Underground at Club Arena

Getting down and dirty to the pulsating rhythms of techno, rap and rave.





Community theater production portrays the vulnerability of gays in a harsh setting of intolerance

t's not much past midnight Saturday, and my girlfriend grinds in close, gets us just about dead-center on Club Arena's dancefloor, takes my ear, says."Check him out" and tells me to scope round, slowly, because she's sure that someone right behind me is either the guy from last term's Chem Lab that never gave her back the notes he

borrowed or the guy we pulled a threesome with two, maybe three weekends back.

I scope, squint through the crowd, low lights, high techno, smoke, Obsession, Drakker Noir and all the other scents-to-get-laid going on, catching the night's notables: Drama boys; three drag-queens; a half-way-OUT-might-aswell-be-OUT track star; my pharmacist; a shy. bi, University football player; and a fourth drag-queen makes it a full house. The lights go up - bright - and before I can find who she's been talking about, my girlfriend shakes her head, mouths a "No - I was wrong - 1 don't know him" and then pulls us tight - as close as the club will allow while grinding us into his space, just as the techno turns into synth, tunes into Shamen, that song that starts, "A great philosopher once wrote: Naughty,

naughty — very naughty..." Not-so-subtle nightmoves naturally nudge into the

night scheme of every nightclub. But Club Arena, located downstairs at Perry's restaurant on 959 Pearl, promises the city's most varied players. Ostensibly a gay club, Club A has enough attractions and distractions to keep all kinds busy. The underground Arena hosts gay. straight, bi and things-in-between, although nanagement only barely acknowledges the latter three categories.

Go there in spite of management. Go downstairs to dance, to jam on the best pre-recorded music in town or to voyeuristically view the latest episode of The Slither Game. Or to star in your own.

Downstairs is done in black and white (apparently paralleling the owners' gay/straight-only view of sexual orientation.) New multi-colored, light-spewing ceiling balls barely rescue the design from being a bi-chromatic nightmare. There's a pool table and a Pac-Man machine parked by the stairs, and Eugene's biggest condom bin parked by the bathroom, but the definite crowd-draw is the dancefloor. It's bigger than the shellacked shuffleboard court Guido's calls dance-space. and here people actually dance.

The music, too, is downstairs' salvation. The

Story by D. Lee Williams

format is dance but it's fiercely varied: earlyevening disco gives way to

hip-hop, house, rap, rock, and - at the strike of midnight - techno and rave. This is the only club outside Portland with any solid, set time for techno. (A brief "rave" at Springfield's Mill Camp a few weeks back was justifiably unsuccessful. Duh. Putting on a rave in Springfield and hoping for success is like putting a Tic-Tac in cow dung and hoping for fresh air.)

Go upstairs, too. Upstairs holds the quiet lounge, and there are huge booths, poker machines, another pool table and a second, cheesier bar. The main activities are dissing. dishing and eaves-dropping. Screw ambiance. It's all about attitude.

There's a split of talent in the club's waitstaff. Order only from the women because, just like life, the men don't care. The barmaids work; the barboys pose. The males are annoying and un-tipworthy, always looking like they have something or someone better to do.

As always, there are simultaneous rumors of closure and expansion. New changes include a newest squirter of Paul Mitchell than a barfew weeknight hours of non-smoking, and Sattender manual or anything by Keats. urday night Afterhours. What keeps Club A Watch the lights. Watch the action. And from being one of the coolest clubs at the end watch your drinks upstairs. I made the mistake of the Western world is an obnoxious, inexcus-Turn to ARENA, Page 8 able "No overt heterosexual behavior" rule.

By Freya Horn

Playwright and director Bea Souza Harpham makes the most of low-budget, bare-bones community theater.

"I do theater anywhere and everywhere I can. If the script is good, it doesn't matter where you do it," she said.

Harpham's latest play, "Elia Preta III," is being presented as a benefit for the McKenzie Theater in Springfield.

With only five black boxes and a coat rack as props, the play requires the audience have an active imagination. Yet Harpham's skillful script compensates for the minimalistic set

All card-carrying OCA members are invited to see the play free-of-charge, Harpham said. The play is about the vulnerability of gays in

a harsh setting of intolerance, she explained. The protagonist Elia Preta, a Portugese

woman raised in a strict Catholic environment is unable to accept her sexual predisposition when she falls in love with her music teacher,

Her struggle to realize her self-worth takes her through a doomed marriage, motherhood, a bitter divorce and losing custody of her son.

