

# Southfield pair looks at the roots of dramatics

Leslie Straus and Wendy Shapiro of Southfield are among 30 Michigan State University students involved in a seminar course to determine what qualities make drama a universal cultural phenomenon.

Until now, anthropologists have explained the birth of drama as an outgrowth of any one particular ritual in cultural history. But a theatre professor and an anthropologist at MSU's Justin Morrill College say it's not that simple.

Professors Sears Eldredge and Pamela Holcomb Ostericher, joint teachers of the course, "Roots of Drama," contend that the origins of drama vary from culture to culture just as the art form itself does.

The search for the origins of theatre was a popular pursuit at the turn of the century, but early anthropologists sought the origins in one ritual or one particular kind of ritual.

"The whole Greek thing supposedly comes out of fertility rites," Eldredge said. "And the latest book tries to pin the origins of theatre down to Shamanism."

Shamanism is a religion based on

beliefs in good and evil spirits as interpreted through priests who act as mediums.

"THROUGH DISCUSSION, films and a wealth of readings, students in the seminar hope to come to a better understanding of the various origins of drama and how it functions in different societies in different ways."

By adopting this pluralistic view, we can focus on what is the function of drama in a society, so that we can revitalize our ideas about drama and what it can be for us," Eldredge said. And like any true drama class, students will participate in a grand finale project—an enactment of a dramatic event in a hypothetical, non-industrial culture.

Ms. Straus, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R.J. Straus of 2765 Pierce, is a 1975 graduate of Southfield-Lathrup High School. She is a sophomore, majoring in theatre education.

Ms. Shapiro, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Shapiro, is a 1973 graduate of Southfield-Lathrup. A senior, she has a dual major in psychology and theatre.



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