

Women of Character

Written by Kirsten Gobble
Tuesday, 08 June 2010 10:36



Talking with the cast of 'Talking With'...

Who is Jane Martin? No one really knows. What is known is that Jane Martin is the pen name of an award-winning Kentucky playwright. Though Martin has written numerous plays, including "Talking With..." and was nominated for a Pulitzer, the writer's true identity is still a mystery.

Eleven actresses from Beaufort and Bluffton, ages 18-80, will offer a glance into the unique lives of very different women when "Talking With..." produced by Misspent Youth Productions and directed by Gail Westerfield, comes to the ARTworks stage in Beaufort, June 11-19. The play earned national attention when it premiered at the 1982 Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theatre of Louisville.

The audience will be "marked" by these women who share stories of their passions, ranging from the far-out eccentric to the ordinary: baton twirling, snake handling, McDonalds, the rodeo, a "Wizard of Oz" character, and a loft full of lamps, among others. According to stage manager Travis Williams, the pieces are "gonna bring a laugh and a tear."

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This production is not your usual just-sit-and-watch play. The small, intimate



setting makes the collection of monologues more conversational than presentational. The audience will actually feel like each character is talking with them. Westerfield says, "I want it to feel like a conversation with the audience, rather than a speech given to them."

But why did Westerfield choose to produce and direct "Talking With..."? She says "I was familiar with it because I acted in it more than 20 years ago in Boulder, Colorado. It was the first really good play I'd been in. I felt really challenged because I did "Rodeo," who was nothing like me. I learned so much. I love the writing, and have been looking for an opportunity to direct it all this time. I knew there were a lot of talented women here after just directing "The Vagina Monologues." I really love creating with actors, and this is a great play for that."



Speaking of actors, this play has a fantastic cast and crew, including three mother and daughter pairings. Williams says, "Everybody has something creative to bring to the table, to their character."

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Westerfield seconds that, saying that working with all the unique actors is incredible. "It's just so great because everybody is so different from each other, and they all bring an incredible energy and commitment. Everybody works hard and listens. I get as much out of it as they do. It's really inspiring to me. It's a neat collaboration."

And they are happy to be a part of the process. Christine Smith, who plays Moira, an actress preparing to go on stage in "15 Minutes," has acted in two casts with Westerfield, and heard she was a "really great director to work with. I was looking forward to experiencing that with her."

Billie Shoemaker, who plays a homemaker who's created her own world in "Scraps," wasn't completely



certain if she wanted to audition for the play. She recalled that "when a friend dragged me out of the house to see "Painted Alice," I started feeling that old itch. And lo and behold, right there in the show's program, was an advertisement for an upcoming production to be directed by my old friend, Gail Westerfield (whom Shoemaker directed in "Parallel Lives" in 2001). I thought about it, trying to decide if I should do it or not. On the night of auditions, I tried to chicken out, but my boyfriend pushed me and encouraged me... so I showed up, and am ever so happy that I did!"

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