

THEATER

Women Speak: Iraq

Starring Shannon Woolley.
Directed by Kelly McNeerney.
Presented by Looking for Lilithe Theatre Company, Oct. 5-8 at the Rudyard Kipling. For tickets or more info, call 636-1311 or go to www.lookingforlilithe.org.

Shannon Woolley plays all 12 roles in Looking for Lilithe's "Women Speak: Iraq."



'Women Speak: Iraq' gives a story to many seldom-heard voices

The ink was still wet on the Senate's version of the Military Commission Bill as Looking for Lilithe Theatre Company premiered its original work, "Women Speak: Iraq," last Thursday at the Rudyard Kipling. Ironically, this unconstitutional legislation could some day be used to quell such political theater, as the authors may be deemed "enemy combatants" with no due process rights.

review

The play is a challenge for Shannon Woolley, who plays all 12 roles with no intermission. It shakes off our apathy by presenting feminine viewpoints from all across the spectrum of the Iraq War. Through the stories and statistics presented, we are moved to learn more about what's going on in Iraq, and how we can make a difference. A little over a year in the making, the troupe interviewed women by contacting military organizations, meeting with New York's Feminist Press staff, and reading "Baghdad Burning,"

an Iraqi woman's blog about her experiences in the war. Woolley hopes the audience will be enriched by hearing a perspective they haven't heard before, without feeling anger.

We hear from Sgt. Paula Pawlowski, who thinks having the media embedded with the troops was "stupid." She complains that we don't hear enough about positive things Americans do in Iraq, like volunteering at orphanages. On the other hand, Pvt. Amy Spaulding believes the war is about one thing — OIL. The grunts don't believe the "lie" that it's about freedom and democracy. But they're afraid to speak out. Sally, a Louisvillian whose son and daughter served in Iraq, doesn't think the war is justified, but supports the troops and personally thanks anyone in uniform. Azayla, a young Iraqi who is accustomed to checkpoints, carries a red switchblade while traveling because she never knows if she'll encounter a looter, an abductor or "just another angry countryman."

In a harrowing confession, Paula describes her worst fear. When her unit traveled through a border town, children jumped in front of the vehicles so that snipers could attack. The soldiers, with orders

to keep moving, killed six kids in one week. On one mission, Paula silently begged a child not to throw a hand grenade aimed at her because she knew she'd have to "take him out." Later, Paula tells about a Bedouin woman who let Paula hold her newborn in gratitude for fresh water and toys for the children. Paula can't imagine handing over her own baby to a stranger, especially to one fully armed.

In the finale, we hear from three generations of Iraqi women. Bachsan, a Kurdish freedom fighter, left Azha, her daughter, to fight against Saddam. Azha is bitter about this. Azayla, Azha's daughter, says that Iraqi women were much better off before the war. Once a computer programmer, Azayla now makes excuses to shop for eggplant just to see the light of day.

"Women Speak: Iraq" leans to the left, but succeeds in presenting a fair and balanced view of the war's effect on many different types of women. May the military commission bill not stifle their voices.

BY SHERRY DEATRICK
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