ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HISTORY

Catherine and Her Men (All Twelve of Them)
Wayne H. Proctor
BookSurge
978-1-4392-3589-8
Three Stars (out of Five)

During her reign as Empress of Russia from 1762 to 1796, Catherine the Great built factories and hospitals, fought wars that established Russia as a central power in Eastern Europe, and greatly developed her country's collection of art and literature. Instead of these accomplishments, Catherine the Great is best remembered for her sex life. In Catherine and Her Men, Wayne Proctor has created a monologue for the empress in which she speaks about her life and about the many men who filled it.

The author has estimated that this monologue contains about seventy-five minutes of spoken text. The brevity of the work means that the information provided about Catherine's life and reign is very superficial. Certainly the author touches on the high points—her move to Russia, her marriage and rise to power, and of course her many lovers—but there is potential here for a great deal more.

Included in this monologue is a series of wardrobe changes. While Catherine is off stage, it is the author's intention that an actor to represent each of the men should take her place. Catherine states, "I want you to see [names lover] as I best remember him: as a work of art." The actor then stands proudly on stage until Catherine returns. This is an awkward way of filling time. Because the men cannot possibly bear more than a superficial resemblance to the historical figures that they are meant to represent, they do not add anything meaningful to the monologue. Some of Catherine's lovers were extremely powerful men in their own right, and some were made powerful by their relationship with her. The flow of this piece might be better served by instead using historical images of these men or if the actors had a chance to speak for the figures that they represent, letting the audience know what contribution each man made to history.

The concept behind this work is brilliant. Catherine the Great was the victim of a great deal of gossip during her life, and the stories that were told then have endured far better than the truths of her reign; she deserves a chance to speak for herself. At one point during this monologue she describes how her husband and his aunt, the Empress Elizabeth, treated her with

cruelty and neglect. She says, “I busied myself in my solitude by reading the works of great French philosophers, gathering information about the current events in Russia and news from around the world. I did not know at the time that this near isolation would last two more years.” In statements such as this, those who are interested in knowing more than the gossip behind this historical figure are given the chance to see Catherine as she might have been—lonely, brilliant, and struggling to become one of the greatest leaders Russia would ever know.

Catherine Thureson