



Scott Barnett Emerald

Rosei Rocha-Judd (front) and other members of the Young Women's Theatre Collective work on a performance piece for the troupe's show this weekend at the WOW Hall.

Established in 1996, the Young Women's Theatre Collective provides a forum for young women to express and share their hopes, dreams and fears

By Sara Jarrett
Oregon Daily Emerald

Youth doesn't have to equal ignorance, nor does it necessarily mean a lack of depth. Young women in particular deal with these stereotypes on a daily basis, when trying to prove themselves as intelligent, strong members of society.

Thanks to pop culture and the media, the door seems to shut louder and harder on those who are trying to be taken seriously when girls like Britney Spears are made into superstars.

The Young Women's Theatre Collective, a local group of girls ranging in age from 13 to 19, are on a mission to break those social barriers. The group performs Friday and Saturday night at the WOW Hall, 291 W. Eighth Ave., with both shows beginning at 7:30 p.m. Admission is \$5-15, on a sliding scale.

While helping each other embody and celebrate the traits that make each member unique, the collective "hopefully communicates to the community about teens — their fears, hopes, and dreams," says Hannah Fox, the troupe's director since she founded it in 1996. In the process, the experience becomes an emotional awakening that members say would have otherwise been unattainable.

Performing in public is one of the most rewarding aspects of being involved with the YWTC, members agree.

Even the most emotionally stable person who's able to deal with her feelings through journal writing or talking with friends can still benefit from the experience. Sharing these quests with an audience seems to affirm the exploration of issues and themes, such as sexual violation, parental divorce, self-confidence, alcoholism, grades, voices in your head, the Holocaust, the war against fat and even the high school bathroom environment.

"The beauty of performance is being able to move through the emotional process in a constructive way," Shanti Michaels, 18, said. "It forces me to organize my emotional life."

The process focuses on self-discovery, Fox said. The girls share stories of their lives and discover themselves through their art, and Fox remains dedicated to providing a framework for the girls while leaving plenty of room for experimentation.

"We come here and say whatever we want," says Tinka Standke, a 17-year-old exchange student from Germany.

Along the way, each group member learns about group interaction as well.

One week before their WOW Hall performance show the YWTC chatted after rehearsal about costumes. Fox turned over the decision-making

process to the young women, with only minor stipulations: The shirts must have cap sleeves, everyone must wear the same color and everyone is responsible for black pants, style unimportant.

Everyone offered an opinion. The color choices ranged from green, orange and purple — definitely not red. White looks too formal, they all agreed.

Finally, a tentative agreement was made on the plum color of a sweatshirt worn by one member. Since this is an on-going discovery process, who knows what the group will actually wear?

On the surface, this particular conversation

revelation," Michaels muses, admiring its complexity.

The meaning not only signifies a noticeable change but also refers to the circular course or cycle of events in one's life. It's a statement of the power of the individual, a principle Fox herself brings to management of the group.

"I have been steeped in personal theater throughout my life," she says. In her hometown, New Paltz, New York, Fox's parents practiced a theater form called Playback Theatre, which is an improvisational-based method of performance generated by audience member's stories.

Fox decided to begin her own theater troupe after being inspired by students she taught in theater classes at the Amazon Community Center and the WOW Hall, she said. The collective formally began in August 1996, under the name The Young Women's Ritual Theatre, after 17 teenage girls showed up for an informal first meeting.

Considering the meeting was only advertised by word of mouth, "it was a surprisingly large turnout," Fox said.

Since the collective's first performance in December 1996, it has grown so large that there is now an audition process every season; each audition normally attracts around 25 girls from the community. There are four new members this year, replacing those who moved on last spring.

Jamie Proctor, 19, was a founding member of the company and now is a theater major at New York University.

In retrospect, she says her involvement with the YWTC "totally transformed how I view theater." Without the experience, she maintains her interest in the art would not be as passionate as it is now.

"I feel good having this in my back pocket," she says.

After ¡Constant Revolution!, the young women will begin preparing to take their work to small, rural Oregon towns thanks to a recent grant from the Oregon Arts Commission. Plans are also being formed to take the show to Seattle, Portland, Ashland and San Francisco later in the year.

In an effort to preserve the work of its ever changing art repertoire, the collective has also written a book, titled "Akimbo." The anthology is designed to capture an art form that is otherwise impermanent.

"Because this is a theatre about exploring one's life as it passes, the actors 'grow out' of their monologues like a pair of jeans," Fox wrote in the book's introduction. "The issue itself may be timeless for past and future generations of teenagers but for the actor herself, it no longer is a present struggle."



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Several members of the YWTC are shown here during a recent rehearsal. Each year there is an audition process to replace members who leave the group.

¡Constant Revolution!

Who: The Young Women's Theatre Collective

When: Friday and Saturday, Jan. 14 and 15

Where: WOW Hall, corner of 8th and Lincoln

Price: \$5 to \$15 sliding scale

might seem superfluous, but to a keen observer, the talk is indicative of something deeper than fashion and what color looks best under bright stage lights. Eleven young women who each possess a profound love for their art were able to compromise and come to a collective agreement in less than twenty minutes.

Not only do the girls decide on their costumes, but they compile each show and write every scene, sometimes incorporating song and dance. The freedom and trust Fox bestows on "her girls," defines the troupe as a rite of passage — a journey marking the coming of age. The title of the next show, ¡Constant Revolution!, reiterates this notion.

"The title sounds like revolution, evolution,