

Campolindo Launches First Annual Women's Symposium

By Zoe Portnoff

At Campolindo High School's First Annual Women's Symposium, students, teachers and guest speakers discussed the complex issues facing women today, both locally and globally. Planned by teachers, students and community members, the vision of the day was "to provide an opportunity for young women at Campo a chance to celebrate their identity as women." Topics ranged from a group discussion about the role of the media in the 21st century to a lecture about the power of the self-narrative.

Speakers at this event included Rainie Pearce, an instructional assistant at Campolindo and a marathon swimmer who once swam the English Channel, and Maura Wolf, professor and head of the Saint Mary's College Women's Leadership Initiative. In addition to teaching at SMC,

Wolf is the author of three books, including her most recent title, "What Matters Most: Everyday Leadership at Home, at Work, and in the World."

Wolf began the program by saying, "I believe one of the main problems women face is a lack of support from each other and from other people." Wolf led an activity in which she asked students to think about how they envisioned themselves on a deeper level. She asked them to think of stories about themselves that they believed defined them or demonstrated their character.

"If my activity goes well, people get very quiet. It's not a cheery activity. ... They're moved into a quieter, contemplative space," explained Wolf. Students and teachers attending the event found Wolf's activity thought-provoking and inspiring. "I thought that Mrs. Wolf's exercise was



Campolindo Women's Symposium participants show their enthusiasm at the April 11 event. Photo Kelly Pein

very powerful, and it will definitely stick with me," noted Campolindo junior Ava Tajbakhsh. Other activities included a video showing the effects of Photoshop and airbrushing techniques commonly used today to create unrealistic body images as well as a "Power Pose" exercise led by Campolindo senior Sharon Maher.

Students had many opportunities to voice their opinions about the problems women face today. Tara Gottfried, a senior at Campolindo, stated, "It's simply inequality. People assumed that once women got the vote, we were equal to men, but it's so much more than that, which people don't realize. It's systematic inequality and it's social inequality, like the fact that even though people try to disprove it, women are still paid less than men, and even more so, women of color."

Sharon Maher, a Campolindo senior and one of the student leaders of the symposium, added, "Really, what ends up happening is that we are expected to do different things. I do think there are certain skill sets that may come with each gender, but expecting someone to follow that to the letter because of their biological gen-

der is something that only holds us back as a society and as a species."

Although in the Western World, especially in the United States, both men and women have many opportunities open to them, yet there is no question that gender discrimination still exists in our society today. "There's the statistic that women make 70 cents for every dollar that a man makes, but that's at an even greater disparity amongst lower socio-economic and minority women, so their challenge is just to get by. There are different tiers of challenges that exist. In the global world, there are women who have zero rights, and no access to education," said Molly Kerr, a Campolindo teacher and one of the main organizers of the event. "Underlying it all is a sense of self-confidence, and the idea that you can 'Be and Achieve.' That takes place in terms of the relationships you have, how you perceive yourself in the world, and what you feel you are capable of. Along these lines is looking for mentorship and relationships to help reach that (goal), whether that's on a personal level or as part of a group or a professional organization."

Originally envisioned by Campolindo teacher Lindsay Webb-People, the Women's Symposium enjoyed a broad base of support from Moraga's school board and Campolindo teachers, students and even alumni such as Chrissy Brady-Smith. All female juniors and seniors received invitations to the event, and RVSP forms were also available online to everyone. Although this event was mainly planned by Campolindo teachers and administrators, student leaders such as Regan Gong, Kelly Williams, Sharon Maher and Emily Fong also played an important role.

Future symposiums will ideally be led by students, giving students the opportunity to gain leadership experience.

"We are hoping this day will generate a group of young women leaders going forward at Campo not just to plan the next symposium, but to be empowered and take action on either global or domestic issues in regards to women," said Kerr.

Campolindo staff and students plan to host a second symposium next year and hope to inspire young women to take action both at school and beyond.

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Bertolt Brecht in Lamorinda

'The Good Person of Setzuan' at Saint Mary's College

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Michael Craigen, Karen Hernandez, and Jack Clifford
Photo Matthew Royce

It is quite marvelous to be able to immerse oneself in intelligent entertainment right here at home in Lamorinda at Saint Mary's College. That's what higher education institutions are for – to challenge us to think. The college is providing another great opportunity with Bertolt Brecht's play "The Good Person of Setzuan" at the LeFevre Theatre April 23-26. An excellent performance by any standard, this rendition of the great 20th-century playwright is both funny and stimulating.

The play takes place in the Chinese province of Setzuan in the 1930s. We are mingling in the lives of mostly poor people, all trying to survive at any cost, with not much empathy for their fellow human beings. There come three gods in search for someone good. The only one they can find is Shen Te, a young prostitute who can never say no when someone appeals to her good heart. She will host the gods, and as a reward, they will give her money to start a small business of her own. But predators of all types abuse her generosity, and she can't hold on to it for very long. In order to survive, she invents a cousin, the harsh Shui Ta, whom she impersonates at times. But there comes a

time when the duality is not possible to sustain.

The play illustrates many Brechtian themes – one of them, a contradiction. As Saint Mary's art theory and practice professor Peter Freund explained during a pre-talk to the play, Brecht wrote plays to affect audiences and get them to think. "I think that what he wanted was for the audience to cultivate a productive affection for contradiction," he said. Here the contradiction lives in the same person, Shen Te and Shui Ta, the good doer who is going to her ruin and the selfish capitalist who thrives financially. Emily Klein, who teaches modern drama and performance and women's and gender studies at Saint Mary's, explained that Brecht wanted to create what he called epic theater, as opposed to a dramatic one where people identify with the characters. Here the spectator's mind is engaged as the author shows the troubling complexity of society and human beings. "He said that we needed a theater that takes an issue and looks at it from different perspectives," said Klein.

Like in "The Three Penny Opera," there is an underlying theme of social justice in the play. Brecht also shows the complexity of individ-

uals. Yang Sun, the pilot who Shen Te falls in love with, is completely selfish, but could be good in better circumstances. Many characters are humorous – the gods, especially. And if the play was created to make people think, it is also ironic and funny.

What better compliment to give to the cast than to say that one completely forgets those are students on stage. Sometimes the diction could slow down a tad to enjoy Brecht's wonderfully crafted dialogue more clearly, but that could be said of some professional actors, too. Special kudos goes to Karen Hernandez impersonating the good person of Setzuan, whose credibility as both a male and female character is key to the success of the play.

Saint Mary's theater professor Daniel Larlham directed the play, with Deanna Zibello as scenic designer. "I choose this play because it has a lot of juicy roles for the students and because it resonates with Saint Mary's mission toward social justice," said the young professor. "The play is about the possibility or not of goodness, generosity and compassion in a social world where people are pursuing their self-interest most of the time."

Zibello's scenic work makes the 'Brechtian' choice of showing all of the accessories to remove the magic of theater. "We took as our design concept Brecht's idea of laying bare the apparatus," she explained. It means that all the lighting instruments are visible; the scenery is made of raw material, and spectators see everything that's happening at all levels.

Upcoming performances are at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, April 23-25 and at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 26. Tickets can be purchased at <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/the-good-person-of-setzuan> or the box office on the evening of the play. Signs on campus clearly direct spectators to the theater.

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