BLESSING FINDS DARK HUMOR IN FAMILY LIFE
For Immediate Release
For PUBLICATION on or after 1/26
Contact: Leslee Caul, 963-1339

Lee Blessing weaves metaphor and reality into a tapestry of dysfunction as a woman and her three daughters strive to find happiness in "Independence," currently in production in the Tower Theatre on the CWU campus.

Guest Artist and Director Terri McMahon warns, however, that dysfunction is not necessarily synonymous with depression. "This is a very dark comedy with a lot of laughs," says McMahon. "Blessing, like Arthur Miller or Eugene O'Neill, presents the state of the family as serious, but with an infusion of humor."

The play is set in the Independence, Iowa home of Evelyn Briggs, a former mental patient who spends her days volunteering at the hospital where she was formerly institutionalized. "Evelyn's journey is a real fear of abandonment -- what we may easily term as 'crazy'," says McMahon. "But the play, like life, is never that simple. We can make definite judgements about the characters but that doesn't account for the whole picture and we find we are wrong."

The part of Evelyn is being portrayed by CWU professor and professional actor Brenda Hubbard. "It's very exciting to work on this project," said Hubbard. "Blessing is really one of the most promising playwrights to make a significant showing in regional theatres in the past 15 years. Blessing's plays are consistently shown at regional theatres, as well as Broadway and on public television."

While Evelyn is certainly a central point to the play, she is nothing without the constant conflict she experiences when her three daughters all land at home. The eldest daughter, Kess, is a college professor who has moved away and fed on Evelyn's fear of abandonment. Middle daughter Jo works as an accountant when she's not constantly reassuring Evelyn that she will be the one to stay. Youngest daughter Sherry dreams of a career as a New York artist and spends her time counting the days until she can gain an escape. Starring as the mismatched daughters are Sön Tissel (Kess), Tricia Theil (Jo); and Kerri Van Ayken (Sherry).

"Each character is searching for family even though they sabotage each other and themselves," says McMahon. "Blessing presents characters that are so different. If we look at each character in terms of their sexuality, we see that each is unique: Evelyn is asexual; Kess is a lesbian; Jo is pregnant after one disastrous affair; and Sherry is lost in promiscuity."

While the process of communication is no doubt painful, the end result is one of enlightenment. "In 'Independence' a family moves from dishonest interaction to more authentic interaction," says Hubbard. "Blessing shows great skill in creating natural, believable dialogue and characters. He captures the pain and humor of family life in a way that is unique. Anyone who has pondered how parents and children communicate, and how illness in the family controls and affects all family members, will find this play fascinating."

"Independence" runs Jan. 26-28 and Feb. 2-4 at 8 p.m. in the Tower Theatre. There is also a special "Escape the Super Bowl" matinee Jan. 29 at 2 p.m. Tickets for "Independence" are currently on sale in the Tower Box Office, located in McConnell Auditorium on the CWU campus. Tickets may be purchased with VISA or MasterCard by phoning 963-1774. The Box Office is open Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 90 minutes prior to each performance.
CWU WOMEN TAKE CENTER STAGE WINTER QUARTER
FOR RELEASE: January 13, 1995
CONTACT: Leslee Caul, (509) 963-1339

Winter quarter could more aptly be dubbed “Women’s Quarter” in the CWU Theatre Arts Department. The three shows being offered this winter not only have all-female casts, but also female directors at the helm.

Opening the winter season is Lee Blessing’s “Independence,” a poignant look at the struggle of three daughters trying to gain freedom from their domineering mother. Starring as the mother is CWU Professor Brenda Hubbard, who was seen most recently in the Laughing Horse Summer Theatre production of “I Hate Hamlet.” Ms. Hubbard, a member of Actor’s Equity, teaches acting, directing, voice and theatre literature classes. She will also direct the spring Children’s Theatre touring show, “Tom Sawyer.” Besides their own in-house professional, CWU students will also have the opportunity to work with professional director Terri McMahon, who appears as part of the department’s on-going Guest Artist program. “Independence” opens Jan. 26 for a two-weekend run, with a special “Escape the Super Bowl” matinee Jan. 29 at 2 p.m.

Mid-quarter the focus shifts to the lives of African-American women in “For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf” by Ntozake Shange. The “choropoem” dramatizes the lives of seven women through music, dance and storytelling. The cast includes CWU African-American faculty and students and is produced in cooperation with the Black Student Union and the Office of Minority Affairs. Professional actor, director and jazz singer Denise Thimes, of St. Louis, will provide the direction for this production. Ms. Thimes will also be sharing her vocal talents at the First Presbyterian Church in late January. “For Colored Girls...” opens February 16 for a two-weekend run with a special matinee Feb. 19 at 2 p.m.

