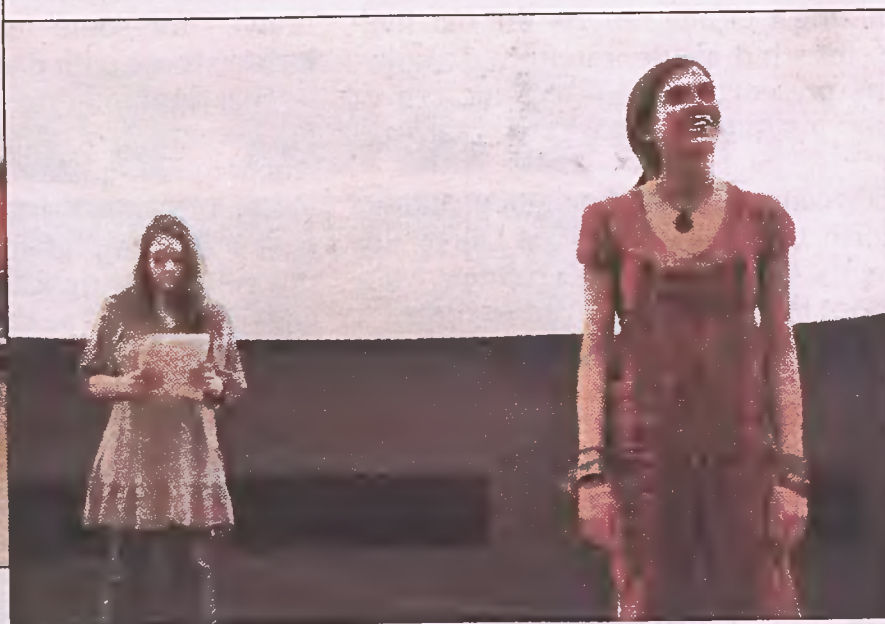


## V-day performances resonate with empowering voices



By Theo Kogod  
STAFF WRITER

In the entrance hall outside of Bryan Jr. Auditorium, the familiar red hues of Valentine's Day weekend bloomed. Cards and chocolates were being handed out, celebrating "V-Day 2010." These were not Valentines, however, but cards for a different type of V-day altogether.

The vagina-shaped chocolates and black-type cards represented "The Vagina Monologues," one of two plays performed each year to commemorate the experiences of women, good and bad, beautiful and horrific, originating from all ages, races, and backgrounds.

The other play, "A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and a Prayer," dealt with themes of women's suffering, rape, and domestic abuse.

Performed by an all-Guilford cast and directed by seniors Alyzza Callahan and Carly Mills, these two plays resonate with themes of empowerment and awareness. Profits from both plays benefited Leslie's House, an anti-domestic violence campaign founded by junior Megan Snider.

Both plays were envisioned by Eve Ensler, a playwright, feminist, and activist who wrote "The Vagina Monologues" and edited the collection of stories that comprises "A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant, and a Prayer." The essays include work by Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Anna Deavere Smith. Smith will speak on Feb. 28 at the Greensboro Coliseum as part of Guilford's Bryan Series.

The first and more famous of the two plays, "The Vagina Monologues," draws myriad reactions. Ensler collected interviews and monologues from women of many ages, races, and backgrounds across the country, and their stories range from hilarious to tragic.

One monologue, "Because He Liked to Look At It," performed by senior Alessandra Barbiero, focuses on a woman who used to think of her vagina as being comparable to a couch — a sort of disembodied mass attached to her — until she met a man named Bob, who changed her life (and her relationship with her vagina) forever. Bob, speaking to her passionately in pre-coital moments, told her "I need to see you." To Bob, nothing about the woman or her sexuality was shameful.

"Down there?" begins another mono-

logue, which Saron Smith-Hardin '09 recited in a New York accent. "I haven't been down there since 1953. No, it had nothing to do with Eisenhower." The piece, titled "The Flood," focused on the elderly speaker's fear and willful ignorance of her sexual responses, which colored her relationships for most of her life.

In another monologue, "Reclaiming 'Cunt,'" which was performed by senior Hailey Moses, one woman discussed the controversial word, breaking down its sharp, powerful poignancy, letter by letter, sound by sound, speaking with quick and rhythmic passion as she expressed the importance of embracing and owning a word often used against women.

The tone shifted with each new speaker. One particularly haunting scene recounted the Bosnian genocide, in which women were raped en masse. This monologue featured a Bosnian refugee, performed by first-years Hannah Waller and Elizabeth Wray, recounting how she was sexually assaulted by a group of soldiers and survived with irreparable genital injuries.

