



Wednesday, November 10, 2010

Lighting Up Off-Off-Broadway

Chiara Montalto reminds us that theater doesn't need flash to succeed
By [Mark Peikert](#)



Chiara Montalto in *Emergency Used Candles*. Photo by Francisco Solorzano.

Emergency Used Candles, the slight, charming new one-person show starring and written by Chiara Montalto and directed by Victoria Malvagno, raises a surprisingly large question for such a personal production. An hour-long play based on Montalto's own experience living with her grandfather as his caretaker, *Emergency Used Candles* begs the question: What constitutes a show worth our time?

For the first few moments of the show, I must admit that I didn't think Montalto had it. Recounting the rituals and comedy inherent in a twenty-something living with her octogenarian grandfather, Montalto's sudden switches between the two characters and wide-eyed, child-like delivery as the granddaughter were initially off-putting. Listening to her stories about workplace romances gone awry, or brief anecdotes about the elderly friends of her grandfather, I uncharitably wondered why we cared.

As the show progressed, however, and Montalto relaxed into her story, *Emergency Used Candles* acquired a certain battered charm. Montalto became a stand-in for anyone who has ever cared for an elderly relative; the details are different, but the emotions are the same. Good theater, at its most basic, should simultaneously accomplish two things:

entertain and enlighten the audience. And by the time Montalto's piece of theater had ended, she had more than accomplished both. Plays don't need to be two-and-a-half hours long, with a 10-minute intermission to be effective. Sometimes, all you need is a barebones set and a story worth hearing. You'll find both at *Emergency Used Candles*.

Emergency Used Candles, through Nov. 20, Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. (betw. Bedford & Barrow Sts.), 212-239-6200; \$35.

Also in 24/7 Theater:

- Ssh! Men at Work
- Poor People Problems
- The (Screen)Play's the Thing
- Poor People Problems
- The Transformative Power of Theater
- Sensing Disaster
- Up Front and Center
- Going 'Under'
- Turned Off Broadway
- The Heat In Tennessee