“I Can’t Keep Running In Place,” the insightful musical comedy by Barbara Schottenfeld, will round out “Women’s Quarter.” Direction, however, will not fall to a pro, but a beginner. This delightful exploration that follows six women through an assertiveness training program is directed by CWU student Jasmine Grevstad. The play is Ms. Grevstad’s Senior Project and is being funded through a Farrell Merit Scholarship. The show opens March 9 for a three-performance run.

“Male characters are so prevalent in what we consider to be ‘classic’ theatre,” says Brenda Hubbard. “This quarter offers a wonderful opportunity, not only for the women in the department who are not always featured, but for anyone who is interested in women and their special roles and challenges within our society.”

Tickets are currently on sale in the Tower Box Office for “Independence” and “For Colored Girls...”, Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 90 minutes prior to each show. Tickets can also be reserved with a VISA or MasterCard by phoning 963-1774. Admission to “I Can’t Keep Running In Place” is free.

XXX
A play by Lee Blessing

Directed by Terri McMahon

(Miss McMahon is a resident member and one of the leading actresses with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.)

Guest Artist Brenda Hubbard (CWU Faculty) will perform this play with three CWU students.

INDEPENDENCE deals with a dysfunctional family. A mother and her three daughters each search to find some route to happiness.

"Blessing has a hair-trigger sensitivity to what families are saying and doing now, this minute." Dallas Times Herald

Recommended for age 17 and above.

JANUARY 26, 27, 28
February 2, 3, 4, 1995
8:00 p.m.
Tower Theatre

TICKETS: (509) 963-1774 Tower Box Office
General $6; Students and Seniors $4
Thursdays 1/2 price MC/VISA Group Rates Available

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS
500.463.1766 Wesley Van Tassel, Chair
COMING ATTRACTIONS

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf

A "choreopoem" by Ntozake Shange examines the lives of African-American women. February 16-18 and 23-25 with a special 2 p.m. matinee February 19.

I Can't Keep Running In Place (Senior Directing Project)

Theatre Arts senior Jasmine Grevstad directs this insightful musical comedy by Barbara Schottenfeld in which six women attend a series of assertiveness training sessions.

CWU Theatre Arts Presents

INDEPENDENCE

A Play by Lee Blessing

January 26, 27, 28 -- 8 p.m.
January 29 -- 2 p.m.
February 2, 3, 4 -- 8 p.m.
1995
Tower Theatre
CWU Theatre Arts Presents

INDEPENDENCE

by Lee Blessing
Directed by Terri McMahon

Lee Blessing’s oeuvre is a celebration of the human being seeking relationships. Funny, often dark and troubled, Blessing’s characters above all attempt to make contact with one another, whether they are American and Russian cold-war politicians from his A Walk in the Woods or a mother clinging to her three daughters in Independence. The world politics setting is no more important than herbicide in Independence, Iowa—Blessing’s characters need one another on the primal level.

Our current popular catch words describing and labeling social interactive behavior: dysfunctional, enabler, issue, harassment are not to be found in Independence because, as in life, context makes it complicated and less than loving to use labels. Independence’s Evelyn, Kess, Jo and Sherry are all battling to be a family, however inappropriately or desperately or dysfunctionally they go about it. It is real thanks to Lee Blessing.

-- Terri McMahon

CAST

Evelyn Briggs..............Brenda Hubbard
Kess........................Sön Tissel
Jo..........................Tricia Theil
Sherry......................Kerri Van Auken

GUEST ARTISTS

Terri McMahon

A native of Phoenix, Arizona, Ms. McMahon has lived in Ashland, Oregon for the past 10 years where she has performed in numerous productions at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, including eight tours with the OSF Educational Touring Program. Ms. McMahon received a BFA from USC and has just recently taken up the craft of directing.

Brenda Hubbard

Brenda Hubbard brings more than 18 years of professional experience to her position as Assistant Professor Theatre Arts at CWU, where she teaches acting, voice, directing and theatre literature classes. Originally from Yellow Springs, Ohio, Hubbard has lived all over the country, most recently Portland, Oregon. She served for 5 years as Artistic Director of the Portland Repertory Theatre where she produced more than 30 shows, directing 15 of them. She has also maintained an accomplished career as an actor, performing with many notable companies including Seattle Repertory, A Contemporary Theatre, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She was seen most recently by local audiences in the Laughing Horse Summer Theatre production of “I Hate Hamlet.”

