

OU thespians heading for Kennedy Center

By SHARON DARGAY
Staff Writer

Karen Sheridan wanted a "nice little ensemble show" to give her students at Oakland University a shot at winning in the theater festival circuit this year.

"I had never even directed a fully produced show before," Sheridan admitted. "You decide what play to put up for competition when you select the whole season. You can't even cast it first."

Her pick, Caryl Churchill's "Cloud Nine," was the perfect fit. Local players will get a chance to see it tonight on the Rochester Hills campus before cast and crew head to the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts next week.

"This is a play with a strong message. You think about the social injustice of what's going on in the play but you do it while you're

laughing," Sheridan said. "This is just the right-sized show. Everyone plays at least two roles. It forces your actors to stretch."

Actors switch eras, ago, and sometimes gender as they change character during the nearly three-hour production that looks at sexual and racial roles in Victorian Colonial Africa and 1980s London.

Social change

Characters age 25 years from first to second act, but experience 85 years of social change.

"When I first read it I was confused," said senior Angela Maclean of Bloomfield Hills. "Then I fell in love with it."

Maclean switches between two different characters, Ellen and Mrs. Sanders, 12 times during the first half of the play and reappears as feisty lesbian, Lynn, in the second half.

"Ellen seems real innocent but

she's not. She's in love with 'Betty,' who is played by a man," Maclean said. "Mrs. Sanders is a widow. She can control men and she knows it. She's sleeping with Betty's husband and is very blatant about it too."

Consider Stephanie Woodman's character leap from a 9-year-old Edward, the cheerful victim of child molestation, to his grown-up sister who's struggling with marriage, career and sexual preference. Another actor plays the adult, gay Edward in the second act.

"It was a lot of fun," said Woodman, an OU junior from Troy. "When we switched parts that was neat because we got to work with another actor. We'd down and talked about why Edward is the way he is."

Real test

The cast camped on the OU

campus one night to test their roles in a simulated Colonial Africa. Sheridan and production designer Susan Barrett spent hours, beginning last May, researching Victorian Africa — from costume to native music. An OU African drumming ensemble supplied music for the first act.

During their five-week rehearsal, actors learned to walk, talk and move with Victorian-era mannerisms.

"I think of my character, Clive, as a 44-45 year old man. I'm only 21, so I had to learn to move differently," said Corey Skaggs of Bloomfield Township. "We spent so much time preparing the first act that we almost forgot we had almost a whole other play to do in the second act."

The cast and crew change characters and set in the 15-minute interval that spans the 85-year chasm between acts.

New abortion bill goes to Senate

See related editorial

LANSING

An "informed consent" abortion bill is on its way to the state Senate after being reported out of committee on a 3-1 vote earlier this month.

Under Senate Bill 384, a woman would receive counseling by a physician or qualified assistant at least 24 hours before an abortion is performed.

"Women need to understand

the entire procedure rather than subjecting themselves to assembly-line abortion clinics that have no long-term interest in their physical or emotional well being," said sponsor Jack Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, an abortion foe.

The Senate Family Law, Criminal Law and Corrections Committee reported out the bill just before the two-week Easter break.

Voting yes were Welborn, the chairman, Doug Carl, R-Utica, and Chris Dingell, D-Trenton. Voting no was Virgil Smith, D-Detroit.

Bob Geake, R-Northville, had an excused absence but is expected to support the measure.

Last year the Senate passed a similar measure, but it died in the House. An important change from last year's bill, said Welborn, is that the new bill requires patients

to be shown a drawing rather than a photograph of a fetus.

Patients would be told the probable gestational age of the fetus, what to do if medical complication is result, how to get pregnancy prevention information from the Department of Public Health, possible physical and psychological complications from abortion and continued pregnancy, and what adoption services are available.



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