

Lessons in love

Birmingham playwright focuses on the trials of marriage

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Kitty Dubin types away at the computer in a feverish race against time. Her latest drama, *Dance Like No One's Watching*, is set to open with previews beginning Wednesday, May 8, at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre in West Bloomfield.

The first run of any play requires a birthing process of sorts. Once completed the script becomes a starting point for the collaboration between playwright, director and cast. Dubin is in the final stages of rewriting dialogue after an eight-hour rehearsal the day before.

"It's a world premiere so it's alive and changing everyday,"

The drama revolves around a couple trying to overcome the trials and tribulations of marriage. The arrival of children frequently creates a crisis between two people even in the happiest of relationships.

explore the complexity and difficulty of modern marriage. I worked with a lot of couples over the years."

Dubin has nearly 33 years of personal experience to call upon as well. Husband Larry, a law professor at the University of Detroit-Mercy and a legal analyst, raised their 25-year-old son Nick together.

"I've learned a lot and my marriage has changed a lot," said Dubin. "Because life is changing so fast and people are changing, your marriage has to change, too."

"The play is about a couple who after a year of marriage has twins. The husband is addressing his career issues and climbing the corporate ladder. She's conflicted because before the births she was a stewardess traveling all over the world for 10 years and is suddenly at home with two babies. It's a tremendous loss of identity and isolation. Anyone who has kids goes through this transition from this great romance to asking 'is it over coming back again? Do I love this person or do I hate this person?' At its heart, it's a drama with comic undertones. Situations just get so bad they're funny."

Dubin attributes the success of her marriage to dedication on both their parts. In the play the couple, played by Robin Lewis-Bedz and Thomas Hoangland, must rely on the therapist (John Siebert) to help them. *Dance Like No One's Watching* dissects the relationship and personal histories.

"Marriage takes work, work and more work, staying conscious, knowing if you take it for granted the connection disappears," said Dubin. "You have to work at it almost daily to keep it alive and attend to one another."

But before they reach the point of nurturing one another, the couple in *Dance Like No One's Watching* must work through issues, in some cases, that originated long before the marriage.

"I have a lot of confidence in director Geoffrey Sherman and the cast," said Dubin. "The therapist plays several roles includ-

Jewish Ensemble Theatre

What's Presents the world premiere of *Dance Like No One's Watching*.

When: Previews May 8-11. Opens May 12 and continues to June 9. Show times are 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and Sunday, 8 p.m. Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Aaron DeRoy Theatre in the Jewish Community Center, 6600 Maple at Drake, West Bloomfield.

Tickets: \$18-\$28, discounts for seniors and student. Call (248) 788-2900.

ing the father of the woman. As they talk about things that happen they come to life. The therapist asks where they met. They met on an airplane. Suddenly the audience hears the sound of an airplane and the wife appears wearing a stewardess uniform. It's a device that really works. Visually and psychologically it's very interesting."

Just like her playwrighting students at Oakland University in Rochester Hills, Dubin strives to advance her skills.

"I keep learning about the process of playwrighting," said Dubin. "The basic rule of drama is show not tell, not for someone to come on and explain. I try to teach that to my students."

"The big challenge for me in some ways is to let go of the play and surrender it to the director and cast but when you're initially writing it you have to figure out what you're saying. You have to take a point of view and focus in on what that is. Over the period of time when I was writing it I developed insights about marriage and then had to figure out how to dramatize that."

Judging from audience response to a staged reading of the play at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre in 2000, Dubin accomplished just that. According to artistic director Evelyn Orbach, who selected the drama for the 2001-2002 season, it's Dubin's best play so far.

Orbach's watched Dubin's talent evolve from the time her first play, *Mirrors*, debuted at the State Fair Theatre in Detroit in 1986 as an equity production. Since then the Jewish Ensemble Theatre has done three of Dubin's plays *The Day We Met* (2000), *Change of Life* (1995) and *The Last Resort* (1990).

"Each time we've done one of Kitty's plays, they've done better than before as far as community response," said Orbach. "There's always substance in her plays. A staged reading gives you a sense you never really realized when you read it. Her last three were in our *Festival of New Plays*. Part of our mission at JET is to bring recent plays of substance to audiences. Kitty's work is a marvelous mix of comedy and drama. They're serious subjects but she's funny."

"What I love about this play is that in the end it's about finding yourself and not being what others want you to be."

The last year has forced Dubin to look inward just as the female character does in the play. Within the span of 12 months Dubin's mother and father died. Now she needs to grieve the loss. After the JET production closes Dubin plans to take some time for herself. She hasn't been able to do that. Four days after her father's funeral, her one act play, *Mimi and Me*, was produced at the American Playwrights Theatre in New York City. In February, she received the Jewish Woman in the Arts Award from the Festival Dancers of the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit and the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery.

Since 1984, several of her dramas and one-acts have been produced at Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea; Live Oak Theatre, Texas; University of Detroit; Mercy Theatre, and by Heartlands Theatre Company. Dubin began writing plays in the early

1970s after taking a class at Wayne State University while working towards a master's degree in English.

"The thought of writing plays was totally daunting but I found I had a knack for it," said Dubin. "I tried short stories, poetry, but playwrighting was all dialogue. I knew this was my genre after my professor suggested I enter the Detroit Motion Picture Playwriting competition and won \$350 and saw it produced at Wayne State. I got bit by the bug. Seeing people totally enjoy my work was intoxicating."

"That feeling of euphoria is what the female half of the couple experiences in *Dance Like No One's Watching*."

"The character says the line 'dance like no one's watching' in the play to describe a feeling," said Dubin. "When I'm dancing like no one's watching I feel very alive and connected to myself."

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