

Joan of Arc returns for women's history month

Lesbian history is continually being annulled. Take Joan of Arc for example. Why was one of history's most gutsy lesbians recorded as a simple-minded peasant girl and pious heterosexual virgin saint? The true story and reasons behind the historical coverup are revealed in the award-winning, nationally touring play, **The Second Coming of Joan of Arc**, written by Carolyn Gage.

In Honor of women's history month, Lesbian Avenger Theatre presents Paula Arden of Yemaya Productions performing the one-woman show for women audiences March 18 and 19, at 8pm at the Community Church of Chapel Hill.

At 17, Joan of Arc led French armies to victory. At 18, she arranged the coronation of a king. At 19, she challenged the Catholic Church in court, and was burned at the stake as a witch. Now she returns to tell her story to contemporary women: "My story is not a sidelight of history, some piece of local color, optional reading. My story is the story of all women...My trial is the trial of all women."

Gage's play reveals the anorexic teen-aged Joan who ran away from her incestuous, alcoholic father. She donned men's clothing to be taken seriously. She slept with women. She survived rape. More clever than her judges, she was irreverent, unrepentant, and unflinchingly true to her own visions.

Joan of Arc's trial was carefully transcribed by notaries. Yet for centuries, only the male clergy had access to the transcripts because they were in Latin. Upon their translation into English, Vita Sackville-West wrote a biography of Joan which inspired Gage's work. All of the details of the play are historically accurate to the trial transcripts. "When I saw Arden perform the play at the East Coast Lesbians' Festival, I knew I had to bring it to North Carolina," says producer and Lesbian Avenger Lauren Birke. "Joan shows the teenage lesbian rebelling against the gender roles and sexual oppres-

sion that contemporary women still struggle with today. Her herstory empowers lesbians and survivors of all forms of violence against women. It powerfully exposes rape and sexual violation as the overriding strategy for female oppression, while reclaiming a lesbian heroine."

Originally published in 1988 in the lesbian/feminist journal *Sinister Wisdom*, the work won Oregon's highest literary award, The Oregon Playwright's Award. Gage has toured with the show throughout the US and Canada, including a 1991 performance at the National Lesbian Conference in Atlanta. In 1993, Arden performed *Joan* at the East Coast Lesbians' Festival, and in Saint Augustine and Gainesville, Florida. Arden visits the Triangle en route to open the show in Philadelphia.



Paula Arden

Tickets for **The Second Coming Of Joan of Arc** are available from White Rabbit Bookstore in Raleigh, Southern Sisters in Durham, and the Internationalist Bookstore in Chapel Hill. Admission is \$9-13 in advance and \$10-14 at the door. The play will be followed by a reception with the actor. Any proceeds will go to the Lesbian Avengers for promoting lesbian visibility through theatre.

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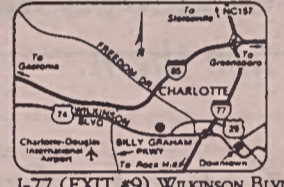
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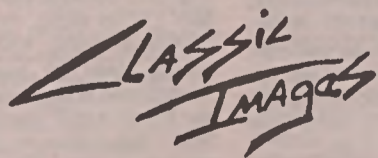
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