



SPECTACLE

Bolden Girls: WET Tells the Provocative Stories of Four Women in Northern Ireland **By Marie Yereniuk** **Columbia Daily Spectator**

"Come in, bold girls inside" was the sign on the door of Urban Stages. After seeing the play *Bold Girls*, the welcome sign seems to be an understatement. To call this work of art "bold" does not give full justice to the innovative, thought-provoking genius of Rona Munro's play and the powerful performances of the actresses.

Presented by Women's Expressive Theatre (WET), *Bold Girls* pieces together the individual stories of four women in Northern Ireland, with the political situation taking the back seat. The emphasis on women is central to the mission of WET, founded in 1999 by Sasha Eden and Victoria Pettibone, which is "to challenge and transcend female stereotypes" through individuality, female creativity, and sisterhood.

The friendship between Marie (Marian Tomas Griffin), Cassie (Jordan Simons), and Cassie's mother, Nora (Denise Lute) eases a difficult life in West Belfast, and shows no sign of tension. The calm, however, comes before the storm when a stranger enters the play unexpectedly. The visitor, Deirdre (Sasha Eden), is a ghost-like figure dressed in white. Although both Cassie and Nora are annoyed with Deirdre's sudden intrusion, Marie welcomes the girl and pities her. Deirdre then disappears to take a shower and help herself to Marie's things. Her identity remains a mystery to both the audience and the other characters.

That evening, the three friends go out to celebrate their friendship, but there is palpable tension among them. Monologues and dialogues, isolated by spotlighting, reveal the hidden pain and unexpressed emotions that plague the individuals. Deirdre, always alone, comments that "we're all in a prison;" she forces the other characters, as well as the audience, to question the nature of truth itself.

Nora storms off after several arguments with Cassie about Cassie's salacious dress and lascivious habits. As the play builds to a climax, Cassie, half screaming and half crying, reveals that she had an affair with Marie's deceased husband Michael four years ago. Marie realizes suddenly that all of her convictions, about both her husband and her friend, were built on falsehood.

Moments later, Marie, still crying and trembling, gathers the courage to ask Deirdre what she's searching for. Deirdre finally reveals her identity as Michael's illegitimate daughter, the product of another affair. Marie furiously tears down the picture of Michael, symbolically rejecting an unrealistic attachment.

Achievements in character development overshadow technical aspects of the *Bold Girls* production. The optimism of the early sister-like closeness is captured by Lute's interpretation of Nora, an otherwise flat character. Eden uses expressions of wild fear and surprise to imbue Deirdre with an appropriately awkward quality. Marie's sense of loss and betrayal at the end of the play are perceptible when Griffin sinks to the ground, emotionally paralyzed.

The intimate quality of the theater keeps the audience physically close to the actresses and helps make the experience personal. In a clever use of the space, set designer Sandra Goldmark uses a revolving wall to transform the scene from Marie's home to the bar. In costumes, Deirdre's simple white dress conveys a sense of innocence and truth, while Cassie's short black dress makes her literally the play's *bete noir*.

Griffin and Eden stand out in their acting performances as truly "bold girls." Supported by the other two women, they convey the work's message with clarity: the importance of facing the past with honesty and courage. The sentiments of solidarity that began the play were crushed quickly, leaving the audience exposed to the fragments of the characters' lives. Yet what emerges from this apparent chaos is the sense that a painful truth is better than a beautiful lie. Munro's message, especially through Griffin's performance, inspires us to unravel the falsities of our own lives.

Bold Girls opened on March 31 at Urban Stages (259 W. 30th St.) and runs through April 21. Performances are Tuesday-Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15. Call 296-4280 for tickets.

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