The play is basically about the ownership of children, about custody, and about how gays are not really automatically bad parents," Harpham said at the Women's Legislative Forum Tuesday.

Redeemed by her musical genius as a composer, Elia's only fortification against life's onslaught is her art.

At the peak of her self-discovery, Elia creates a musical masterpiece that is represented as a 37-minute dream sequence on the movie screen. The visuals, created by Cable Access, and the music, composed by Fern McArthur, took two years to coordinate

"It looks like I spent \$10,000 to produce the video, but I spent only \$500," Harpham said.

Harpham earned a Masters of Fine Arts in playwriting at Tokyo University and was a professor of drama at UCLA before retiring and moving to Eugene. She is now the director of the Oregon Academy of Dramatic Arts, a theater training school for the non-academic stu-Her play, a trilogy centered on the life of Elia

Preta, has elements of the Japanese Noh tradition, which is loosely paralleled to the Greek tragedies in form. Mime, music and dance are integral to the Noh style, Harpham said.

The trilogy began with a 1988 WOW Hall performance of "Elia Preta I" and is now at its dramatic conclusion. However, each part is understandable without the framework of the trilogy.

With low attendance at last weekend's shows, Harpham said she hopes the 500-seat theater will see a better turnout this week.

"We really hoped that the OCA would picket so we could get publicity," she said. The play ends this weekend with 8 p.m.

shows Friday and Saturday and a 2:30 matinee Sunday. Admission is a suggested \$7.



In a recent club survey, management verifies in writing that "this is a discriminatory policy," yet discusses no plans to change it. This policy is based on a survey of 96 customers and mimics in absurdity, the city of Eugene's recent attempt to forge a municipal tax policy for a city of 110,000 based on one survey completed by just 700 people. (The restaurant tax - fallout from this survey - was not supported by Perry's/Club Arena, but Club Arena nevertheless sees no harm in imposing the city's flawed methodology on its clientele.)

This policy merely darkens the typeface on societal labels. Either straight or gay. Anyone caught blurring these lines is subject to discrimination. Caught in its own sexual solipsism, Club A thus casually and hypocritically dismisses the very valid question of to bi or not to bi.

But go anyway. Go for the music. Go to dance. Go for a thick slice of attitude served by a way-too-pretty-for-Eugene, spandexed English major who's probably spent a helluva lot more time studying the contents label on his



Bea Souza Harpham



A Latino family's struggles are portrayed metaphorically with a dramatic cockfight in "Roosters," a University theater production directed by Rachel Chipman Waite and opening April 21 at the Arena Theater in Villard Hall.

Play delves into family issues

Ming Rodrigues For the Oregon Daily Emerald

With cockfighting as the backdrop to its ethnic slant, "Roosters" is both a comic and poignant look by playwright Milcha Sanchez-Scott into the story of a Latino family torn between the past and present.

The story is an ensemble piece. The setting is New Mexico. The characters are members of a family of cockfighters. Life turns around for the family when Gallo. the father jailed for killing another man whose stag he borrowed to breed prize cocks, returns.

Conflict arises when Hector, the son, intends to sell the rooster to pay his way out of the valley. Meanwhile, Juana, the mother, wants to keep the family together in harmony, and Angela, the sister, seriously believes she's an angel and walks around with wings talking to God.

The struggle of the family roles is played out against the rhythm of drums, and the dreams of a culture are portrayed metaphorically

through a dramatic cockfight.

'Roosters' excites me like no other play I've read in a very long time," said theater arts graduate student Rachel Chipman Waite. director of the play. "It is an impassioned play about family bonds, love struggle, competition and the eternal. As a director, I am enticed by the theatrical elements of the play: the dancing. lighting and the music (performed by Sandunga)."

The play, though in English, is stimulating in its poetic language and Latino flavor, added Waite. who speaks Spanish and has lived in Spain for some time and traveled through Mexico. Real roosters will strut around on stage, but the cockfighting scenes will be played out by the all-Latino cast

'The play has proved to be a cultural experience for the actors," said Waite. "They have come in closer touch with their heritage as a result - even through the little things they had

'It is an impassioned play about family bonds, love struggle, competition and the eternal.'

- Rachel Chipman Waite, director

to learn, like rolling their R's and working on their accents."

"Roosters" opens Wednesday, April 21, at the Arena Theater in Villard Hall, 1109 Old Campus Lane. Additional performances are scheduled for April 22-24; April 28-30 and May 1. All performances begin at 8 p.m. Tickets, at \$3 for students and \$5 general admission, are available at the University Theater Box Office in Villard Hall, 346-4191.