

'Vivien' shows Leigh was no Scarlett O'Hara

By Sandy Staggs
El Tecolote Staff Writer

Scarlett O'Hara would never heed in the face of adversity. But as God as her witness, Vivien Leigh did.

Leigh was more like Blanche Dubois, the vulnerable, tragic figure the Brit captured in Elia Kazan's screen version of "A Streetcar Named Desire."



"Vivien: The Triumph and Madness of Vivien Leigh" at the Magic Theatre is an account of the last hours of her mental and physical (tuberculosis) anguish in 1967 London.

In a one-woman show, Janis Stevens is downright incredible and convincingly embodies the stage actress who was tormented by her love and rivalry with husband Lawrence Olivier and legacy as the "Gone With the Wind" heroine, and not as the true Shakespearean actor she wanted to be known.

This lethal combination drove her to a sanitarium where she endured seven years of psychotherapy and shock treatments, as Rick Foster's play demonstrates. Leigh suffered from a bi-polar disorder, an illness that did not have an official diagnosis in her day.

Stevens' remarkable resemblance to Leigh is startling in this 85-minute piece (with no intermission) as she recounts getting the part of Scarlett, kissing Rhett Butler (Clark Gable) who had "bourbon breath and false teeth), playing Ophelia opposite "Larry's" unforgettable Hamlet, having a fling with Peter Finch and even covering the shock treatment scars with make-up. Her innocent smile, her commanding eyes, her "Fiddle-Dee-Dee" all capture Leigh in a biographical portrayal, that rivals the best Maria Callas players in Terrence McNally's wrenching "Master Class."

The production, which is craftily directed by Barbara Bosch, is further enhanced by Ron Madonia's complex lighting design that gently contracts and expands with Leigh's swinging array of moods.

"Vivien" runs Wednesdays through Saturdays at 8:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. through Oct. 7 at the Magic Theatre at Fort Mason Bldg. D. Tickets are \$25-\$30. Call (415) 441-3687 or visit www.DuendeDrama.org.