PRODUCTION STAFF

Scenic and Lighting Design..............R. Dutch Fritz
Costume Design.............................Erin Perona
Sound Design..............................Patrick Maxwell
Technical Director......................R. Dutch Fritz
Properties Chief.........................Molly Clarke
Stage Manager............................Erica Davis

PRODUCTION CREWS

Assistant Stage Manager.................Jeremy Sonney
Costume Shop Supervisor...............Ellen Hess
Master Electrician.......................Rob Sherman
Sound Engineer............................Nathan Shuster
Sound Operator.........................Patrick Maxwell
Light Board Operator....................Jason Montgomery
Scene Shop Carpenters..................Phil Smith, Scott Majcher,
                                      Jason Montgomery, Aaron Steen,
                                      and Nathan Shuster
Scene Shop Assistants..................Mandy Bailey, Brandy Black,
                                      Troy Gibson, Lori Johnson,
                                      Kay Miles, Seth Mullinnex,
                                      Nathan Shuster, and Son Tissel
Costume Shop Staff......................Wendy Sparks, Erin Perona, Barbara
                                      Stetter, Brenda Cromer, Kanae Okuyama
                                      and Mystina Perry
Costume Shop Assistants..............Molly Clarke, Letty Drew,
                                      Kimberly Edwards, Dina Franz, Jasmine
                                      Grevstad, Sara Hill, Mary Ellen
                                      Musselman, and Laura Renner
Wardrobe Chief..........................Mary Ellen Musselman
Dresser......................................Dina Franz
Makeup......................................Mary Ellen Musselman
Properties Crew.........................David Crinean, Tom McNally,
                                      Jeremy Sonney, and Kerri Van Auken
Publicity Staff............................Karen Everett, Torina Smith,
                                      Athena McElrath, Jason Schuessl,
                                      Colleen Smet, and Danny Thomas
House Manager............................Kay Miles

Special Thanks

Amy Bishop, Keith Edie; Robbie J.; Brian Durr; David Shoup; Stage Crew Services; Paulette Bond, Turn-A-Lum Lumber.
Powerful performances in 'Independence'

By KATHLEEN CIOFFI
Special to the Record

"Independence," now playing at CWU, touches on several currently much-discussed issues: mental illness, teen pregnancy, homosexuality, the dysfunctional family.

However, the play is not really about any of these themes. Instead, it takes on the subject of the old age of children trying to break away from their often-difficult, clinging parents. To the extent that you recognize this problem from your own life (and I certainly recognized it from mine), you will enjoy "Independence."

Playwright Lee Blessing, whose most well-known play, "A Walk in the Woods" concerns American and Russian negotiators during the Cold War, here focuses on one family in the small town of Independence, Iowa. Matriarch Evelyn Briggs (played by CWU professor Brenda Hubbard) is a former mental patient who now uses her instability as a means to manipulate and control her three daughters. Kess, the oldest daughter (Son Tissel), has returned for a visit to the family after a four-year absence during which she evidently had absolutely no contact with them. The middle daughter, Jo (Tricia Thiel), is unerringly pregnant, and conflicted. The youngest, Sherry (Kerr Van Auker), has already had an out of wedlock child which she gave up for adoption and is now marking time until she graduates from high school.

Directed by guest artist Terri McMahon of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and performed on a set designed by R. Dutch Fritz, the play consists of a series of short scenes in which Kess interacts with one or more of the other members of the family. Family members seem to bicker constantly, all the while wishing that they were not at each other's throats. They just can't help squabbling—the resentments run too deep.

Though the scenes are leavened by humor, there is a certain static quality to much of the play until near the end when the climax comes abruptly and almost as a surprise.

The performances by the four actresses are impressive. Tissel, playing the buttoned-up lesbian Kess, whose homecoming serves as the catalyst for the play, has the most difficult role because the playwright has provided her with contradictory and unconvincing characteristics. For example, though she is described as "the most silent of the daughters," she literally screams out the details of an affair she had as a counselor. Also, though she tells us early on that she has to get back to Minneapolis because she's teaching classes at the university, she seems to have no problem whatsoever staying as long as she wants in Independence. Since when do universities grant leaves of absence that abruptly?

Theil, who gave a hilarious performance as the busybody Arsinoe in last year's production of "The Misanthrope," is equally strong here in a completely different type of characterization. As the mousy, "good" daughter Jo, she bears the brunt of her mother's cruelty and seems to be almost endlessly willing to come back for more. And she is able to let us see the pain that this choice brings her character.

Van Auker, most recently seen as a student in CWU's fall production of "Oleanna," plays a convincing rebel as the slatternly youngest daughter Sherry. Her rebelliousness comes out in her looseness on stage, as she sashays from couch to chair to stool. Attempting pathetically to realize her independence through promiscuity, this character nonetheless has aspirations to be a sculptor. And she has some of the best, and funniest, lines in the play.

But the strongest character, the one who welds together the experience for the playgoer, is the mother. Brenda Hubbard plays Evelyn as a dowdier version of Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' "Glass Menagerie" (which Hubbard directed last summer at Laughing Horse), who likes to float along on nostalgic memories. When Evelyn is forced to deal with an unpleasant present, however, she becomes furious and sometimes violent.

