

THEATER

Revolutions

The personal is political. And theatrical, too.

BY MEG DALY

You could read history books, but this is more fun," says Bethroot

Gwynn, creator of *Women: The Longest Revolution*, a performance about the women's liberation movement that runs this month in Ashland, Eugene and Portland.

Not only is it more fun, the production showcases the personal stories of several Northwest women, adding an intimate element to a complex social and political story.

Gwynn calls her work a "performance documentary," meaning it weaves together historical events with the personal stories of several co-performers. The 62-year-old lesbian has been involved with the women's movement since the late 1960s and has been a resident at Fly Away Home women's land in southern Oregon since 1976.

A contributor to several We'Moon publications, Gwynn has been creating what she calls "personal theater" and performing throughout the state since the 1980s. Portland performances include *Pieces of Truth* and *Child Tracks and Amazon Wing*. She has also directed performances such as a recent production of *The Vagina Monologues* in Roseburg.

Two years ago she was invited to create a performance for the 2003 WomanSource festival in Ashland. She envisioned a sort of "feminist state of the union," she says. After a crash course in women's studies, she pulled together historical threads and personal memories to create her new show.

"The women loved it," says Gwynn of the successful debut.

One of *Women's* collaborators is Jem Mara, also a 60-something lesbian living in southern Oregon. "Part of my contribution has been to be a partner in the remembering," says Mara, who attended her first women's liberation meeting in 1971 Dublin, Ireland.

Gwynn says the first half of the performance tells stories from the second wave of American feminism, particularly women's bookstores and music, health care and the rise of women's studies programs. The focus then shifts to national pol-



From left: Jem Mara, Bethroot Gwynn and Jennifer Council sport costume designs from Oregon artist Tee Corinne's *Cunt Coloring Book*

itics and economics, then broadens to incorporate global feminism. Gwynn says it was important to her that the piece reflect the full arc of the past several decades.

Women was created through workshops led by Gwynn in which the performers gave voice to memories of feminist activism and discovery. Some of those stories became elements in the actual performance. Mara will perform a five-minute piece about her relationship with her son.

The women are joined by Jenny Council, who, at 40, is the youngest member of the ensemble. A native of England, she moved to southern Oregon several years ago because of the women's community she found there.

Council performs a personal piece about a protest she attended in 1982 at Greenham Common, the U.S. military base in Newbury, England. After nearly 20 years of women's peace

activism, the common recently was returned to public land.

Portland audience members can look forward to cameo appearances by notable feminists Naomi Morena, a writer and musician, and Ann Mussey, an assistant professor of women's studies at Portland State University. Mussey will relate the story of how she and a number of lesbian feminists who attended Iowa's Grinnell College flocked to Portland in the early 1970s. She will also recount her involvement with the groundbreaking Portland Women's Health Clinic.

According to Gwynn, the performance will survey the changes and accomplishments in women's lives during the past 35 years. It will also consider what is needed for the future.

"It's all done in a lively way," says Gwynn. "There are songs, poems and humor throughout."

Barbara Winkler, the director of women's studies at Southern Oregon University, says *Women* is "a must-see for anyone who wants to know more about second wave feminism and its continuing legacy, especially in Oregon." **J**

WOMEN: THE LONGEST REVOLUTION plays 7:30 p.m. April 17 at Southern Oregon University's Center for the Visual Arts. Tickets are \$5-\$15 from 541-552-6216. The performance benefits Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance.

The Eugene performance is 7:30 p.m. April 23 at University of Oregon's Willamette Hall. Tickets are \$5-\$15 sliding scale from 541-346-1134. The performance benefits the university's Southern Oregon Lesbian Archival Collection.

The Portland performance is 7:30 p.m. April 24 at Portland State University's School of Business auditorium. Tickets are \$8-\$15 from 503-232-6003. The performance benefits the Lesbian Community Project and In Other Words.

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