

Block by block, life by life

Quilters has ample singing and dancing, but music isn't the most memorable part — the quilts themselves are.

BY SANDRA DE HELEN

Quilters, a musical play depicting the lives of pioneer women, will re-open October 2 for an extended run at the Schubert Theatre in Beaverton. Artists' Repertory Theatre has produced what *Willamette Week* is calling "the year's best show."

Quilters (by Molly Newman and Barbara Damashek) uses sixteen quilted pattern blocks

Theatre

to describe events in the lives of women. (Ten blocks would have made for a tighter production: the show is too long for the audience's comfort.) This clever — and beautiful — device moves the story forward from birth to adulthood to death, portraying many life experiences. Along the way, we meet Sarah McKendree Bonham and her six daughters, as well as myriad relatives and friends all portrayed by the cast of seven women. (At press time the all new cast had not been named.)

The typical events of women's lives are explored. *Quilters* includes the requisite childbirth scene, but it is quickly executed and the audience is not subjected to the prolonged wailing and grimacing such scenes usually contain. (Thank you, Director Rebecca Adams.)

The onset of menstruation is handled in a musical number. Adolescent women sing about the curse of being the first (or last!) to get their periods.

The abortion scene is the most powerful I have ever seen on this subject. The intensity, the desperation, the secret sorority that exist when legal abortion is not an option are quietly and sensitively portrayed. The agony of the decision itself will always be with us, but a reminder of what is necessary — and REAL — when abortions are illegal is good to see.

Marriage, sibling rivalry, education, death and disaster are all covered. There is one glaring gap: lesbianism is not addressed. Oh, one woman is a spinster, but she sings of her loneliness and her inability to bear children.

In point of fact, lesbians had a pretty tough time in those days. Unmarried women usually lived with their extended families and were resented. A few women were teachers, but salaries were too low to support even one woman adequately. Women were not allowed to own land if they had one male relative living. Lesbian lives were interesting, to say the least.

Quilters has ample singing and dancing, but music isn't the most memorable part — the quilts themselves are. Sixty-four women worked the individual quilt blocks that come to life onstage. They also created the fabulous quilt that is revealed at the end.

The sets, lights and costumes serve as appropriate background to the beauty of the quilts.

Women, revolution and love

Dilemmas we encounter in our personal lives are played out from a refreshing and challenging perspective, in the new novel, N•E•W•S, by former Portlander, Heather Conrad.

BY CATHY SIEMENS

"NEW•S, a suspense novel of women, revolution and love," is the first novel from former Portlander, Heather Conrad. Going against the grain of much of today's fiction, *N•E•W•S* portrays strong wo-

Books

men characters responding to our complex beleaguered world with initiative, cooperation and courage. It is a welcome antidote to the modernist angst, ennui and alienation.

N•E•W•S—North East West and South—is a global anti-imperialist organization controlled by women that is planning an ambitious international conference while at the same time coordinating a daring clandestine action. As the project progresses, the lives of the women, both lesbian and straight, unfold through interactions with their work, families, lovers and each other.

Love and its fading, in-law problems, survival, parents; in short, all the human dilemmas we encounter in our personal lives are played out from a refreshing and challenging perspective. This expanded perspective is a profound commitment to the well-being of all people. Family, friends and lovers are one small group within the general concern for people globally. This leads to interesting contradictions, difficult choices and a sophisticated interplay of values, needs and desires. The characters of *N•E•W•S* are playing for higher and certainly more dramatic stakes than personal satisfaction.

Conrad has also managed to weave factual information on the international scene throughout the novel in an appropriate manner. Her erstwhile reader cannot help but come away painlessly a little better educated.

For those who like a good adventure story about strong women told from a palatable political point of view, I recommend *N•E•W•S*.

Ms. Conrad will return to Portland Friday, October 23, from 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. to read from *N•E•W•S* at A Woman's Place Bookstore. She deserves a warm welcome.



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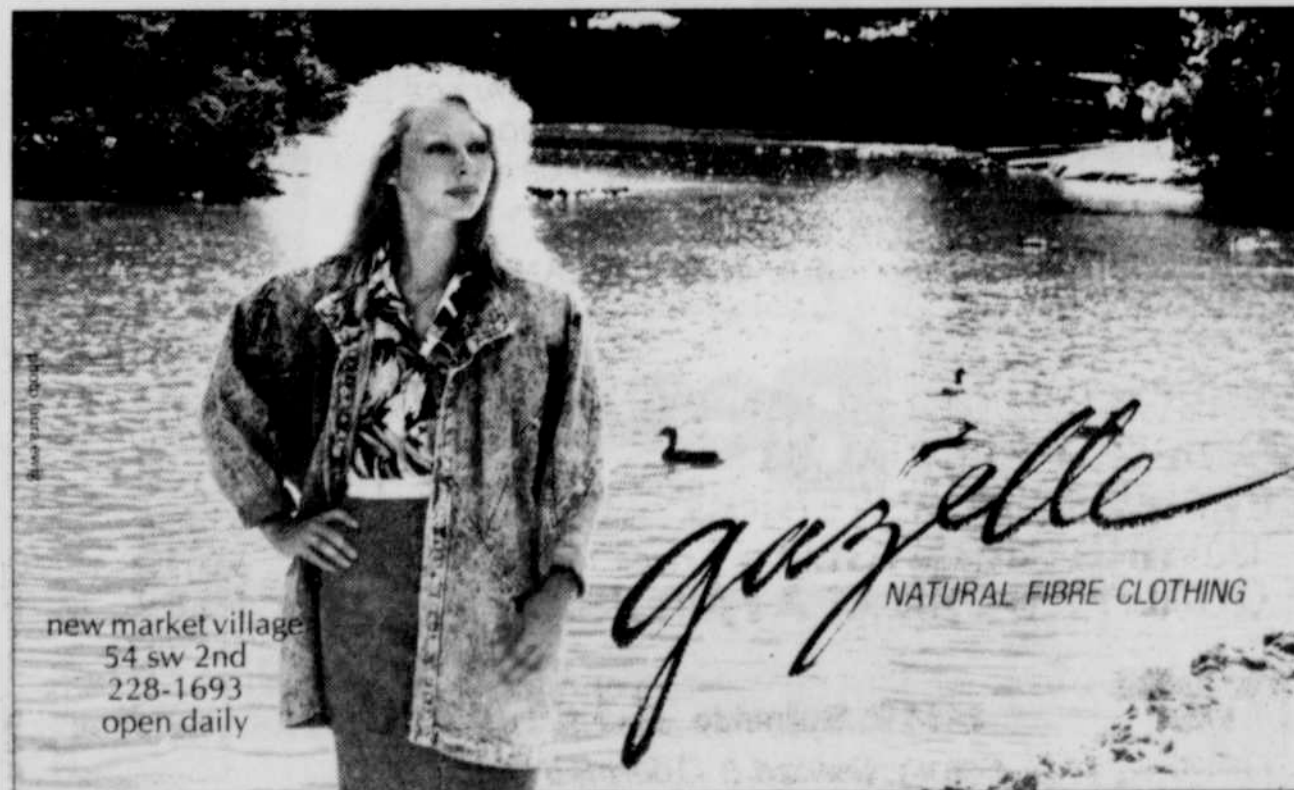
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