Hubbard, whom Ellensburg audiences have previously seen only in comic roles ("Best Little Whore-
KITTITAS C

CWU stages a battle for 'Independence'

By DEWEY MEE
Contributing Critic

Family reunions can be very unpleasant affairs. Old wounds are often exposed and the injured parties have nowhere to hide. So it is in Lee Blessing's drama "Independence," on stage at Central Washington University's Tower Theater, and directed by guest artist Terri McMahon.

Kess (Son Tissel) returns home to her mother and two sisters after a four year absence. In that time, she has managed to establish an independent life for herself. She lives by her own set of rules and answers to no one. The same can not be said for her shy sister Jo (Tricia Theil) who is completely dominated by their mentally unstable mother, Evelyn (Brenda Hubbard). Evelyn has had a recent violent episode, seemingly caused by the fact that Jo is unmarried and pregnant. Sherry (Kerri Van Auken) was also pregnant (she gave her baby up for adoption) but, unlike Jo, she has no sense of moral responsibility or family obligation.

After quickly assessing the tense atmosphere, Kess decides to stay indefinitely in order to play the role of protector. She is the designated "caretaker" in this family—the one who attempts to smooth out everybody else's problems. Unfortunately, all of Kess's efforts at peacemaking fail miserably because, as Sherry tells her, "you're trying to create a family where there isn't one."

Mother Evelyn, whom all three girls must contend with, is a truly frightening character. Her mental illness is painfully real, yet she uses it as a means to control her daughters, especially Jo. When this fails as an effective manipulative device, she applies liberal doses of good old-fashioned guilt. Kess is, apparently, the only one going on inside her. Her eyes are always on the alert for swift mood swings within her two sisters. Tricia Theil, who has exhibited a vivid stage personality in many previous CWU productions, is forced to tone herself down in order to play the meek and timid Jo. Yet, when given opportunities to express her pent-up anger and rage, she really makes sparks fly.

Kerri Van Auken portrays Sherry as a 1990s version of Holly Golightly from "Breakfast At Tiffany's." Sherry is nineteen going on thirteen, blithely indifferent to the world around her — or so she'd have us believe. She knows her life is a mess, and has devoted herself to parties and promiscuity as a way of coping. Like Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly, Van Auken is wise enough to show us that Sherry's "what the hell" attitude is merely a facade to protect the frightened little girl underneath, demonstrated by the painful undercurrent in her casual remark, "My biggest mistake was not moving into my own apartment at birth!"

As Evelyn, Brenda Hubbard is required to play a hundred emotions all at once—and she plays all of them brilliantly. Her voice, layered with honeyed-sweetness one minute, unexpectedly erupts into savage screams the next. Hubbard plays her character straight down the middle and, admirably, she makes no apologies and refuses to beg for sympathy.

In recent years, we've all seen families who air their dirty laundry in public on an endless parade of TV talk shows. Playwright Lee Blessing reminds us that there are no easy solutions to painful problems. Some problems remain unresolved, regardless of the amounts of tender loving care and psychotherapy we receive.

Watching "Independence," you may see yourself, your family, or somebody you know. You may, very likely, find yourself in tears and, like the characters on stage, see the world as a cruel, unforgiving place where family means nothing.
Powerful performances in Independence

By KATHLEEN CORB

TICKETS: 963-1744
8 pm
VIP 3-4
Remain
Two Performances
CWM Tower Theatre
by Lee Blessing

"Independence"

Special to the Record
Super Bowl escape found at theatre arts

Deborah Sullivan
Staff reporter

If watching the Super Bowl is not what you want to be doing on Jan. 29, then escape to the CWU theatre arts department for a matinee of the all women's production of “Independence.” The show will be at 2 p.m.

Winter quarter, better known as “Women’s Quarter” because of the all women cast and directors, will open with Lee Blessing’s “Independence.”

Upcoming productions

- **INDEPENDENCE**
  Jan. 26-29, Feb. 2-4

- **FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED...**
  Feb. 16-19, 23-25

- **I CAN’T KEEP RUNNING IN PLACE**
  March 9-11

not only be working with their own in-house professional, but also with professional Director Terri McMahon. McMahon

women through music, dance and storytelling. The cast includes CWU African-American faculty and students and is produced in cooperation with the Black Student Union and the Office of Minority Affairs.

“For Colored Girls...” coincides with Black Appreciation Month in February. The production will open Feb. 16 for a two-weekend run with a special matinee Feb. 19 at 2 p.m.

Toward the end of “Women’s Quarter”, be looking for the ship.

“I Can’t Keep Running In Place” opens March 9 for a three-performance run.

