

Review

'Agnes of God' previewed last night

By Penny Kramp and Chris Streppa

"Nuns don't have children," says Mother Miriam Ruth in Theatre UNCA's production of *Agnes of God*, but this drama soon cuts through many religious myths.

The play draws you in from the start and does not let you go until its emotional climax.

Last night's preview of Arnold Wengrow's latest production is a cohesive combination of strong acting and directing, and ingenious stage setting.

The play is intense. It is about three women forced to confront their hidden feelings and re-evaluate their own "realities."

The play tells the true story of a young nun (Tanya Thomas) accused of strangling her newborn infant.

The story unfolds through a series of interviews by Dr. Martha Livingstone (Sarah Manley), the court-appointed psychiatrist who must uncover the mystery of the baby's conception and death to

determine Sister Agnes' sanity.

In the process, the hard, chain-smoking professional comes face-to-face with her own empty life.

Each scene also gives us new insight into the nightmare of Agnes' life, as an abused child and a frightened, hysterical adult.

Mother Miriam Ruth (Janet Oliver) is the stern, devout, but worldly-wise Mother Superior. She desperately tries to shield Agnes from the outside world and the consequences of her actions.

She maintains that the young nun is an innocent child of God. At one point, Mother Miriam Ruth even suggests that Agnes' pregnancy is a miracle, another immaculate conception.

Oliver brings Mother Miriam Ruth to life with the most powerful performance of the cast. This woman does not pretend to be a saint; she is the mother of grown daughters,

a woman who misses her two packs of Lucky Strikes a day and is not above the occasional curse. Oliver slips effortlessly into the role.

While Thomas' hysterics sometimes verge on shrill whining, her interpretation of a young woman dragged through the emotional pain of hypnosis is spine-tingling.

Sarah Manley got off to a slow start in her role as Martha Livingstone; it was difficult to hear or understand her at the very beginning. But she came on strong in the second act, giving a moving performance as the chain-smoking, ex-Catholic psychiatrist.

Paul Sweeney, associate professor of drama, and his crew outdid themselves. Stained glass windows light up under the actors' feet, while an 18-foot figure of Jesus shadows the stage from above.

The drama shines a harsh spotlight on human relationships and religion. It's an intensely emo-

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EMOTIONS ERUPT as Dr. Martha Livingstone (Sarah Manley) restrains Sister Agnes (Tanya Thomas) from attacking Mother Miriam Ruth (Janet Oliver) in "Agnes of God."

Staff photo by Sylvia Hawkins

'The Killing Fields': a brutal reality



By Anna Wilson

Cambodia, 1975: The prisoner, thin and dressed in rags, ran for his life. Bursting out of the woods, the man found himself in an open field, ankle deep in mud.

Bleached roots of trees gleamed in the sun. The prisoner began to gingerly pick his way across a mud bank. Suddenly he fell hip-deep into a mud hole.

The man looked around—human skeletons surrounded

him. He began to frantically climb out of the hole. The man had stumbled into a mass grave. Bones blended with the roots and parts of bodies were visible in the water.

Thousands of bodies lay there, partially covered with mud. They were the victims of mass executions—people dragged out of bed before dawn, blindfolded, roped together and shot.

The man's eyes widened in horror but he had to go on. He had to get to the Thai border and to freedom.

This scene is part of the movie *The Killing Fields*, recently nominated for seven Academy Awards including one for "Best Picture."

The movie brings the Southeast Asian conflict home to the viewer in graphic detail. Audience members witness a movie based on a true story of brutality in the Cambodian warfare; but unless you know all about the con-

flict, you are hopelessly lost in the first few minutes.

I must confess, I was confused at first, but then it ceased to be important. The struggle portrayed on screen became the focus and it held my interest despite the confusion.

Sydney Schanberg, a journalist for *The New York Times*, is assigned to cover Cambodia. His guide is a fellow journalist, Dith Pran, from Cambodia.

The two become as close as brothers during Schanberg's stay in Cambodia. When the fighting escalates, Schanberg arranges for Pran's family to go to the U.S.

Pran decides to stay with his friend, risking his life to do so. Eventually all foreign correspondents have to leave the country and Schanberg wants to take Pran with him.

The government refuses to let Pran go and he becomes a prisoner in his

own country. Next follow the horrifying events that Pran must face to gain his freedom.

Sam Waterston as Schanberg and Haing S. Ngor as Pran are very believable. In fact, I had to keep reminding myself I was watching a movie and not a newsreel.

If you are the least bit queasy, think twice before going to see this film. The camera dwells on bloody bodies and horribly injured people.

But the camera also captures the anguish and suffering of a people who can't understand what is going on and don't realize what is happening to their country.

One scene that will haunt me forever shows a Cambodian girl about four-years-old holding her hands over her ears, squeezing her eyes shut, and crying, to block out the noise and sight of bombs dropping. She was left all alone.

As Schanberg accepts the

1976 Journalist of the Year Award, he says, "This country was not concerned with the people of Cambodia except as abstract tools of policy. I tried to bring it all home to the public what was happening."

The movie also fulfilled this objective, bringing the horrors of war to the screen so the viewer can "see the insanity \$7 billion worth of bombing can bring about."

The final scene in *The Killing Fields* is poignant. In the background, John Lennon's song "Imagine" is playing. The Cambodian refugee children of the killing fields watch as American and Cambodian journalists hug, transcending the race restrictions man has placed on himself.

Movies such as *The Killing Fields* make this war, and all wars, unforgettable because they don't glorify battle. Instead, they show real human suffering.