

Crowd wowed by touching 'Vagina'

BY AYOFEKI KIRBY
STAFF WRITER

Women and men of all ages waited in line outside Gerrard Hall on Friday and Saturday night to hear monologues about women and their vaginas.

A cast of 13 presented "The Vagina Monologues" to two sold-out audiences those nights. The shows benefited the Carolina V-Day initiative, a campus group dedicated to preserving women's rights that is an extension of the national organization.

When the doors opened, patrons scrambled to find and save seats for others who wanted to buy tickets at the door. They soon realized the seats would go to those lucky enough to purchase tickets in advance.

They all bought tickets to hear about vaginas, a part of the female anatomy so taboo and unmentionable in global society that it is referred to by creative — and often vulgar — synonyms more often than its proper name.

"I really wanted people to hear an honest portrayal about how women feel about their vaginas," said senior Erica Robinson, events coordinator for the Carolina V-Day initiative. "Because usually when it is portrayed, it's not honest."

"I think it's something refreshing for women to hear that is honest and real," she said. "Something they can come together and connect to. I know I did."

Every year on or around Feb. 14, productions of "The Vagina

Monologues" bring audiences together for 2 1/2 hours in a recounting of sexual expression, self-discovery, sexual abuse and oppression in open and uncensored dialogue.

At the beginning of the show, the cast, dressed in jeans, bikinis, skirts and shirts, marched through the aisles of an anxious and excited audience. Once they reached the stage, they began to humorously describe journeys of searching for their vaginas and ended the scene stating the names vaginas have acquired through time.

Expressive monologues "Hair" and "My Angry Vagina" received thunderous laughter and cheers from the audience, while those recounting experiences of sexual abuse ushered in a thick silence.

"I think that's what it takes to get people to embrace and acknowledge themselves," said sophomore Shalandra Macon, a member of Voices for Planned Parenthood, about the show's candid content.

V-Day, a nonprofit corporation, gives college initiatives the rights to produce "The Vagina Monologues" at no cost after they agree to donate proceeds from the show to organizations dedicated to protecting women's rights.

This year, the proceeds will be divided among the Orange County Rape Crisis Center, the Family Violence Protection Center and the annual V-Day spotlight campaign.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Actors recount their own tales of womanhood

Reconnect with selves thanks to play

BY KATHY CHO
STAFF WRITER

All week long, the word gleamed from one side of a Cube, grabbing attention, inviting stares — "vagina."

In the Pit, unabashed pink T-shirts read, "Vaginas Are Coming." "What we (tried) to do is put ourselves out there in a ballsy way — no, in a vagina-y way," said Allison Garren, a senior political science major. She directed and acted in this year's production of "The Vagina Monologues."

Eve Ensler's show urges women to think about, and talk about, their vaginas. The message is that by "reclaiming" the core of their sexuality and resisting the stigma that shrouds it, women can empower themselves in the fight against violence.

For the 14 actors, the first task was not only getting used to saying the "V-word" but opening up about its meaning to themselves. Garren, as director, had to set an example.

"I reminded myself that, compared to what a lot of women go through, like enduring a violent relationship or an abusive family, this is nothing," she said.

Garren said she grew up in a small-town environment, resenting her vagina because it was a place of pain or discomfort.

She didn't pay it much attention. Neither did anyone else.

"It would be nice if we could celebrate (a girl's first period) as a passage into womanhood, but it's just, 'OK, here are the tampons and the pads, this is how you use 'em, good luck,'" Garren said.

After seeing "The Vagina Monologues" during her sophomore year, she was eager to embrace its message.

"Me and my vagina are on a better talking level," she said. "We've grown together."

The play was also a turning point for Erica Robinson. The senior political science and journalism

major was the event coordinator of the Carolina V-Day Initiative and performed the "My Short Skirt" monologue in the play.

"I knew (my vagina was) there, but I didn't really want to think about it," she said.

"It was something I was disconnected from. Then I saw (The Vagina Monologues) in my freshman year, and I saw all those connections being made. It resonated with me because I am a woman."