“Male characters are so prevalent in what we consider to be ‘classic’ theatre,” Hubbard says. “This quarter offers a wonderful opportunity, not only for the women in the department who are not always featured, but for anyone who is interested in women and their special roles and challenges within our society.”
CWU women take center stage this winter

Winter quarter could more aptly be dubbed "women's quarter" in the Central Washington University theater arts department.

The three shows being offered in Ellensburg not only have all-female casts, but also female directors.

Opening the winter season is Lee Blessing's "Independence," a poignant look at the struggle of three daughters trying to gain freedom from their domineering mother. "Independence" opens at 8 p.m. Thursday in the Tower Theatre for a two-weekend run, with a special "Escape the Super Bowl" matinee at 2 p.m. Jan. 29.

CWU theater arts professor Brenda Hubbard stars as the mother in "Independence." She appeared in the Laughing Horse Summer Theatre production of "I Hate Hamlet." She also will direct the spring children's theatre touring show, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."

"Male characters are so prevalent in what we consider 'classic' theatre," Hubbard said. "This quarter offers a wonderful opportunity, not only for the women, but also for their special roles and challenges within our society."

CWU students also will have the opportunity to work with professional director Terri McMahon, who directs "Independence." McMahon, a leading actress with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, comes to Central as part of the department's guest artist program.

Midquarter, the focus shifts to the lives of African-American women with "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enu" by Ntozake Shange. The "choreopoem" dramatizes the lives of seven women through music, dance and storytelling. The cast includes CWU African-American faculty members and students. It is produced in cooperation with the Black Student Union and the CWU Office of Minority Affairs.

Professional actor, director and jazz singer Denise Thimes of St. Louis will direct this production.

"For Colored Girls" opens at 8 p.m. Feb. 16 for a two-weekend run with a special matinee at 2 p.m. Feb. 19.

"I Can't Keep Running in Place," the insightful musical comedy by Barbara Schottenfeld, will round out "women's quarter."

The play that follows six women through an assertiveness training program will be directed by Central student Jasmine Grevedal, a senior theater arts major from Kirkland, as her senior project. It is funded through a Farrell merit scholarship.

The show opens at 8 p.m. March 9 for a three-performance run.

Tickets for "Independence" and "For Colored Girls" are on sale in the Tower box office from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. The box office also is open 90 minutes prior to each show.

General admission is $8; student and senior price is $4. Admission to Thursday shows and matinees is half-price. Tickets may be reserved with a credit card by phoning 963-1774. Admission to "I Can't Keep Running in Place" is free.

Disabled persons may make arrangements for accommodations by calling the box office at 963-1774 or TDD, 963-3323.

Evelyn Briggs (Brenda Hubbard, center, seated) tries to hold on to her family while all three daughters, played by from left, Tricia Theil, Kerry Van Auker and Son Tisson seek 'Independence.' The play opens Thursday at Central Washington University in Ellensburg.

CWU, Laughing Horse set auditions

The cooperative relationship between Laughing Horse Summer Theatre and the Central Washington University theater arts department will extend auditions at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 30 in McConnell Auditorium.

The theater department will be casting two spring productions, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," scheduled for an eight-week Northwest tour, and the French farce, "13 Rue De L'Amour."

Laughing Horse Summer Theatre is seeking actors for its four-show summer season as well as technical and design crew members. LHST's 15th season includes "Marvin's Room," "Absurd Person Singular," "Dancing at Lughnas" and "Tons of Money."

All persons interested in auditioning should prepare two contrasting memorized pieces, each not more than one minute long. One piece should reflect American realism and the other, a more comic or stylized approach. Individuals interested in "Tom Sawyer" also must sing one verse of an American folk song a cappella.

LHST will be interviewing for technical and design positions Jan. 31; call Brenda Hubbard, 963-1660, for information. For more information on the CWU auditions call Jim Hawkins, 963-1230.
Central Washington University's production of Lee Blessing's "Independence" opens at 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 26, at the Tower Theatre. Performances will be Jan. 26-28 and Feb. 2-4 with a special "Escape the Super Bowl" matinee at 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 29.

The play is a poignant look at the struggle of three daughters trying to win freedom from their domineering mother.

CWU theatre arts Professor Brenda Hubbard stars as the mother in "Independence." The play is directed by professional director Terri McMahon. McMahon comes to Central as part of the department's ongoing guest artist program and is a leading actress with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

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Actor turns to directing

Women in theater at Central Washington
CWU women take center stage this winter

Winter quarter could more aptly be dubbed "women's quarter" in the Central Washington University theater department.
The three shows being offered inEllensburg with a large female cast include "You Can't Keep Running in Place," "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf," and "Tons of Money." Each show opens at 8:00 p.m. at the Theatre of the Arts.

