

The Advocate

Thursday, April 8, 2010

FREE!

Arts & Events for Berkshire & Bennington Counties • advocateweekly.com



A warm welcome

A new theater company with a philanthropic mission is making its Berkshire County debut in Pittsfield



COURTESY WAM

Students from Russell Sage College rehearse 'Mirror, Mirror,' one of three pieces to be presented at 'A WAM Welcome' on Barrington Stage Company's Stage 2 from April 9 through April 11. Top: Robin Gelfinbien's 'My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wiernmobile Journey' is part of the premiere of Women's Action Movement Theatre this weekend in Pittsfield.

By NICHOLE DUPONT
The weight of the responsibility resting on the shoulders of women the world over is increasing. According to Kristen van Ginhoven, co-artistic director of Women's Action Movement Theatre, this weight includes helping other women in their struggle against poverty and oppression.

Van Ginhoven and fellow co-artistic director Leigh Strimbeck are using theater as a means to this end. Beginning Friday, April 9, and running through Sunday, April 11, WAM Theatre will present "A WAM Welcome" at Barrington Stage Company's Stage 2. A portion of the proceeds from this kickoff event, and all other WAM performances, according to van Ginhoven, will go to Women for Women International, the company's primary beneficiary.

"This is our first produced theater event," van Ginhoven said. "The big question is, will there be a WAM theater audience?"

Van Ginhoven thinks so. She said Berkshire County

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3 ►

WAM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

has thus far been more than happy to welcome the new theater company, especially one with a philanthropic heart.

"I've been thinking for a while about starting a theater adventure," she said. "The Berkshires came first, and WAM came second. Here, people are not selfish with their ventures. There's such a strong voice for promoting women in this area. We've had lots of support."

Strimbeck said local support of WAM comes at a time when many artists and supporters of the arts are taking stock in their role not only as audience members but as global citizens.

"We feel that we won the lottery," she said. "We're educated, we have food and we have options."

Strimbeck, who has traveled the globe, has seen firsthand how sisters in other — particularly Third World — countries are struggling to make meager ends meet.

"I've been to Africa twice, and I've definitely heard stories and seen performances of women's lives," she said. "The impact of AIDS has affected mothers and families. Conversely, I lived in Sweden and have been to countries where the system supported women in so many ways. These things all added up for me."

Van Ginhoven said she had a similar revelation after reading "Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide" by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn.

"I don't have a high resilience for what's happening to women around the world," she said. "Making your effort from the bottom up can affect change. I'm using what I do well, theater, to take my own action."

Taking action is the driving force behind WAM Theatre. For every ticket sold, a portion of the proceeds goes directly to Women for Women International, a nonprofit organization that provides resources for food, education and protection among women in war-torn, poverty-stricken nations such as Afghanistan, Rwanda and Iraq, to name a few. In addition to naming Women for Women as its main beneficiary, Strimbeck said WAM

also plans on supporting local women's organizations as well.

"It's double philanthropy," she said. "We're supporting women in the world and women in the performing arts."

The latter is of particular concern to van Ginhoven because of what she terms the "gap" in theater, where male playwrights, both alive and dead, dominate the performance space.

"Our main objective for presenting these works is so that the audience gets a range of women's theater," she said. "We love the magic of being in the physical theater and building relationships in the theater. This range of pieces gives people a slice of our aesthetic."

WAM will present three very different performances for its inaugural event, beginning with a staged reading of Lydia Stryk's "The Last Standing Protester," which portrays one woman's final stand against any and all self-inflicted societal woes. This will be followed by a selection from Robin Gelfinbien's "My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wienermobile Journey." While the play is meant to be humorous, it chronicles the true story of a woman who is saved from her own thoughts of suicide by her job as an Oscar Mayer Wienermobile driver.

The culminating performance, "Mirror, Mirror," is an ensemble piece created by a cast of students from Russell Sage College in Troy, N.Y. It is this play that Strimbeck hopes will solidify and unify the experiences of audiences and actors alike. The piece addresses the effects of the media on how women, particularly young women, view their bodies and, in turn, themselves.

"The play is based on 100 interviews that were conducted with men and women ages 7 to 87 about body image," she said. "I am hoping that some of these young women, through performing some of these pieces, will really internalize this Jedi warrior that says you don't have to be everything to all people all the time."

"We need to support each other as women in whatever

decisions we make."

For more information on "A WAM Welcome" or to purchase tickets, visit wamtheatre.com or call 413-236-8888. The show runs at 7 p.m. on Friday, April 9, and Saturday, April 10, and at 2 p.m. on Saturday, April 10, and Sunday, April 11. Tickets are \$20 for general admission and \$10 for students.

Shaffe's
Men's Shop
Since 1932
Casual • Dress • Formal
475 Main St., Bennington, VT.
802-442-2521 www.shaffes.com
Mon.-Fri. 9-5:30 Sat. 9-4

WAM Theatre presents

WAM
theatre
welcome
www.wamtheatre.com

© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein