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Giving Comes From The Heart

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Harjo shares poetic vision of Native American culture

By Alice Tallmadge
Of the Emerald

With a body as strong and uncompromising as her words and in a voice as elemental as the images she spins from, poet Joy Harjo offered her Friday night audience the complexity, power and beauty of one woman's unfettered poetic vision.

Harjo, a Native American from the Creek tribe, gave a poetry reading sponsored by the ASUO Women's Task Force and the University creative writing program.

Harjo began writing poetry 12 years ago so that she could express her visions, she said.

"When I first started writing, there was no way I could have gotten up and talked," she said. "It's been a way to speak. It's helped me learn to speak."

Relaxed and unassuming in conversation, her voice resonates quietly from a cavity deep within her, a tone that recalls rock, deep roots, aged connections. When she reads her poetry, the resonance widens and begins to echo in the canyons of her words.

Images of blood, fire, the moon, darkness, mountains and sky fill Harjo's poems. A strong connection with the earth is almost expected from Native American poets, but Harjo said she believes that everyone has that connection inside. However, "people get lost from it," she said.

One way Harjo is helping to reshape the altered image of Native Americans is through film. She recently has written a screenplay for Nebraska Educational Television. The film is a story of an Omaha Indian boy growing up with no white contact.

"It's a very revolutionary film because the characters are real human beings. You get a really good idea of how people lived," she said. All the actors in the film, which she helped cast, are Native Americans.

Sometimes Harjo taps into her tribal consciousness unknowingly, she said, giving old legends and symbols a new form. In her reading, she told the story of writing a poem entitled "White

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Joy Harjo

'Jimmy Dean' refreshingly well cast

It's refreshing to watch a performance in which the cast members mesh so well that they detract from a play's weaknesses.

Hats off to director Jack Watson for his uncanny foresight when casting for University Theatre's Second Season pro-

duction of "Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean."

Not an easy task considering the rich variety of characters the script holds. The cast is a fine combination of amateur and seasoned performers who have the knack for molding their roles together to give a play continuity while still maintaining strong individuality on their own.

The play is set in the dry, desert town of McCarthy, Texas, on a hot September day in 1975 at the Five and Dime Drug Store, which is the former meeting place of "The Disciples of James Dean." The disciples are holding a reunion to honor the 20th anniversary of Dean's death.

The characters' excitement over meeting once again soon unfolds into a series of painful

reminders as to why the past is sometimes better left alone. These memories are brought to life throughout the performance in a confusing way with the use of sporadic light changes or interwoven scenes in which the characters are living their past and present on stage simultaneously.

Watson's quick-change approach to making these difficult scenes work gets a little topsyturvy occasionally, leaving the audience unsure at times as to what's going on. Fortunately, the cast manages to hold the tempo and keep the plot alive with their ability to manage the mercurial script.

University sophomore Tricia Ann Will, a theater arts major, gives a gutsy performance as the older, buxom blond, Sissy. Her performance, combined with her younger counterpart,

played by University freshman Gail Grobey, gives the play the comic relief needed to counteract the underlying tension the script carries, particularly in the present and past characters of Mona.

Seasoned actress Brenda Jones plays the neurotic, depressing, older Mona quite well, while University junior theatre arts major, Tina Gilbert, gives a fine portrayal of Mona's younger days as the confused teenage president of the disciples.

The disciples' drug-store meeting place is a wonderful replica of early '50s small-town tackiness, and the Texan drawls of the characters adds to the production's authenticity.

Performances continue in the Arena Theatre, May 23-25.

By Sheila Landry

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