CWU, Laughing Horse set auditions
The cooperative relationship between Laughing Horse Summer Theatre and the Central Washington University theater department will extend to auditions for three shows in Jan. 30 in McConnell Auditorium.
The theater department will hold casting calls for "You Can't Keep Running in Place," and "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf," which are part of the 15th season. The auditions will be held from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 19, and from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 27. The auditions will be held in McConnell Auditorium and the Theatre of the Arts.

CWU students and faculty are encouraged to participate in the auditions. The casting call information is available online at the CWU theater department's website. The information includes details about the auditions, including the roles and character descriptions. The auditions will be held on campus, and all interested individuals are welcome to attend. Please contact the CWU theater department for more information about the auditions. For more information about the CWU theater department, please visit their website.
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Directed by guest artist Terri McMahon of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and performed on a handsome stage set designed by R. Dutch Fritz, the play consists of a series of short scenes where Kess interacts with one or more of the other members of the family. Family members seem to bicker constantly, all the while wishing that they were not at each other's throats. They just can't help squabbling—they resentments run too deep.

Though the scenes are leavened by humor, there is a certain static quality to much of the play until near the end when the climax comes abruptly and almost as a surprise. The performances by the four actresses are impressive. Tissel, playing the buttoned-up lesbian Kess, whose homecoming serves as the catalyst for the play, has the most difficult job because the playwright has provided her with contradictory and unconvincing characteristics. For example, though she is described as "the most silent of the daughters," she literally screams out the details of an affair she had as a YWCA counselor. Also, though she tells us early on that she has to get back to Minneapolis because she's teaching three classes at the university, she seems to have no problem whatsoever staying as long as she wants in Independence. Since when do universities grant leaves of absence that abruptly?

Theil, who gave a hilarious performance as the busybody Arsinoe in last year's production of "The Misanthrope," is equally strong here in a completely different type of characterization. As the moody, "good" daughter Jo, she bears the brunt of her mother's cruelty and seems to be almost endlessly willing to come back for more. And she is able to let us see the pain that this choice brings her character.

Van Auk, most recently seen as the student in CWU's Fall production of "Oleanna," plays a convincing rebel as the slatternly youngest daughter Sherry. Her rebelliousness comes out in her looseness on stage, as she sashays from couch to chair to stool. Attempting pathetically to realize her independence through promiscuity, this character nonetheless has aspirations to be a sculptor. And she has some of the best, and funniest, lines in the play.

But the strongest character, the one who weaves together the experience for the playwright, is the mother. Brenda Hubbard plays Evelyn as a dowdier version of Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' "Glass Menagerie" (which Hubbard directed last summer at Laughing Horse), who likes to float along on nostalgic memories. When Evelyn is forced to deal with an unpleasant present, however, she becomes furious and sometimes violent.

Hubbard, whom Ellensburg audiences have previously seen only in comic roles ("Best Little Whore-
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BLESSING FINDS DARK HUMOR IN FAMILY LIFE
January 23, 1995
Contact: Leslee Caul, 963-1339

Playwright Lee Blessing weaves metaphor and reality into a tapestry of dysfunction as a woman and her three daughters strive to find happiness in “Independence,” currently on stage in the Tower Theatre on the Central Washington University campus.

Guest artist and director Terri McMahon warns, however, that dysfunction is not necessarily synonymous with depression. “This is a dark comedy with a lot of laughs,” says McMahon. “Blessing, like Arthur Miller or Eugene O’Neill, presents the state of the family as serious, but with an infusion of humor.”

The play is set in the Independence, Iowa, home of Evelyn Briggs, who spends her days volunteering at the hospital where she was formerly institutionalized. “Evelyn’s journey is a real fear of abandonment — what we may easily term as ‘crazy’,” says McMahon. “But the play, like life, is never that simple. We can make definite judgments about the characters, but they don’t account for the whole picture.”

The part of Evelyn is being portrayed by CWU professor and professional actor Brenda Hubbard. “It’s very exciting to work on this project,” said Hubbard. “Blessing is really one of the most promising playwrights to make a significant showing in regional theatres in the past 15 years. Blessing’s plays are consistently shown at regional theatres, as well as on Broadway and on public television.”

--more--
BLESSING FINDS DARK HUMOR IN FAMILY LIFE/add 1

While Evelyn is certainly a central point to the play, she is nothing without the constant conflict she experiences when her three daughters all land at home. The eldest daughter, Kess, is a college professor in town for a visit. Middle daughter Jo works as an accountant when she’s not constantly reassuring Evelyn that she will be the one to stay. Youngest daughter Sherry dreams of a career as a New York artist and spends her time counting the days until she can gain an escape. Starring as the mismatched daughters are Son (Sonia) Tissell, Ellensburg, Sr., (Kess); Tricia (Patricia) Thiel, Auburn, Sr., (Jo); and Kerri Van Auken, Redmond, Jr., (Sherry).

