

Energy Puts Together Plays in 24 Hours

Plays performed Saturday night

By MICHAEL ABERNETHY, GABRIELLE DE ROSA AND MICHAEL PUCCI
Staff Writers

At 8 p.m. Saturday, a curious crowd shuffled into 100 Hamilton Hall to witness something that had never been seen at the University.

The 24 Hour Plays was the culmination of the effort of current and former UNC students to write, cast, rehearse and ultimately perform six 10-minute plays — all in the span of 24 hours.

The process began at 10 p.m. Friday, when junior Lyda Kendrick stood before the crowd of anxious actors, writers and directors and offered her special skills to the group as part of the meet and greet.

"I can do this with my hands!" she said, and contorted her body in a bizarre manner. "I can also do a pretty good Jimmy Stewart impression," she said, and then recited lines from "It's a Wonderful Life."

The purpose of the meet and greet was to introduce the group and prompt the six writers with inspiration. In addition to goofy tricks, each participant was asked to bring a prop and a costume.

"From here on out the clock is ticking," said Lindsay Bowen, co-producer and UNC alumna who also produces for the 24 Hour Plays company in New York.

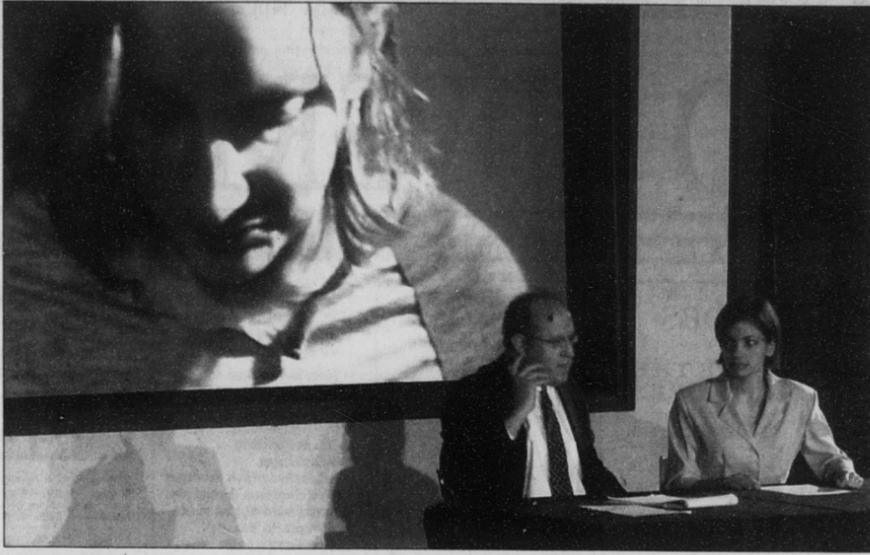
As the meet and greet came to an end at 10:45 p.m., the room emptied, leaving the writers to begin the process. They sat around a pile of Polaroids, trading cast members in a game of theatrical poker.

The writers each had their own means of sparking the creative process. Sophomore Milind Dongre inspected the table of props while Amon Anderson, also a sophomore, preferred sketching in his notebook.

Senior Bill Cochran, a member of the Chapel Hill Players, worried the event would "turn into a game of telephone" because of the large number of people involved in each phase.

Writer Tessa Blake, a UNC alumna and veteran of 24 Hour Plays, spoke of the process's randomness. She said that great writers don't necessarily write great plays and that great actors don't necessarily give the best performances.

With coffee and pizza on the way, the first phase of the plays commenced. By 5:45 a.m., six brand-new plays were



Sarah Farnell (on screen), Chris Chapman and Laurie Kovacs act out "Subconscious" on Saturday night. It is one of six plays written, cast, rehearsed and performed in one day as a part of 24 Hour Plays.

born and delivered to the directors at 7 a.m. By 9 a.m. the actors were faced with the daunting task of rehearsing them off book.

Off book is the most dreaded, frustrating and liberating term in the dramatist's language. It's the deadline by which all actors are required to know their lines by heart. Normally it takes weeks of practice and memorization.

