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THEATER REVIEW

'Bride' juggles tasks with panache

BY J. WYNN ROUSUCK
[SUN THEATER CRITIC]

Dressed in a straitjacket with a telephone cord wrapped around her torso, Sara Felder balances on a small seesaw while the audience sings "You Are My Sunshine."

June Bride, Felder's largely autobiographical one-woman show at the Theatre Project, may have a conventional title, but it defies convention in both its style and subject matter. And this defiance couldn't be more fitting.

That's because *June Bride* is about challenging —

and expanding — traditions. As the title indicates, it's a show about a wedding. Felder falls in love, decides to marry and wants a traditional Jewish wedding. The challenge comes from the fact that she's marrying another woman.

Her show's stylistic departures include escaping from a straitjacket and a considerable amount of juggling. (Felder's juggling credits include the Pickle Family Circus and Jugglers for Peace.)

In terms of wedding preparations, finding a rabbi was apparently not a problem. Felder and her partner, Dev, were members of a San Francisco synagogue at the time of their 1992 wedding.

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Sara Felder's nuptials defy convention.
[COURTESY OF SARA FELDER]



»» **JUNE BRIDE** runs through March 18 at the Theatre Project, 45 W. Preston St. \$16. 410-752-8558.

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Persuading her mother and long-estranged father to attend proves trickier, as do such details as who will break the glass at the end of the ceremony — a Jewish custom usually performed by the bridegroom.

Felder — who is now based in Philadelphia where her partner is studying to be a rabbi — presents information about Jewish customs along with autobiographical snippets. These spoken segments take the form of either informal lectures or scenes in which she portrays various characters.

Her most charming recurring character is an elderly Jewish man she meets at her grandmoth-

er's funeral. Comparing his long beard and eye patch to a violin held upside down (the chin rest is the eye patch, the strings and scroll are the beard), she uses the instrument as a stand-in for this mysterious sage.

Her juggling interludes are also illustrative. In the funniest, she juggles three large knives while reciting a poem about circumcision ("the ritual of circumcision is an act requiring some precision ..."). In the loveliest, she manipulates a single glass ball, which glides from one arm to the other while she talks to God.

Overall, *June Bride* is as quirky as it is entertaining. One of the biggest quirks is the notion of creating a one-person show about a

wedding, a subject that would appear to require a cast of at least two. With her affable, welcoming presence, however, Felder is adept at holding the stage on her own.

During the wedding ceremony, Felder recites a Yiddish prayer while pantomiming juggling. Or perhaps she is juggling air — no longer needing to juggle several things at once. This feat is metaphorical proof that she has mastered the art of balancing life in the gay and Jewish communities. And yet, as long as gay marriage remains a controversial topic, *June Bride* will be as edgy as, well, juggling knives.

j.wynn.rousuck@baltsun.com

Baltimore Sun
March 10, 2007