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Pittsfield actress/writer comes a long way, baby

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By Kathy Ceceri

NORTH ADAMS - Kristin Ace says "Baby, Oh Baby," her one-woman show about being a career woman turned stay-at-home mom, which is receiving its regional premiere this month at Main Street Stage, is "hilarious."

From being asked, four months into her pregnancy, if she was "due any day with twins," to the time her little boy painted himself all over with red nail polish (and the pediatrician warned her to take it off or he'd turn into a homosexual), Ace has filled her personal account with the kind of funny moments most parents can relate to. But there's a lot of serious stuff in it as well.

Ace grew up in Pittsfield and later moved to New York, Boston and Chicago to pursue her dream of becoming an actress. But she happily gave up her work when her son Landon was born six years ago and didn't expect to go back.

What happened was that Ace found staying home alone with her baby all day very lonely.

"The playgroups just aren't enough," she said during a recent interview. "They last an hour, and then you're on your own."

As a first-time mother, Ace said she felt very inept taking care of a newborn.

"All of a sudden, they put the baby in your arms and say, 'OK, that's it,'" she recalls. "I couldn't take a shower for three weeks."

And when she became the first in her circle to become pregnant with a second child, her daughter Miranda, she said the other mothers cut her off when she tried to share



submitted photo Kristin Ace

her fears about being able to love the new baby as much as the first.

"They'd say, 'I don't know what you're talking about.'"

Later, when they found themselves in the same situation, those other mothers came back to Ace to tell her they were sorry, she said. But in her experience, women have not been as supportive of each other as they could be. She wishes there was more discussion about the reality of parenthood - the good and the bad.

"I didn't find in the most stressful times with a baby or toddler that other women helped," she said. "How come we aren't talking about how hard it is to stay home - and how wonderful it is at the same time?"

People on the street would ignore her when she needed help with a stroller. Other mothers - especially those with well-behaved daughters - were aghast when Landon behaved like, well, a boy.

"People stopped playing with us," she said. "We were shunned."

And Ace had her own demons to wrestle with, as well. She said there was "brutality" in her past that made her question her ability to become a good parent. It was something she had to work hard to deal with.

"I had to rework my past and make it something beautiful. The play is about how I transitioned my life. My children are the vehicle of my transformation."

After Miranda was born three years ago, Ace said she realized she did, in fact, want to return to acting.

"I couldn't be a stay-at-home mom anymore. I couldn't do it 24/7," she said. "I feel women need something more."

Her husband, Jeff, and friends and family had been urging her to write down the stories she loved to tell about motherhood. So starting with her birth story - "Nobody ever talks about how shocking it is! Or how funny these things can be" - she wrote what became "Baby, Oh Baby" in two weeks.

At first, Ace worried that she wouldn't have enough material. People told her to keep it to 30 or 40 minutes, tops. But when she wrote everything down, she had three or four hours' worth of monologue, which she then had to trim down to a manageable length. (She'll probably do more rewrites during the show's three-week run in North Adams.)

"Baby, Oh Baby" got its first performance, in front of a specially invited audience of 35, on Mother's Day.

"It turned out it was very powerful," Ace said. "It was my kids who helped me bring these things to the front. It's my kids who've taught me about triumph and loving who we are. Now I have the maturity to weave these stories together and make the play more than a sitcom."

Ace's life as a work-at-home mother works well for her family, she said.

"I have a great babysitter. She's here three days a week, so I can write and do mailings."

When she's done with work, Ace comes downstairs and makes dinner.

"We've found a rhythm," she said. Husband Jeff pitches in as well.

"He's my major support. He's my champion."

While the show is running at Main Street Stage, Ace will be gone four days a week. She's tried to explain to her children why she's doing it.

"My daughter doesn't really understand, but my son does. I told him it's really important that Mommy works and that they're a huge part of it. I tell them it's important to help people laugh and cry. I know he's a little sad I'll be gone."

But after its run here, Ace won't have to leave home again until the end of the summer. The play, which has already been workshopped in New York City, will go on to a women's festival in Pennsylvania and then possibly Chicago.

For Ace, one of the biggest changes having children has brought has been taking charge of her own career. Although before motherhood she was headed towards success in TV and movies, trying out for directors has lost its appeal.

"I'm not going to get down on my knees and hope you like me. The auditioning, hoping against hope. Oh God, that's so tiring. It's a fulltime job," she said. "I can make my own rules here."

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the whole endeavor has been the response she's received to the play. When people come up and tell her "I've felt that sorrow," she feels she's created something truly universal.

"It's the humor and the pain together that make it an unusual experience," she said. "It's about transforming it into something more beautiful."

"Baby, Oh Baby" by Kristin Ace will be presented at Main Street Stage, 57 Main Street, North Adams, as follows: Friday, May 13 and Saturday, May 14, 8 p.m.; Sunday, May 15, 3 p.m.; Friday, May 20 and Saturday, May 21, 8 p.m.; Sunday, May 22, 3 p.m.; Friday, June 3, and Saturday, June 4, 8 p.m.; Sunday, June 5, 3 p.m.

Seating is limited. Reservations are recommended and can be made by calling the box office, 663-3240. Ticket are \$20 general admission, \$15 seniors and \$10 students.