The play was a strong production with a large cast. Some monologues were performed by more than one actress, and in these cases, the acting itself was often surpassed by the artful manner in which one speaker would feed into the next, rhythm smooth or syncopated, to drive home a point.

Several actresses used distinct accents and mannerisms to characterize their roles with audible and visual cues.

The other play, "A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and A Prayer," had darker stories, included male roles, and dealt more with violence against women.

The male parts speak on behalf of men's crimes and responsibilities. Women throughout the play recounted instances of violence directed against them.

In the opening scene, four actors chanting in turn describe everyday acts of violence against women. The first among them to speak was senior Tim Lindberg who described a man about to hit a hungry child:

"His arm raised, the end of it a fist, aimed at the child at his knees, wanting attention, a hot dog, 'I want something to eat. I want, I want.' But he had nothing to give, no money, no patience, no anything else. And fury surged up in him as if from hell itself. And the fist braced to explode like a bullet. And the little girl cringed and screamed, 'please no don't!'"

"A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant, and a Prayer" also used lighting extraordinarily well. It compounded the effects of utter darkness with high-noon sun effects to capture the moods of different speakers, and often, in the moments of darkness, a sound would ring out, capturing the imagination of the

whole audience with a single slap or words that echoed throughout the auditorium.

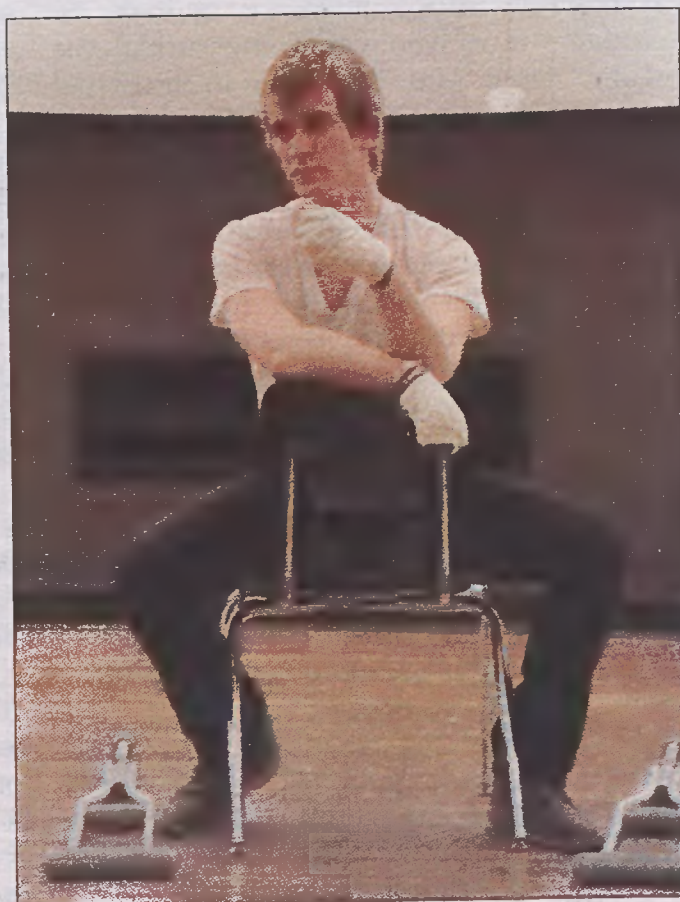
"The Vagina Monologues" are important because they give an excellent view to monologues as a separate realm of acting, and an excellent medium for victims of violence to be heard," said Lindberg.

At the end, there was no uplifting message of hope, but something perhaps more elevating: a sense of understanding the reality of violence against women. Afterwards, as the applause rose and fell again and people slowly rose from their seats or congratulated actors, some members of the audience lingered, eating their vagina-shaped chocolates and having gained a new take on V-Day.

"The Vagina Monologues":

(Top left) Senior **Mary-Pearl Monnes** tells the story of a woman's unfamiliarity with her clitoris. (Top center) Africana Community Coordinator **Jada Drew** leads the ensemble in the closing monologue. (Top right) Senior **Carly Mills**, co-director of the Vagina Monologues, rehearses with first-year **Elizabeth Wray**, whose monologue addresses women tortured in Bosnia.

"A Memory, a Monologue, a Rant and a Prayer":  
(Bottom left) Sophomore **Arthur Wood** portrays a self-mutilating artist. (Bottom right) Senior **Clare Gillen** plays a composite character of women in the developing world.



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