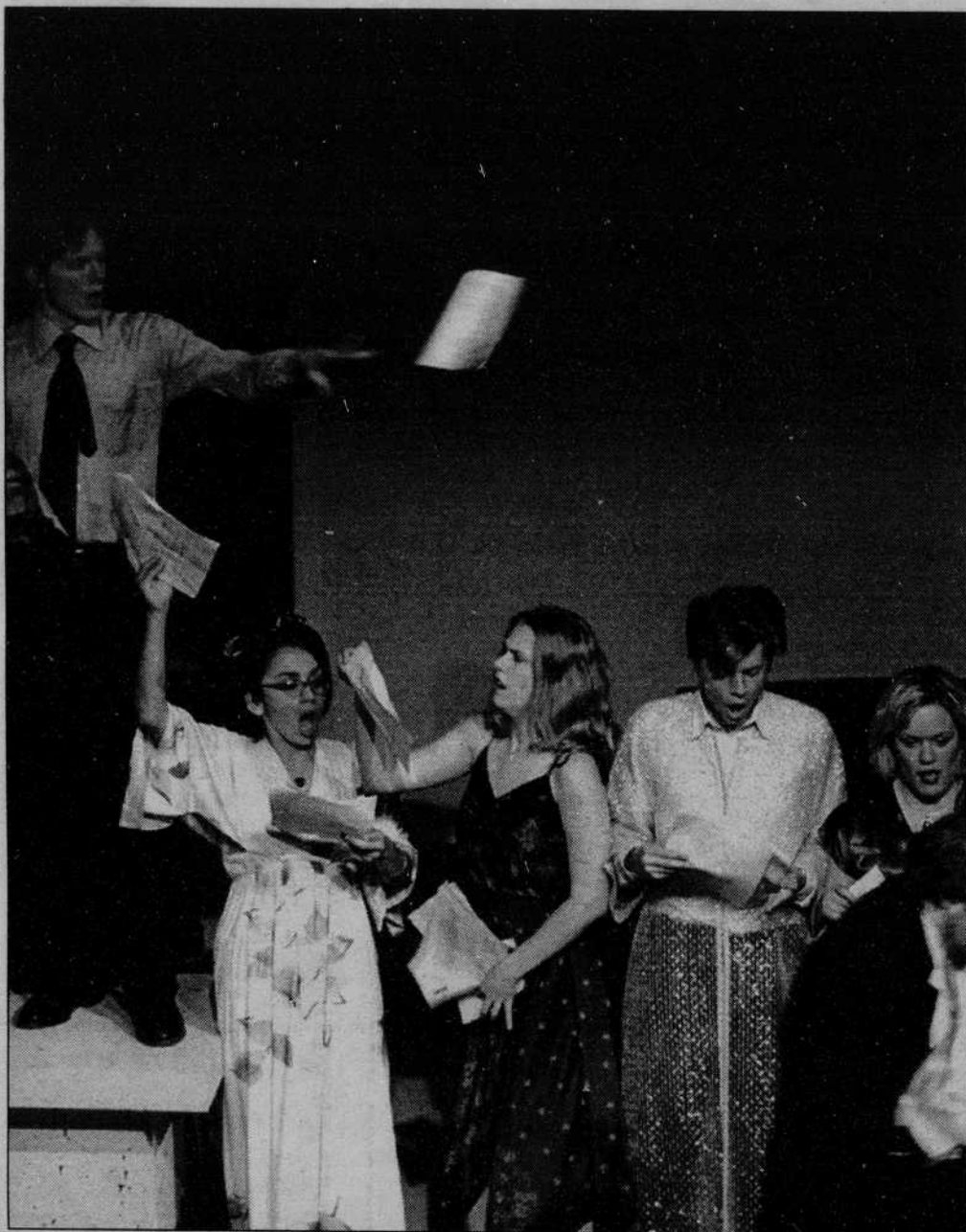


Playhouse depicts MTV as 'Running on Empty'



■ The final Pocket show of the year satirizes the network with a comedic portrayal of an empty reality



THEATER

Pocket Playhouse
'Running on Empty'

★★★★☆

By Mason West
for the Emerald

Anyone who has seen the latest 'N Sync video, "POP," knows that the MTV style of visual presentation has sunk to new lows. The video besieges your eyes with bright colors and ludicrous computer effects that are best reserved for a 30-second commercial.

The arrival of this unrelenting video complements the last Pocket Playhouse show of the year, "Running on Empty," which opens today. University graduate Heather Meyers, who wrote the show, took the MTV style and transformed it into live theater. To bring her show to life, Meyers passed the torch to graduating senior Greg Thorson to direct the show and put her ideas into practice.

The goal of this experiment was not to make a pop-play, but to poke fun at the medium for what it has done to society. The play centers around the creation of MTV by music producers Tom and Robert. Tom, played by Tom Thorson, is the man with the vision but not the morals. He likes to cheat on his wife, Brook, a would-be pop star (think Pat Benatar) played by Lindy Anderson. Robert, played by Curtis Williams, is the reluctant one who finds the talent and tries, unsuccessfully, to do the right thing.

Just before the birth of the new station, Tom cheats with Lila, another would-be pop star played by Katie McClatchey. He seduces her with the promise of a recording contract, but then in true Milli Vanilli

form, he only uses her voice and puts a pretty face in the video. During this time, Lila is involved with Ben (Noah Smith), a reluctant man who also tries, equally unsuccessfully, to do the right thing.

These character parities are not coincidental — the similarities go so far as to repeat dialogue from earlier segments but by different characters. While this is confusing at first, it proves to be an effective way to show connections in how the characters feel.

Another confusing aspect of the play are the presences of Gwen and Ellis. Played respectively by Darlene Espinoza-Dadras and Nanda Golden (that's a guy), the two are like archetypal angel/devil characters who try to influence the characters. The audience will wonder where they came from and what they're really doing, but on a superficial level, they provide rare comedic entertainment in the show.

The best parts of the play are dialogue montages between the characters. They will be carrying on separate conversations but the portions that are voiced to the audience flow together. One character picks up where the last left off and the broken fragments fit together to create one continuous story. This is when the meaning of the play is best conveyed because the individual trains of thought that make up the larger story are lost. Society has become so accustomed to dealing with quick changes that keeping up with many is easier than following just one.

At the celebration of the birth of MTV, Tom says, "With MTV, everybody wins." These words justify the play's title; they are empty. Even though this play leaves audiences confused, that confusion will invite them to think more about the way they process stories and information. The desired effect is to slow people down enough to realize that they have been pushing on blindly without fuel.

"Running on Empty" runs in full today, Friday and Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Pocket Playhouse.

Mason West for the Emerald

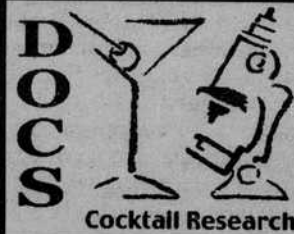
The cast of "Running on Empty" breaks into spontaneous song. Pictured, from left, are Tom Thorson, Darlene Espinoza-Dadras, Katie McClatchey, Nanda Golden, Lindy Anderson, Noah Smith and, in front, Curtis Williams.

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