

Dreams Are What a Feminist Group's Plays Are Made Of

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BRONXVILLE, N. Y.—The play was about how it feels to be the only Jew at the third grade Christmas party. Or how it feels to be a lesbian in a straight society. Or how shaving one's legs doesn't necessarily save face.

It sprang from the life stories of six members that It's All Right to Be Woman, a radical feminist theater group performed at Sarah Lawrence College here this week, and it spilled out from the stage to take in the dreams of the student audience circled about them.

"Will someone come up and tell us a dream? It could be from childhood or something you dreamed last night," called a diminutive actress with a brown belt in Tea Kwon Do (Korean karate, rough play, dirty fighting).

"Good dreams, bad dreams, nightmares. We like nightmares," she announced with a sweet smile.

A blonde volunteer, who looked to be a freshman, took the microphone. In her dream, she and a girlfriend hopped onto a fast-moving

train. Suddenly, the figure of the girlfriend changed into her boyfriend. A baby cried at her feet. She grabbed the baby and fled.

As the dream was told, the cast began to act it out, passing a red-flowered scarf from one to another to signify "the I" of the dream.

Across the stage roared a two-woman train, eyes bulging, cheeks puffed, feet shuffling frantically. Two other players jumped abroad. Another rolled out like a fetal ball.

"I dreamed I was in cales-thenics class," confided a second student. The players flailed their arms. "We must, we must, we must increase the bust," they chanted.

A Nightmare Rearranged

Then, the dreamer recalled, two men rode into the gym on horseback. They were sinister types, "with rifles, I think." The men backed the girls against the wall. Screaming from the girls. But the dreamer found a club in her hand. She beat off one man. He fell on the ground, groaning.

"I could see that I hurt him and I felt really bad," the dreamer continued, "so I

went back and dreamed the dream all over again and I changed the ending."

The players grinned. Once again they exercised, galloped, menaced, screamed. Only this time the dreamer disarmed her attacker by psychoanalyzing him. He lay on an imaginary couch. She nodded and scribbled notes. Cheers from the audience.

Dreams, say the actresses, have no "political" content. And for this reason, they find that their largely female audiences respond to them. Similarly, the actresses, in turn, express and exploit their own experiences in vignettes, songs, dances and crankies (serial comic cartoons cranked across a wooden board).

Some stories emerged with a sad, funny bravado. For example, "The Saga of How I Lost My Hairy Legs" (and didn't find happiness). Cheer leaders cheered, ballerinas twirled, brides gushed.

Other stories were rooted in more painful realities. A lesbian relived her childhood confusions ("Is that a girl or a boy?" asked the chorus); her rejection of her own sexual feelings; her final, glorious "coming out."

As a giant cardboard "photograph" of her old high school self, tight curls and white-gloved and clutching a small bag looked on, she plucked a guitar and sang a love song.

Waves of applause, a full minute's worth. Fellow cast members embraced her. So did a few members from the audience who mingled later with the actresses. At least a dozen women students signed up for a series of workshops that the collective teaches in subjects such as "physical consciousness raising" and self-defense for women.

Of the six acting members of It's All Right to Be Woman (there are 11 in all), only half had had professional experience before joining the group. They recalled days in guerrilla theaters and street troupes.

"I had to unlearn all my techniques," said one actress with a laugh. "There I was up there with my Stanislavsky method and it was horrible."

Since some of the actresses are homosexual and all of them hold daytime teaching jobs (a grant of \$5,000 a year

from the New York Council on the Arts doesn't begin to keep them in leotards) they prefer to remain anonymous. Anyway, they insist, there are no stars, no directors, no scripts. And, most important, no men ("and there never will be").

Their revues occur almost anywhere—in a fire house, a church, a college auditorium, a loft. "We've even played to Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts," one member said cheerfully.

Some shows, they concede, are "downers, depending on our mood and the mood of the audience." But, they

smiled and pronounced the Sarah Lawrence audience "a good group."

Most of the approximately 200 students who turned out despite a last-minute paper-writing rush (the term ends tomorrow) were young, female and enthusiastic. A handful of faculty members was spotted here and there.

One or two men looked frankly puzzled, but that apparently was not the case with Charles DeCarlo, the college's president. He was only sorry a holiday party had delayed him. But he caught the second act "and I applauded."