

The Polio Boxer



The Polio BOXER

starring
roger freeman

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
JEFF WHIPPLE

When Roger Freeman was a little baby in 1953, he boxed with Polio and lost. Now Polio symptoms are back for a rematch.

But this time, Roger is no little baby.

And he's not pulling any punches.

The Polio Boxer is a full-length play with songs telling a touching and often comic story of self-recovery and personal triumph.

MARCH 16th & 23rd

When Roger Freeman was a baby in 1953, less than a year before Jonas Salk's vaccine put an end to the dreaded polio epidemics, he "boxed" with polio and lost. Surgery was recommended at three months, and he was fitted with his first leg brace at the age of three. Not only has he worn a leg brace ever since, the polio twisted his vocal cords, permanently affecting his speech. Despite the problems associated with growing up with polio, Freeman has continued to fight the disease, and he doesn't want this fight to end in a decision, he wants to land a K.O. punch.

In the early 1990's Freeman, who had since become an actor, was cast in *Tunnels in the Crust*, a play written by Jeff Whipple. Freeman mentioned to Whipple that he once did a short stand-up routine called "The Polio Boxer." They agreed that Whipple, as a writer, could develop the concept into a full length play. After hours of interviews and years of writing, the new version of *The Polio Boxer* was staged last year in Sarasota. *The Polio Boxer* will be performed Mon., March 16 & 23 at 2 p.m. & 8 p.m. as the next installment of the Caldwell Theatre Company's Performing Arts Series.

"The play is based on Roger's life," says Whipple, "However, I did run with it. Roger is on stage creating a new character." That new character that Freeman creates does mirror himself and his life.



“It reflects my life pretty well,” says Freeman. “A lot of the stuff is specific to me.” Born “a regular baby to a regular family in a regular hospital” in Nashville, Tenn., Freeman recounts his life as an infant, including his contraction of the disease, summers spent as a youth in summer camp, his young adult years, marrying, divorcing, becoming a father—all the while dealing with polio. His stories are sometimes touching, often funny and always poignant. But make no mistake, Freeman is no polio victim, rather a polio fighter. Set in a boxing ring, with Freeman dressed the part of a heavyweight fighter, he challenges polio, hurling Muhammed Ali-style taunts at it, even occasionally sparring with the disease.

“I enjoy the challenge of it,” says Freeman. “It breaks down barriers. If I’m having enough fun I can make people see that there’s no difference, that this is just another person. I’ve never wanted to be anybody else.”

“It’s a positive play,” adds Whipple. “A lot of people get frightened because it’s about a disease like polio. The whole point is that Roger isn’t letting his physical limitations get in the way. In fact, he’s living more fully than most people. That’s what intrigued me about his story.”

The Polio Boxer will run Mon., March 16 & 23 at 2 p.m. & 8 p.m. Tickets are \$12 for Caldwell mainstage subscribers, \$15 for non-subscribers and \$5 for students with ID. For more information call the box office at (561) 241-7432 or toll-free throughout Palm Beach, Broward and Dade counties at 930-6400.