Her interest in women's issues was spurred from then on. She eventually became co-chairwoman of Voices for Planned Parenthood.

"If I don't own my vagina, I allow everyone around me to determine it for me," she said. "I can't follow those rules because they aren't structured to help me."

Robinson, who had felt "unsexual" and "disgusted" about her sexuality, now says, "This is my vagina, and I love it."

Libby Jeter, who graduated last December, said she has always been comfortable with her sexuality.

But acting in the play was still a rich experience, as it let her connect with other women. She loved sharing stories with her fellow actors and the rare opportunity to express herself "in a way that's sexual, intellectual and emotional at the same time."

The exchange wasn't limited to the actors due to the play's interactive nature. "You're speaking directly to the audience all the time," she said. "It's exciting, but also nerve-wracking."

"It's interesting to express and embrace (female sexuality), and not just when you're talking with your friends," Jeter said.

"You may not be able to relate to a dominatrix or someone who's been under a burqa. But you can relate to what it is to be a woman."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

Group brings kids' stories to life

BY MELODY GUYTON
STAFF WRITER

Wide grins and giggles abounded at a Chapel Hill elementary school Friday afternoon when a Charlotte-based theatre company acted out creative stories written by six students.

Three actors and writing coaches from StageWorks Theatre visited Mel and Zora Rashkis Elementary School for the second time this school year to hold a program called Imagination Express Part Two.

The program was sponsored by the school's Parent Teacher Association.

Dawn Ruston, a representative of the PTA, said the program has been well-received.

"I think it's a great way to plant the seeds for writing," she said. "It makes writing fun for the kids."

The students knew that the company was returning to perform Friday, but they did not know that they would be watching the works of their fellow classmates.

After the company's visit in October, students submitted stories to the group. Six were selected to be performed.

Stacey Izrailyan, the mother of one of the selected writers, David Izrailyan, 10, praised the program.

"It's very exciting," she said. "David is not much into writing, but for him, it's going to be a very good push in the right direction."

Writing Coach Alicia Sowisdral said the selected plays were chosen because they incorporated the four "CLAP" elements taught in October and were detailed and cohesive.

The "CLAP" writing method requires students to integrate character, location, action and plot into their writing.

Before each play was performed, the writer was called on stage to be given a certificate and to answer questions about the play. The parents of each of the winning writers were present, which was also a surprise to the students.

Before performing each play,



Alicia Sowisdral, a member of Charlotte's StageWorks Theatre troupe, acts among fourth- and fifth-grade students Friday afternoon at Rashkis Elementary School. The group acted out six of the students' essays.

the actors asked for volunteers to act out parts. One of the selected volunteers, Brinklee Bailey, 10, said she enjoyed the program.

"It's fun because they make boring things really funny, like the play about the history museum," she said. "I don't really like history, but I enjoyed the play."

Jack Vozella, 11, wrote that play, which was titled, "The Museum," based on a family visit to Washington, D.C.

"I was happy when they performed my play," he said. "I didn't think they were going to choose mine."

The plays ranged widely in subject matter from bullies to cats — and even a "pickle queen."

"(The program) was helpful because I had written some stories before, but I feel more comfortable now because I know how and when to write," David said.

Morayo Orija, a writing coach, said performing the stories is appealing to both kids who are interested in writing and those more interested in public performance.

When the company visited the school in October for Imagination Express Part One, the coaches worked with fourth- and fifth-grade students to improve their writing through the "CLAP" method.

Corina Rice, one of the coaches, said they worked with the students for five days. Each of the first four days, they covered a different aspect of "CLAP," and on the last day, they performed the plays that the students had written.

After the company left, the students wrote stories that incorporated the "CLAP" principles.

Each teacher then selected five of the stories to submit to StageWorks, and from those stories, the group selected six to perform.

Jack's mother, Julie Vozella, said the StageWorks program is especially beneficial for students in North Carolina because of the state writing test that students must take.

"It's positive reinforcement," she said.

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