



'BIRTH' bold and not for the wimpy

By Jim Cavener

Friday, September 1, 2006

Citizen-Times Correspondent

ASHEVILLE – Karen Brody’s significant script for “BIRTH,” now in the Catalyst series at N.C. Stage Company, is a strong feminist statement in the tradition of “The Vagina Monologues” and “Menopause: the Musical.” This is not just a story with noble, or virtuous, able and worthy women as heroines. This theatrical experience is bold and in-you-face and is not for the wimpy who want to avoid dealing with birth-centered material or gender and sexual realities.

The topic is birth, the beginning of human life. It is presented as story theater by seven able actors who come to this common experience from a variety of backgrounds and exposures. Mothers will resonate most fully. Fathers will pick up some of the nuances and even non-breeders will get breadth and wisdom from the sharing of these fascinating stories. Who knew that there were such varied approaches to giving birth?

While not quite a completely female presentation – Josh Batenhorst is the show’s director – in addition to the seven able women actors the show’s author (Brody) and producer (Desiree O’Clair) all come down as potential mothers and able to fully participate in the experience portrayed in this show. Those not close to the core of parenthood may learn even more from these vibrant stories.

Review

One does not come to see “Birth” for the costumes or scenery, music or visuals. The level of technical theater is close to nonexistent. What’s done is done well, but it’s the material that counts.

The cast is varied in age as well as in their paths to and from pregnancy. Veteran local actress, C.J. Breland (Jillian) is outstanding as a matriarch among the cast. Newcomer Lorraine Roberts (Beth), also ‘of-a-certain-age,’ carries her weight and gives credence to her A-B Tech drama training. Stephanie Hickling (Vanessa) is another familiar local face in a type-cast, no-nonsense role.

Desiree Tucker (Janet) is crusading for an epidural, while Cassie Barnes (Sandy) is after the Caesarian experience. Eliza Harris (Amanda) is a young progressive, who is more vocal than some, but all the women make a strong case for women’s choice. Lisa Abeling (Lisa) joins Hickling and Tucker as the other offstage non-mothers, but still give strong performances on behalf of home births, mid-wives, dulas and other options to common hospital deliveries.

Delicious references to Helen Reddy, childbirth classes, Oprah Winfrey, breast feeding, Lucy and Desi and OB-GYNs couple with high drama, moments of poignancy, triumphs, failures, joy and sorrow. Every pregnant couple could benefit from this experience, parents will be filled with nostalgia and every living person (non-breeders included) have experienced aspects of this universal event.

Jim Cavener writes on theater for the Citizen-Times. Email JimCavener@aya.Yale.edu

“Birth”

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday

Where: N.C. Stage Company

(enter next to Rankin Avenue
Parking deck, across from Zambra)

Information: 350-9090

On The Net: www.ncstage.org