

Wishful Drinking

Carrie Fisher brings her wickedly funny one-woman show to Seattle

By Katherine Luck

Princess Leia, we hardly knew you.

At age 19, Carrie Fisher saw herself sporting that iconic cinnamon bun hairdo atop *Star Wars*-themed Pez dispensers and shampoo bottles. Then Fisher-as-Leia graced the covers of tabloids under headlines exposing her ongoing battle with drug addiction. Finally, and perhaps as the last straw, that singularly bad hair day was immortalized in the *Abnormal Psychology* textbook's chapter on bipolar disorder.

In between, she was married to Paul Simon, wrote four bestselling novels and came to love electroshock therapy.

Fisher puts a scathingly farcical spin on these peculiar factoids and so many more in *Wishful Drinking*, her one-woman show which opened April 2 at Seattle Repertory Theatre.

"It's my performed personality. It's me taking things that were just true and making them funny — making them acceptable. It's about my life," Fisher explained. "It takes a kind of artistry to make it funny. Otherwise, you're just going to be trounced. Having been trounced, I don't care to have it happen again. I make the difficult into the amusing as much as I can."

She developed *Wishful Drinking* from a series of speeches she gave over the years. "I was doing speeches for a long time. I would get an award for being good at being mentally ill, so I'd develop speeches for that. And for *Star Wars* — there were a lot of those! And I just melded them together."

The daughter of Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, she grew up amid Hollywood royalty, with Elizabeth Taylor becoming her stepmother after her parents' divorce and Cary Grant periodically calling to lecture her on the dangers of LSD. Fisher acknowledges that she would have been a very different person if she hadn't grown up a product of what she refers to in *Wishful Drinking* as "Hollywood inbreeding."

"My personality is bigger than life, which is not something you find in every family. It's a performed personality," she said.

Fisher first performed *Wishful Drinking* at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles in November 2006. The show dishes the dirt on why her childhood home had not one, but three swimming pools; George Lucas' theory about the existence of outer space undergarments; and Bob Dylan's quest for colognes to endorse.

"I ask everybody I talk about in the show if they mind any of it, and I take it out if they do. It's no big deal — it's not like I'm hurting for material!" Fisher laughed. "It's an interactive show. I bring people on stage. I let them ask questions, I ask them questions ... It keeps evolving. Otherwise, it wouldn't be fun to do or watch."

For Fisher, it's also a therapeutic show.

"The cathartic experience is when you first really are able to transform it so it's not just something that happened to you. It's something you happened to," she said.

Some of Fisher's most thought-provoking material comes from her struggle with drug abuse and her subsequent diagnosis with bipolar disorder.

"A lot of people who have chemical imbalances use drugs to change how they feel," Fisher explained.

Her effort to come to terms with her bipolar diagnosis has led her to explore the various ways mental illness is treated, including the use of pharmaceuticals and electroshock therapy, of which she has become an advocate.

For Fisher, the hardest part of performing *Wishful Drinking* hasn't been revealing the good, bad and funny about herself, but the time she has to spend away from her daughter, Billie, age 16.

For the first 15 years of her daughter's life, Fisher was battling depression and chemical dependence, and for the most part wasn't working at all. She has discovered that it takes a bit of an adjustment, becoming a working mother with a teenager. Once again, though, there's no shortage of material for Fisher to mine from this challenge.

"She thinks I'm an idiot, but that's okay. I thought my mom was too at her age!" Fisher joked.

Fisher wanted to make sure the audience knows one thing about her before attending her show: "I'm overweight. They should know that," she laughed. "But I'm fun. Unless I'm not!"

Wishful Drinking runs through May 3 at Seattle Repertory Theatre, located at 155 Mercer St. For tickets or more information, call (206) 443-2222 or visit www.seattlerep.org.



Photo by Kevin Berne

Carrie Fisher reveals everything you ever wanted to know about Hollywood, electroshock therapy and being Princess Leia in *Wishful Drinking*.



Photo by Michael Lemont

Carrie Fisher performs her one-woman show, *Wishful Drinking*, through May 3 at Seattle Repertory Theatre.