But these actors were running rehearsals off book by noon Saturday. Each 10-minute play was given an hour of onstage rehearsal time to choreograph and block scenes.

The tension onstage was visible as the actors struggled and fumbled with awkward lines, losing patience with themselves as they had to ask directors for cues.

At one point David Chapman, director of "Valentine's Day," decided to break the tension by having his cast members release some of their frustrations.

"The only thing keeping this play from being great is our demons," Chapman said. "So let's sanctify this place by exorcising our 'Do I look stupid?' demons." With that, the cast began to shake and flail wildly around on stage to release pent-up energy.

But besides the pressures of learning scripts in lightning speed, the casts also had to contend with the distraction of

technical crews setting up light and sound equipment during their stage rehearsals.

"Having it all shoved together like this, it's really a different experience," said producer Greg Lewis. "You have tech setting up while they're onstage rehearsing. The suddenness of it really adds to the atmosphere."

But Lewis said putting together a performance in 24 hours is a valuable exercise for everyone involved.

"Twenty-four hours brings everyone down to the same level," he said. "You don't know anything that's going to happen going into it, so you can't assume that you know more than anyone else. It's a great learning experience."

Up until the moment the audience walked in, the cast and crew continued to run through each play, perfecting everything from lighting to stage props created at the last second.

The plays were an emotional whirlwind, ranging from the poignancy of traveling to a best friend's funeral to the utter absurdity of attending a "date bait." A trip into the subconscious of a guy in a serious dating drought was hilarious, while in another play, a chess game became a metaphor for a struggling relationship.

There were some awkward segues and flubbed lines, but all could be for-

given. The enthusiasm of both the cast and the audience always kept the show at a highly entertaining level.

"It's absolutely amazing that everything came together," an exhausted but proud Bowen said after the show. "There was such a creative charge in the air."

Even in the midst of the utter chaos onstage, director Daniel Kananen had no doubts that 24-hour plays would reappear on campus.

"It's wild, isn't it?" Kananen said. "But it's great. I think we're going to try to do it again in April."

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Sen. Metcalf Resigns From WCU Position

By ELYSE ASHBURN
State & National Editor

Sen. Steve Metcalf announced Thursday that he will resign from his post at Western Carolina University to avoid any apparent conflict with his legislative duties.

The Buncombe County Democrat was appointed chairman of the Senate Education Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education last week.

Critics claimed that Metcalf's \$95,000-per-year job at WCU would conflict with his ability to serve judiciously in his new posts, prompting the senator to resign from the WCU position he has held for a little more than a year.

Metcalf also said he will resign from the Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College Board of Trustees, on which he has served for six years.

"The next two years are going to be really rough, especially as regards funding our universities," Metcalf said in an interview Monday.

"I resigned lest anyone be thinking I would champion those things because I work for them."

But Metcalf maintained that his decision was only a matter of appearance and that his job at WCU would not have conflicted with his service in the Senate.

"I don't think I had a conflict of interest," he said. "I just felt like it was time to move on."

Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand, the Cumberland Democrat who helped

select Metcalf for his chairmanships, was outraged Monday to learn that Metcalf had been pressured into resigning.

"I never thought it even looked like a conflict," he said. "I thought it was just a tempest in a teapot."

The N.C. General Assembly prides itself on being a citizens legislature, Rand said, and individuals shouldn't be excluded from service simply because their professional careers fall in a particular sector.

"If you're going to exclude, then you should have to tell lawyers they can't serve on judiciary committees," he said.

If anything, Metcalf's experience in higher education made him more qualified to lead his slated committees, Rand said.

"He's highly intelligent and knowledgeable," he said. "You really can't find anybody better."

Sen. Virginia Foxx, R-Watauga, said that while she trusts that Metcalf would have been unbiased, she thinks he made the right decision in leaving his job at WCU.

"I support his decision to do this," Foxx said. "I certainly didn't think it was the best situation."

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Favorite Web site (not sports related) _____
Favorite movie in 2002-03 _____
Best place to find that new CD _____
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THE SCENE

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