"Blessing presents characters that are so different," says McMahon. "If we look at each character in terms of their sexuality, we see that each is unique: Evelyn is asexual; Kess is a lesbian; Jo is pregnant after one disastrous affair; and Sherry is lost in promiscuity."

While the process of communication is difficult for the family, the end result is one of enlightenment. "In ‘Independence’, a family moves from dishonest interaction to more authentic interaction," says Hubbard. "Blessing shows great skill in creating natural, believable dialogue and characters. He captures family life in a way that is unique. Anyone who has pondered how parents and children communicate will find this play fascinating."

"Independence" runs Jan. 26-28 and Feb. 2-4 at 8 p.m. in the Tower Theatre. There is also a special "Escape the Super Bowl" matinee Jan. 29 at 2 p.m. Tickets for "Independence" are currently on sale in the Tower box office, in McConnell Hall on the CWU campus. Tickets may be purchased with VISA or MasterCard by phoning 963-1774. The box office is open Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 90 minutes prior to each performance.

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For Immediate Release
For PUBLICATION on or after 1/20

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XXX
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INDEPENDENCE
Theatre Arts Department, Seattle University

Super Bowl Super Bore?
Dominica Myers has always known she wanted to perform.

But until recently, she thought it was something she would do on the side, more of a hobby than a career.

The junior Central Washington University student from Seattle came to college with aspirations of majoring in bilingual education. She also considered majoring in English, but ultimately settled on theatre arts.

Myers' decision hinged on the role she landed in CWU's production of "Grease" last year. "I kind of got sucked into the department," she said.

Now, though she isn't entirely sure what she wants to do after graduation, Myers is looking seriously at musical theatre.

"I want to be singing, dancing and acting all at the same time," she said.

Her interest in drama started in high school when she was cast in "Fame," a production put on by all the high schools in her district.

"That was my first introduction to dance," Myers said.

It is an interest than has stayed with her.

"I really like tap right now," she said.

She also likes jazz dance and ballet, and hopes to take African dance classes this summer.

In addition to "Grease," Myers appeared in CWU's 1994-95 productions of "Godspell" and "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf," both of which gave her the opportunity to work with professional guest artists.
Working with professional actor and director Blair Bybee, who directed "Godspell," was a real learning experience, she said.

"I learned so much about the musical theatre business and how to audition properly."

Writing is another of Myers' interests. She has written one play, "The Visiting Hours," and had it produced at Central.

"I'd like to write more plays," she said. "But it's hard. You have to think about the stage and how it's all going to look--the set, the lighting, everything. You have to have an idea that can actually be put on stage. It's not like TV where you can add special effects."

Though writing is a challenge, watching a play she's written performed under someone else's direction is harder, Myers said.

"They might see things differently than you did," she said. "They bring their own experience to it and you have to be willing to let them change it."

While at home in south Seattle, the Evergreen High School graduate works at Childhaven, a therapeutic daycare that serves children in the Seattle area.

"That's my favorite accomplishment," Myers said. "I think kids are so special. They need so much help and guidance. It's therapeutic for me, too, sometimes. They have so much love and they give it for free."

Her efforts to help others continue at Central. Myers works in Central's ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) affairs and student assistance office, where she works with students of disability.

"I like my job," she said. "I know the office, and I know the students who come in."

She is also dedicated to her family, which includes her three sisters and a brother.

"My older sister thinks a lot of me because I'm in college and she never went that route," she said. "My younger sister really looks up to me. I try to be a good example."

Myers is treasurer of Central's Black Student Union and a member of the Central Theatre Club.

XXX
ASHLAND ACTOR TURNS TO DIRECTING AT CWU

January 12, 1995
Contact: Leslee Caul, 963-1339

Guest artists have been an integral part of the CWU Theatre Arts program for several years; however it is the roles these guest artists are filling that are somewhat of a switch.

"In past seasons we have hired primarily actors to serve as guest artists," says Dr. Wesley Van Tassel, department chair. “This season all of our guest artists, with the exception of resident professionals Dude Hatten and Brenda Hubbard, are serving as directors. This not only gives our students the opportunity to work with professional directors, but also provides them with valuable contacts in professional theatre.”

Those who might doubt the importance of theatre “networking” need look no further than guest artist and “Independence” director, Terri McMahon. With her BFA from the University of Southern California in hand, McMahon began her professional career at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and it was there that she met professional actor Brenda Hubbard.

“It was my first year, and I was just one of the ingenues, and Brenda was one of the big leading ladies,” says McMahon. “We didn’t really have a relationship before, because we only did a couple of shows together, but she remembered me. When she called she was actually looking for a mutual friend, but I really wanted to work on this play, and I was so happy when the job offer came my way.”

