

Drama explores impact of Karen Silkwood case

By KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Laborers standing up, courageously demanding that management correct workplace hazards is a story with timeless appeal, especially in strong union towns like Detroit.

Gordon Reinhardt of Westland, the son of a UAW member, stars in "The Half-Life of Karen Silkwood," at the Attic's New Center Theatre.

The compelling drama tells the story of Karen Silkwood who died in 1974 while trying to alert the public about health and safety irregularities at the Kerr-McGee Nuclear Corp. in Oklahoma where she worked.

The plant was under a fixed-price contract with the federal government to produce "fast breeder" reactors, using plutonium instead of uranium as fuel. The term "fast breeder" refers to the "breakthrough" by which, instead of the fuel being exhausted, the system would actually make more plutonium than it used. The fast breeder reactor was never built in this country. After billions of dollars, the unaccountable disappearance of many pounds of bomb-quality plutonium, the problem of disposing of nuclear waste, and the poisoning of numerous workers — the Carter Administration killed the program in the late 1970s.

Reinhardt portrays Tony Mazzochi, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union official who Silkwood sought help from in Washington D.C. "My character doesn't tell Karen to steal evidence about the wrongdoing at the plant, but he tells her they can't do anything unless they have proof. Karen gets the proof that eventually leads to her death."

"THE HALF-LIFE OF KAREN SILKWOOD"
Theater: The Attic's New Center Theatre, 7339 Third at West Grand Boulevard, Detroit.
Curtain time: 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays through Aug. 15.
Tickets: Thursdays and Sundays, \$14-\$19; Fridays and Saturdays, \$19-\$24. Special discounts available for groups, union locals, students and seniors. "Student Rush Tix" are 1/2 off ticket price, available 1/2 hour prior to performance. Tickets available at box office, 875-8284, Strand Theatre box office, 395-8100, or any Ticketmaster outlet, 645-6666. Group sales information, 875-8285.



Compelling drama: Lance Retallick (left to right), Gordon Reinhardt and Michael Quimet in a scene from "The Half-Life of Karen Silkwood," at the Attic's New Center Theatre.

PREVIEW

Reinhardt met Mazzochi who attended two rehearsals and opening night. It was the first time Reinhardt ever met someone he was to portray on stage.

"He is a man of few words. I didn't get to talk to him very much, but I tried to observe him to pick up his speech patterns and rhythm. He was pleased with the production."

"The Half-Life of Karen Silkwood" represents an unusual alliance between the Attic's professional theater company and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, which commissioned the play through its educational and cultural affiliate, the Alice Hamilton College.

A feature film about Silkwood was released in the late 1970s. It

ended with her fatal automobile accident, and did not predict the "half-life" which survives her death.

"The truth surrounding her union battle and death must be told," said Mazzochi. "If we fail in this task the labor movement struggle for a safe and healthy workplace will have been dealt a serious blow."

This is the first play about Silkwood's life written specifically for a company of actors in a live theater venue and dramatizes the continuing impact of her mission.

"The play looks at the time before Karen's death and shows the impact her civil case had on corporations and on the Atomic Energy Commission," said Arnold Medias of the Attic Theatre. Director David J. Magidson, dean of Wayne State University's

College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts, who recently came to Detroit from Denver, met playwright Larry Bograd while in Colorado. When a director for "The Half-Life of Karen Silkwood" was being sought, Medias said Magidson's new residency in Detroit, where there is a heavy concentration of union workers, provided a natural connection.

"The Half-Life of Karen Silkwood" features Susan M. Arnold as Karen Silkwood, Loretta Higgins, Marilyn Mays, Phil Locker, Glen Allen Pruett, Kevin Kenerly, Michael Ollmitt, Lance Retallick and Becca Parker as Karen's daughter.

"Talk back" sessions with the cast and director will take place every Thursday, directly after the performance.

Take an imaginary Great Lakes journey

Folk singer Leo Murdock will convey the drama, myth and legends of the Great Lakes in a family concert of folk music 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 17, at the Community Center, Farmington-Farmington Hills, 24705 Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 Mile Roads in Farmington Hills.



Tickets are \$7 adults, \$5 children, family of three, \$16. For information, call 477-8404.

Murdock will help you use your imagination to visualize a storm on the lakes, hear a choir singing and much more.

Enjoy Appalachian folk dancing at the Community Center 7-9:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Sept. 7. Cost is \$3.50 per person every Tuesday.

The Choctaw Chip Players will perform Laura Ingalls Wilder's frontier story, "Little

Folk singer: Leo Murdock will present a concert Aug. 17 at the Community Center of Farmington-Farmington Hills.

House Near Walnut Grove," 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 18. Tickets are \$5 per person.

Outdoor concerts feature Gypsy, mariachi music

A Gypsy orchestra, and mariachi group will be featured in concerts sponsored by the Southfield Parks and Recreation Cultural Arts Division Aug. 8, and 11. For information about other upcoming concerts, call 354-4717.

Nick Ferraro and his Gypsy Orchestra will perform in the Summer Concert Series 7 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 8 at the Prudential Sunbowl behind the 3000 Pruden-

tial Town Center off Civic Center Drive. Concert goes should bring lawn chairs or blankets.

Mariachi Zapappan will perform 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 11 at the Burg Gazebo, at Berg Road and Civic Center Drive in Southfield. A picnic supper will be available for purchase 6-7:30 p.m. Bring lawn chairs or blankets to sit on.

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