

Lab Theatre: outlet for amateurs

A series of plays are offering students, who might not otherwise have the chance, a try at acting and directing. The plays are being directed by students from Jean Cutler's Play Direction class, and the casts include both experienced and inexperienced actors.

The project, referred to as the lab theatre, provides an ideal opportunity for newcomers who want to break into the

Story and Photos
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theater. Each of the 23 students in Cutler's class is directing a play; ten plays have already been cast. Auditions for 13 other plays will be held May 3, 4 and 5.

"It is conceivable that people may get substantial roles who have not had any experience . . . you try to get the best company you can," Cutler said. Often the students acting in plays are not even theatre art students.

A student should not feel discouraged from trying out just because he is not a drama major. For as Cutler described it, the theatre is "sort of like a little world, so many things make up the theatre, and there are so many things and people one has to be concerned with."

Cutler also described what most students could expect to get out of acting. "An actor will learn something about

himself, how to communicate with himself and others. In particular he will share with other people things he has thought and felt. He will also learn the value of intuition."

An actor has much to think about: emotion, movement, how he relates to space and objects, and how he relates to the audience. "Acting involves the whole nervous system," Cutler added.

His student directors also have much to think about. "We give them as many problems to solve without completely discouraging them," Cutler explained.

Each director has three responsibilities: 1) he must direct a play, 2) he must assist another director, and 3) he must be responsible for another aspect of play production such as stage manager or makeup. The director must pay for all royalties, if there are any, and for cleaning costumes if he uses those from the costume shop.

According to Cutler, the most important decision for the director is choosing the play. "He must think in terms of producing it and consider the nature of his audience. He should have a strong personal commitment," Cutler said.

Garthelia Williams is one of the student directors. She has been directing *Soul Gone Home* by Langston Hughes. "I wanted to do a Black play, and it had to be a one-act, so I decided on that one," Williams said. She described Hughes' play as the "Life of a poor mother and son, each with their distinct personalities showing, and each beginning to realize the other's needs and wants."

As a director, Williams sees her role as helping or hindering the actor. "The actor is the artist, and the director is more of an instructor," she added.

Williams, a junior in theater arts, was attracted to acting because of its glamour and later found it took a lot of work and discipline. "But you can come out feeling really good about it," she said. She would like to become an artist "like Cicely Tyson." "All my life I have been secure, but acting is a high risk business; you don't get a secure living," she added.

The plays being presented in the lab theatre have a lot of promise, Williams believes. But the auditions were not good. "The turnout was low; people were afraid



Suzanne Stassevitch as "She" and Paul Meir as "He" rehearse for *The Artist*, a farce on the roles people play, opening May 1 in the Pocket Playhouse.

to try out," she explained. As a result, she had a difficult time finding a male lead.

Larry Sutton, however, was "totally pleased" with the tryouts: "I cast three people that I really liked."

Sutton is directing a fable, *Love in a French Kitchen*. The play involves a triangle: husband, wife and mother-in-law. The husband is henpecked, but in a brief span of time reverses the whole situation.

Sutton has a degree in literature but has been taking theatre courses for the past year. He has not directed very much and finds the lab theatre a good way to get experience. He has also found it to be somewhat artificial. "It is a class, and the

class requirement colors a bit the reason we are doing a play," he explained. "It is difficult to think of it as a class and to keep the play in perspective as a class project. It is very time-consuming," he added. Sutton estimated he would spend 35 hours on line and working rehearsals, and this does not include special rehearsals. He will earn three hours of credit.

He loves the theatre, particularly the immediacy of it, the constant present tense. He has learned to live with vulnerability. "Performing on stage is one of the most vulnerable things. You are open to criticism and anything that wants to come along . . . it is extremely exciting," he said.

The members of Sutton's cast vary in their previous theatrical experience.

Pam Labbe, who plays the role of the mother-in-law, has been taking acting classes at LCC. She said acting allows her to express herself much the same as any other art. She has been in a couple of other UT productions before.

LuraLee Landis, who plays the daughter, is also an experienced performer. She said acting was "The most fulfilling thing I can do for a hobby or career type of thing." She is currently an English major, but will probably end up in drama and eventually go into it as a profession.

Unlike Labbe or Landis, Ron Bills is a newcomer to the theatre department. Thinking, "with all those parts, we should get something," Bills and a friend built up enough courage to go to the tryouts. They both got a part. Bills, a freshman in interior architecture, thought the one-act plays in the lab theatre were "an easy way to get acting experience, without getting into something over your head."

One of the student directors, Diane Solomon, started her acting career in the lab theatre and will be auditioning for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts next year.

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Pam Labbe and Ron Bills attempt to extricate LuraLee Landis from an embarrassing position in *Love in a French Kitchen*.

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