

THEATRE @ adrian



Beth Warren

Rosemary Regan is sitting in the front row of Downs Hall Theatre, just beyond where the lights flood the stage. She's wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and a headset. She's poured her heart into this play, and tomorrow night it goes on.

Stage left on a shabby red velvet couch is Heather Peddie, Rosemary's best friend. She is staring off into space, absorbed in a wistful monologue about the glory of her past.

In many ways, "The Glass Menagerie" is a lot like the other plays Rosemary and Heather have done together. However, this one is special to them.

The pair met when they were fresh-

men. Now seniors, they've worked together in almost every AC production that has come to the stage in the last four years, and have tried out everything from acting to set design. But from the very beginning, Rosemary's true and burning desire has been to direct this play, her favorite of all time. This year, she finally got her chance. "I've been dreaming about directing 'The Glass Menagerie' since I was a freshman," she said. "Not many people get to direct their dream show."

What was even better was that Heather got one of the lead roles. Heather always knew how much the play meant to her friend, but it wasn't



Lad Strayer, courtesy of the Daily Telegram



Special guest Tony Wolf, fighting styles designer for the "Lord of the Rings" films, visited campus in October to lead a workshop. The New Zealander is a pioneer in his field.

until she was preparing to audition that the play took hold of her, too.

"There was something about Amanda that just caught me, because she's such a nag and is so angry, but she's also so much more," Heather said. "I was spellbound."

Both Rosemary and Heather are double majors, with one major in theatre. To them, the intimacy of Adrian theatre is hard to beat.

"Adrian is a really great place to study theatre, because it's such a small campus that you really get a chance to do a lot of different things, and make good friendships with people who are interested in the same things as you," Rosemary said.

"Let's face it, we don't have the resources of [a bigger school]," Heather said. "But the most inspirational part about it is that we make fabulous theatre with exactly what we have."

Here are a few of the things that give AC theatre its unique character.

FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE

One-act plays

Twelve years ago, a couple of students in the playwriting class decided they didn't want their plays to end up alone in a file somewhere. They talked to Theta Alpha Phi, the AC chapter of the national honorary theatre fraternity, and soon the one-act play program was born.

"It has continued every year since then, with each group of students passing it on to the next," Theatre Chair Michael Allen said.

Every fall, two or three one-acts are selected for production. The plays are written by students, selected by students, and produced by students, from start to finish.

"Because they have total ownership, there's a lot of pride that goes along with it," Allen said.

GETTING OUT THERE

Regional festival

Last January, the actors in a one-act play called "Sex Conversation" brushed up on their lines, dusted off the set—which had been stored in a corner since the play was first produced last fall—and loaded it up in a rental truck for the trip to Illinois State

University in Normal, Ill.

The one-act play, written by **Mike Sell '03** while he was still a student, was the only one-act selected for the regional festival of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), held this year at Illinois State. At the festival, Sell's play was performed for theatre students and professors from across a five-state area.

KCACTF is the educational outreach component of the famous Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Adrian College has a long tradition of success with the festival, despite competing every year with big state schools with graduate programs in theatre. Sell's play was the third Adrian College one-act selected for the regional festival. In addition, AC students have been recognized several times in the script contest, have been published in the festival anthology, and have been selected to direct and to attend seminars at the national festival in Washington, D.C.

BACKYARD TREASURE

Croswell Opera House

The city of Adrian is home to the Croswell Opera House, which opened in 1866 and is billed as the oldest continually operating theatre in Michigan.

The theatre creates some unique opportunities for Adrian students. Classes frequently tour the historic building. Students attend plays, as well as auditioning and performing in them. They take internships, get summer jobs as technicians and performers, and get career track jobs after graduating.

In turn, theatre professionals from the Croswell act as consultants to the AC theatre department, as well as designing, directing and teaching at the College.

SONG AND STAGE

Musical theatre

The theatre and music departments recently decided to join forces to offer a musical theatre degree. While it's still too early to get an accurate count of just how many underclassmen will declare it as their major, it is attracting quite a bit of attention from prospective students—and it is improving the quality of the musicals that are a regular part of the theatre calendar.

A WORD ON THE CHAIR

Michael Allen is in his 18th year as chair of the theatre department. He is the backbone of Adrian theatre.

"He is probably one of the most dedicated people I've ever met," adjunct theatre professor Annissa Morgensen-Lindsay said. "This department is his baby, and if something isn't going right for it, he's not happy."

As the sole full time faculty member, Allen teaches several of the theatre classes. He is also intimately involved with all AC productions, although he is careful to let students do as much as possible. To him, that's the supreme advantage of small college theatre, versus larger schools where graduate students get the best jobs.

"I want it to be about students having the opportunities to take control, to have ownership of their work," he said.

He also likes having students from across campus involved in theatre, so they can experience it. In any AC production, about half of the students are majors or minors, and half are not.

"Theatre can be a lifelong avocation," Allen said. "It's something you can do forever."

His is a life of theatre. In addition to the College, he's involved with the community. Last summer he performed in his 25th musical, and he has years of experience on the board at the Croswell.

"I suppose in one sense, all art asks the question, 'Why are we here?'" Allen said. "And I think theatre, certainly for me, is more involved in that than any other art."



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