical interpretation. I found the film to be highly enjoyable, and absolutely fascinating. I have always been a fan of Billie Holiday since I could remember, but it this particular film piqued my interest, and showed a true legend in both her prime, and the moments of her demise. It is done well enough to do justice to her work, as well as to her legend. I would definitely recommend it.