



DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Felicia T. Perez directs the ASUO Women's Center production of "The Vagina Monologues," which will run Friday through Sunday in Agate Hall.

A whole new V-Day

The annual Women's Center production of "The Vagina Monologues" promises a new crop of diverse voices

BY STEFANIE LOH
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

What do words that begin with 'V' have in common with the big 'V' word, Vagina? Violence. Victory. Victim. Vice. Vivacious. Oh, and the 'W' in 'Women' is two Vs put together.

This is the question Felicia T. Perez, director of this year's "The Vagina Monologues," wants people to ask themselves.

This Valentine's Day weekend, Feb. 11-13, the ASUO Women's Center will put on a production of the Monologues as part of an annual V-Day campaign, as schools and communities nationwide also perform and donate the play's proceeds to nonprofit organizations fighting to end violence against women and to support women's rights.

To 28-year-old Perez, the Monologues are about helping women reconnect with themselves and heal by celebrating the joy and creation that "V" words can bring.

"The Vagina Monologues" are stories of creation," Perez said. "You don't have to be a woman to appreciate the vagina. It reminds us that we all came from the same place."

Perez is from Los Angeles, but was brought to Eugene to direct this year's production.

A teacher by profession, she boasts an extensive résumé. She got her start directing independent performance-art pieces and later did work for Highways Performance Art Space in Los Angeles.

Lately, directing has taken a back seat to Perez's full-time job teaching high school history in Los Angeles.

Still, Perez views directing and teaching as an interconnected chain.

"Directing and theater work is all an extension of teaching. It's all about

helping people to find their voice and tell a story," she said. "It's no different from teaching history, which is also about storytelling anyway."

This approach has brought renewed energy to a production that was brutally slammed last year for lacking diversity. In fact, Perez embodies the diversity this year's cast and crew are trying to bring to the production.

VAGINA MONOLOGUES

When: Friday and Saturday, 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, 1 p.m.

Where: Agate Hall

Tickets: Available at the UO Ticket Office, \$7 students and \$10 public

"As a fully 'out' lesbian and as a Chicano history teacher with tattoos and a shaved head, my life has been about not hav-

ing a place to call home or to feel that I belong to," she said. "My life has been about making sure my voice is heard in connection with everyone else's. That means that I've come into this production understanding how important and empowering it is to know that you have a voice and that you are being represented."

Instead of having auditions, cast members were selected via a nomination process, thus opening the field to people without acting experience. Perez also did not assign parts to the cast members. She said she hopes this process will ensure the voices in the Monologues are believable.

"I suggested roles according to the preferences people had expressed. Then I passed out the scripts and left the room," she said. "The cast decided amongst themselves whether or not to exchange parts. When I came back in, they told me what changes they had made, and we started rehearsing."

So far, directing the Monologues has been a journey of personal discovery for Perez.

"The Vagina Monologues" has given me this amazing opportunity to completely fall in love with vaginas."

The good-mood food

More than just candy, chocolate has a special spot in humanity's heart

BY COLLEEN MCCLURE
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

Valentine's Day is, to some, the ultimate celebration of love, and there is one thing this celebration brings with it in droves: sweets. According to www.holidayinsights.com, 75 percent of chocolate purchases are made by women — except during the days leading up to Feb. 14, when 75 percent of the chocolate purchases, or \$1 billion worth of chocolate, are made by men.

Why would Americans spend so much money to satisfy a sweet tooth?

According to a study conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, chocolate might alter neurotransmitters in the brain that affect mood and desire for different foods. British Broadcasting Corp. reported that eating chocolate also increases the level of endorphins released into the brain. Chocolate also affects another neurotransmitter, serotonin, which acts as an anti-depressant. More recent findings, such as those from Italian researcher Andrea Salonia, have found an association between eating chocolate and sexual fulfillment.

Even with these theories, it's difficult to say how and when chocolate and Valentine's Day became such a popular combination. St. Valentine was a priest in the 400s who performed marriages for soldiers in the Roman army and, in doing so, defied the orders of Emperor Claudius. Although he had a

holy day named for him in the fifth century, our current tradition of exchanging notes and gifts didn't catch on until the 17th century in Great Britain. In 1876, the first milk chocolate was produced in Switzerland and soon found its way into Valentine's Day celebrations, according to www.theholidayspot.com.

Eugene's Euphoria Chocolate Company has served customers chocolates and truffles for more than 20 years. Its hand-dipped chocolate truffles have won acclaim in magazines such as Chocolatier, Success Magazine and Candy Industry and have been featured in guides such as "The Chocolate Lover's Guide to the Pacific Northwest," according to Euphoria's Web site.

Tim Matteson, manager of the Euphoria Chocolate Factory store, recommends a box of Cherries Jubilee, a combination of dark chocolate and fresh cream mixed with cherry pieces to make up the centers. Other popular Valentine truffles include the Kahlua & Cream, Kona Coffee, milk chocolate and strawberry flavors.

Although Matteson estimates sales of chocolates for Valentine's Day mount to more than sales for all of January, he notes that he and his staff have been "planning and preparing for this holiday since November to be completely set for the last-minute rush."

He expects this holiday will be the busiest, as customers scramble to purchase a last-minute gift.



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