THE ARTS

Women make scenes that are provocative yet lacking

WOMEN MAKING SCENES

Directed by Ian Downes, Kringe Little Theatre, Feb. 27-29.

By Hattie L. Schroeder

Women Making Scenes is clear in its intent. Twelve women make up the cast and crew of this collection of dramatic monologues and play excerpts. Sometimes ignoring any solidarity, the scenes go straight to the root of many women's issues, including pregnancy, abortion, women in management, and the cost of tampons. The pieces vary in subject and wit, but not in tone. This collection is proudly about women's search for freedom in body and spirit. The company wishes to generate discussion and challenge assumptions by "making a scene."

Don't be frightened: The performance is not all raised hair, anger, and tears. The raised hair is gentle, and at times witty. Computing how much money a woman may spend on feminine products during her lifetime has to be funny. When a scene of this collection, like Seven by Kirsten Hoyle '92, and A Girl's Guide to Chaos by Cynthia Heimel, uses wit to raise awareness, it becomes entertaining and friendly, inviting the audience to think about the issues involved. But at times the communication in these scenes becomes angry and a piece becomes so self-conscious that it risks overwhelming its goal and being ignored. It is not clear sometimes if this is the fault of the writing or the acting.

Poor acting frequently gets in the way of much of this production. Most of the actors play several different characters and must adopt different voices. This feat is successfully accomplished, but at the expense of some quality. However, there are some excellent performances. Jennifer Duncan '92 as the central character of Female Parts: Same Old Shayna Maiden tells a poignant tale with universal appeal

A SHAYNA MAIDEL


By William Ching

Shayna Maiden opened in 1985 and has been a hit around the country ever since. The New Repertory Theatre's presentation continues this tradition. The ability to appreciate this powerful drama is not limited to the Jewish community, as some may believe. This play will appeal to people of all ages and religions.

Shayna Maiden tells the story of two sisters separated since childhood and reunited twenty years later, in the aftermath of the Holocaust. As the play opens, we are introduced to the younger sister, Rose (Pamela Shafner), who has spent nearly all her life in New York and remembers little about her sister or her family's native Poland. Rose wears makeup, jewelry, and attractive clothes, has her own apartment, dates, and is in all respects "Americanized." Her conservative father, Mordechai Weiss (Dick Rosenfeld), visits her one morning with the surprise news that he has finally found her long-lost sister Lusia (Stephanie Claman), and that she will be coming to New York City by boat fairly soon.

Lusia unexpectedly arrives early by plane. When Rose first meets her sister, the audience is presented with a study in contrasts. Lusia is wearing muted, modest clothes and no makeup, carrying a small worn suitcase, and has a rigid, stoic look on her face—much different from the dress and demeanor of her vibrant sister. Her speech is halting, slipping from broken English into her more comfortable Yiddish and back again (this detracts nothing from understanding the play). In addition, an ID number has been braided prominently onto her forearm, a constant reminder that she has survived the Holocaust and years of imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps.

Rose and Lusia are at first very uncomfortably together, but gradually become closer as they share stories and memories. At the outset, their roles are reversed, and Rose acts as an older sister to Lusia, cooking and caring for her; this and related incidents evoke several of Lusia's flashbacks of her mother "Mama" (played by Barbara Dooneief Haas), her childhood friend Hanna (Chandra Pecenik), and her husband David Pechenik (Andrew Michael Dolan). From flashbacks, the audience is treated to glimpses of the upbeat humor and calm, collected intelligence of David, and also to his romance with a young Lusia.

Eventually Lusia's earlier years begin to fall into place: early on, Mordechai took the young Rose to the United States, but her mother had to stay behind in Poland to take care of Lusia, who was then sick with scarlet fever. The family was separated by the war and concentration camps, where Mama and many relatives died, and Lusia was separated from David. Soon after she and Hanna were freed from the camps by Russian soldiers, Hanna died of typhus. Now alone, Lusia has emigrated to the States, to find the remnants of her family and hopefully David as well. Lusia is angry at Mordechai, her father, for all that happened to her mother. There is a quietly disturbing scene in which Lusia and her father trade information about the whereabouts (and deaths) of loved ones, while Rose listens in, confused at her ancestor's actions.

Afterwards, Lusia openly accuses Mordechai of refusing to borrow money to get Mama out of Poland; he stridently refutes this. Sadly, he produces a long-kept picture of his wife. He leaves and Lusia is alone on stage. She asks an ID number on her own forearm, providing one of the most moving moments in the play.

There are six actors in this drama, all of whom turn in excellent performances. Pamela Shafner perfectly conveys Rose's early confusion and her growing awareness of the suffering and loss her sister has gone through. As Mordechai, Weiss, Dick Rosenfeld portrays a quintessential Jewish father, conservative and commanding, yet he also comfortably portrays Mordechai's sensitive side. Andrew Michael Dolan is perfect as David, a fountain of upbeat humor and intelligence when young.

Story is intriguing and almost flawless. Michelle P. Perry '92 and Tasi Baker '92 also portray interesting and convincing characters. The minimalist stage and good direction smooth a production that could be fairly coarse. This collection attempts to create an environment where "single play could be" is admirable for that ambition. Many gender issues are explored in the short scenes, every scene is distinct. And it's free. An open discussion between the company and audience will follow each performance.

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