



The Red Electric

The old Red Electric was an inter-urban train passing through the once rural community of Hillsdale in the first part of the 20th Century. Passengers shared news and opinion as the train wound through the forested Oregon hills southwest of Portland. This new Red Electric is a way for today's "travelers" to do the same.

— theredelectric.blogspot.com

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A quiet, powerful story of liberation

Rick Seifert

"No Strangers Here Today," a collaboration between Portland performance artist Susan Banyas and jazz musician David Ornett Cherry, is storytelling at its purest and most powerful.

Banyas' narrative, punctuated by gesture and movement, traces the story of Elizabeth Conard Edwards, Banyas' great-great grandmother, who helped fugitive slaves flee to Canada during the Civil War.

Banyas tells the story sparingly and respectfully, occasionally stepping aside to put events in the southern Ohio Quaker community in historical context. In doing so, she invokes voices of freedom, including those of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, John Lewis and Henry David Thoreau.

Cherry's music quietly, yet movingly, frames the tale of one Quaker woman's contribution to the "Underground Railroad," a hallowed chapter in American history.

Sadly, as Banyas points out, much of the nation's history is stained with injustice and cruelty, from slavery itself to atrocities in Iraq.

But Banyas' telling of Edward's story shines like a lamp for us today. It is like a lantern used in the play—a light that guided fugitives across the Ohio River and out of oppression 150 years ago.

"No Strangers Here Today" continues at the Interstate firehouse Cultural Center through Sunday, Feb. 18, when there will be performances at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.