It is only in the past few years that McMahon, an accomplished actor, has turned her sights to directing. “As an actor I thought we could go deeper into the rehearsal process, and I was interested in structuring a tone in the workplace where collaboration could happen,” says McMahon. “I really felt I had a larger vision for production than my individual part as an actor, and I found myself becoming frustrated by the lack of say I had.”
While McMahon is fairly new to the craft of directing, she is no stranger to the theatre. She has appeared at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival for the past eight seasons, including eight tours with the OSF Education Touring Program. She has also performed at Pacific Center of Performing Arts Theaterfest; San Jose Stage Company; Sacramento Theatre Company; Marin Theatre Company; and Musical Theatre of Arizona.

Ironically, theatre was not McMahon’s first career choice. “I was recruited by USC for the track program,” she says, “but I was injured my last couple of years in high school, and it just seemed a natural progression from athletics to performing.”

“OSF was my first job out of school,” said McMahon. “It has been really good to be there for 10 years, mostly because I have been allowed a tremendous amount of time on stage to practice my craft. It is a 10-month season, and the training I have received is really invaluable.”

McMahon is currently sharing her expertise with student actors Son Tissel, Tricia Theil and Kerri Van Auken who star, along with Brenda Hubbard, in the CWU production of Lee Blessing’s “Independence.” “It has been exciting working with students,” says McMahon. “It reinforces all the basic building blocks that we tend to short-cut in the professional theatre or that we just may be too embarrassed to ask. The students are very absorbent and quick to learn. Through this play Blessing is really pushing the students and Brenda to places they’ve never had a chance to explore. We can make judgments about the characters in the play, but just when we do, we realize we’ve overlooked some other element and we’re wrong again. There just are no easy answers.”

And what of the “young ingenue” directing the “leading lady”? “It has been great to see Brenda again,” says McMahon. “We have both been through so many changes. Since I worked with her last she has completed her MFA (master of fine arts degree), she has run a theatre (Portland Repertory Theatre) and she feels really good about being a professor. Quite often, as an actor, you feel so powerless. Now both of us are in positions where we have more say and are enjoying it.”

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While McMahon will continue to act, she has definitely been bitten by the directing bug. "My next project is acting in an original play in the Bay area," she said, "but directing has hooked me. It is wonderful to realize that you are the center for the story to filter through. I had an interview for a directing job in Seattle, and it was at that point that I realized I would give up my next acting job for the opportunity to direct again."

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For PUBLICATION on or after 1/26  
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Guest Artist and Director Terri McMahon warns, however, that dysfunction is not necessarily synonymous with depression. “This is a very dark comedy with a lot of laughs,” says McMahon. “Blessing, like Arthur Miller or Eugene O’Neill, presents the state of the family as serious, but with an infusion of humor.”

The play is set in the Independence, Iowa home of Evelyn Briggs, a former mental patient who spends her days volunteering at the hospital where she was formerly institutionalized. “Evelyn’s journey is a real fear of abandonment -- what we may easily term as ‘crazy’,” says McMahon. “But the play, like life, is never that simple. We can make definite judgements about the characters but that doesn’t account for the whole picture and we find we are wrong.”

The part of Evelyn is being portrayed by CWU professor and professional actor Brenda Hubbard. “It’s very exciting to work on this project,” said Hubbard. “Blessing is really one of the most promising playwrights to make a significant showing in regional theatres in the past 15 years. Blessing’s plays are consistently shown at regional theatres, as well as Broadway and on public television.”

While Evelyn is certainly a central point to the play, she is nothing without the constant conflict she experiences when her three daughters all land at home. The eldest daughter, Kess, is a college professor who has moved away and fed on Evelyn’s fear of abandonment. Middle daughter Jo works as an accountant when she’s not constantly reassuring Evelyn that she will be the one to stay. Youngest daughter Sherry dreams of a career as a New York artist and spends her time counting the days until she can gain an escape. Starring as the mismatched daughters are Son Tissel (Kess); Tricia Heil (Jo); and Kerri Van Auken (Sherry).

“Each character is searching for family even though they sabotage each other and themselves,” says McMahon. “Blessing presents characters that are so different. If we look at each character in terms of their sexuality, we see that each is unique: Evelyn is asexual; Kess is a lesbian; Jo is pregnant after one disastrous affair; and Sherry is lost in promiscuity.”

While the process of communication is no doubt painful, the end result is one of enlightenment. “In ‘Independence’ a family moves from dishonest interaction to more authentic interaction,” says Hubbard. “Blessing shows great skill in creating natural, believable dialogue and characters. He captures the pain and humor of family life in a way that is unique. Anyone who has pondered how parents and children communicate, and how illness in the family controls and affects all family members, will find this play fascinating.”

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