

Play provides comic look at wacky family

by Tim Smith

The University Players have scored another hit in their comedy *Dearly Departed*, a two-act play by David Bottrell and Jessie Jones.

The play performances took place Feb. 21-23 and 25 in the Little Theater.

During the Feb. 22 performance, one member of the audience said, "Make sure your bladder is empty. You won't be able to control yourself."

Dearly Departed, directed by ECSU student LaVonne McClain, takes a comedic look at a dysfunctional family's efforts to cope with the loss of daddy.

When Bud Turpin, played by Jerome Brothers, dies in the beginning of Act I, one would assume it was a short stage career for him, but he goes on to portray a central character in *Delightful*, the daughter. Obsessed with eating—anything and everything—*Delightful* only has two words to say in the entire play, but his/her facial expressions and body language are riotously funny and keep the audience laughing. She uses half of her dialogue in the last act when she looks at Bud in the coffin and says, "Bye."

Damond Nollan as Junior holds the play together with a more serious part. He controls the plot successfully. When he sees Bud in the coffin for the first time, he shows complete surprise at the ballet shoes on his father. His abil-

ity to take a serious situation and portray comedy is stunning. In the fight scene with his brother, Ray-Bud, played by Shaunell McMillan, all the audience sees are arms and legs going in every direction behind the couch. The rest of the family is trying to keep them apart, without success. It's a brawl straight out of the Keystone Cops.

Nollan stands out in another scene as well. While in a car traveling to the funeral, his wife Suzanne is constantly yelling at the kids in the back seat, and berating him for his failed business venture. He's lost everything on a parking lot cleaning machine. Her constant harping sends him into a rage where he threatens to kill everyone in the car with his gun. His ability to make this serious scene funny, is one of the production's many strengths.

Shantelle Harvey, as Suzanne, has the difficult part of playing a wife trying to hold a family together without an income, and saddled with a cheating husband. These problems have made her physically ill, but in the end she forgives him and life goes on.

The set and props were done with pride and professionalism. In scene changes, everything was completed quickly and quietly. The action was fast and funny, with short scenes at side stage to slow the pace. The lights were used successfully to bring the



Appearing in *Dearly Departed*, Vita (Tonya Turner), Suzanne (Shantelle Harvey) and Norval (Khalid Baum) discuss the "dearly departed" member of their family, Bud Turpin, played by Jerome Brothers.

Photo by Eugene O'Neal

audience's attention to all the fast paced action.

Other cast members include Robin T. Gresham as Raynelle, Felicia Best as Lucille, Shalon Hawkins as Marguerite, Shon Barnes as Royce, Bobby Lewis as Reverend Hooker, Tonya Turner as

Veda, Khalid Baum as Norval/Clyde, Billicia Hines as Nadine, and Dorothy Wills as Juanita.

The play's stage manager was Billicia C. Hines. Costumer was Ollie Mason and technical director, Anthony Scott Dunlow.

Student director's biggest challenge: getting 'em there on time

by Lolethia "DL" Underdue

When she first began directing students in the play *Dearly Departed* LaVonne McClain was faced with the problem of some cast members being late to rehearsal.

McClain, normally a soft-spoken person, admitted she had to "get loud" to deal with the problem.

After that, she recalls, there was no more problem with lateness.

Being a student director isn't an easy job. For McClain, a junior business major from Asheville, the job has been a source of exhilaration and excitement as well as much hard work.

Her biggest challenge in the beginning was "getting everyone there on time," she recalls. "It was also very tough for me when I had to let one of the actors go but there were just too many conflicts in times, scheduling, and some other things."

McClain became interested in directing in high school. Her first stint as a director came in the form of a class

assignment in her high school drama class.

"I wasn't interested in directing at all," McClain recalls, "but when my teacher chose me to direct a one-act play, *You Can't Take It With You*, I soon developed an interest."

McClain is no stranger to theatrical productions at ECSU, having acted in three plays in the past three years. She has also assisted in the direction of several plays including *Of Mice And Men*, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, and *A Raisin In the Sun*.

She credits these experiences with helping her learn how to effectively manage a rehearsal and how to be more aggressive.

"I'm pretty lenient but I've learned how to get people to do what I want without having to raise my voice all of the time," she said.

McClain recalls that Shawn Smith, ECSU drama professor, suggested she direct a production last spring.

"I was very interested in doing this play and a little nervous," she said. "I was afraid I wouldn't get the same respect as Shawn." McClain had little problem with her cast giving her the respect she demanded, however.

"As director I had to pick the play, audition and pick the cast, and pick people for the technical crew. Once rehearsals started my job was to block out the action (determine actors' movement and positions on stage) and make sure they learned their lines."

McClain enjoyed rehearsals the most. "I get to work with everyone and there's a lot of playing around and joking at rehearsals. I don't believe in long rehearsals and everyone appreciates that. Everyone works a little harder so they can keep getting out on time."

For McClain the most valuable part of directing is getting to work with people and the excitement of viewing the finished performance.

As opening night rapidly approached she admitted she was "probably more

nervous than the actors. I've tried to make being in this play fun and now I'm starting to crack down and polish up the performances for opening night.

"The only thing I'm letting stress me out at this point is the play," she added. "I'm not worried about failing any classes because I already know I can excel in the classroom. I've got to get this play out because it is a representation of me and when it's out it's got to be good. My dream is that this play will go over as well as *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* and *Fences*."

After the third performance of the play McClain said she was pleased.

"I was really nervous on opening night, but once things got going I relaxed," she said. "I was really proud of everyone, from my assistant director all the way to my technical crew."

Will McClain direct any more plays? "I just want good reviews for this one and then maybe I'll do it again," she said.