

ARTS

Women struggle on 'Home Front'

By Karen Engels
Emerald Reporter

Women fighting to find their roles in society while their men are off fighting a war is one strong theme in *Home Front*, a play by Karen Vossler-Champion that opened Wednesday in Villard Hall's Arena Theatre.

Set during World War II, the play centers around four women dealing not only with the absence of their men but with the absence of their traditional roles.

The changes don't come easily. Catherine, the heroine, returns home from college to find that her father, brother and sister's husband have all gone off to war. She unwillingly stays home to help support the family at her aging mother's request.

Catherine, a pacifist and writer, speaks out against what she believes is a useless war, but finds nothing but silence.

Catherine's mother and two sisters, Brenda and Millie, also each go on a psychological journey during the play. Brenda is racked with guilt because she is pregnant and can't work to help the family. Millie, at a tender 15, discovers her sexuality and falls in love with a returned soldier.

The mother, meanwhile, struggles between the old security of being taken care of by her men and the new reality.

Although women are central to the play, men are also "present" through the women's eyes in

dream sequences and nightmarish war and mob scenes, portraying dark and sometimes violent changes war causes in both those who go and those who stay behind. Even those who stay on the home front can't escape the war's horrors.

"It's a very female-oriented play," said Jeff Whitty, one of four male cast members. "The men are on stage for the whole play, but they aren't the focus."

Whitty cites a dream scene where the girls' brother writes a letter to Catherine. He is present on stage, but actually in Catherine's thoughts.

Home Front's director Amy Sarno, a doctoral student in theater arts, blends both expressionistic and realistic styles, attempting to show each character's psychological journey. In the beginning, things start out as what we see and progress to an increasingly nightmarish state, Sarno said.

Besides themes of women's roles and war, racism, rape and abortion are discussed.

"It's an anti-a-lot-of-things play," Sarno said, adding that a prevailing theme of war and people's reaction to it takes much of the focus.

Sarno warns those with epilepsy or pacemakers that a strobe light will be used in the performance. Some content is also questionable for children, she said.

Home Front continues tonight through Saturday and March 5-7 in the Arena Theatre. All shows begin at 8 p.m. Latecomers will not be seated. Tickets are \$4 general admission and \$3 for students.

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Interested parties should pick up an application packet, which includes a job description, at the ODE front desk in Suite 300 EMU or call 346-5511 for more information.

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