



LIZ DURDEN

TALKING DIRTY *The Vagina Monologues* hope to combat violence and war.

The Vagina Monologues gets lippy with violence

The Vagina Monologues

Directed by Bo Tarasenko
Produced by Medical Students For Choice
Thursday, 8 March at 7:30pm
Bernard Snell Hall, U of A Hospital

ELLIOT KERR
Arts & Entertainment Writer

When asked about the controversy surrounding *The Vagina Monologues* and its misandrist criticisms, director Bo Tarasenko laughs. "You know, for the longest time, I considered myself a misogynist," he admits.

According to Tarasenko, what's important about *The Vagina Monologues* isn't the controversy or the gender side-taking. Instead, it's about telling women's personal stories, where each monologue is just one experience. It's not about the playwright shaping a production according to his/her perspective, but rather showing how things are for everyone and illustrating the way things ought to be.

The 1996 play by Eve Ensler is made up of more than a dozen monologues relating some of the varied experiences of women and their vaginas. The tales range from sweet stories of self-discovery to humorous rants about tampons, and even to brutal encounters with both men and women. This production also includes three new monologues written by Ensler

in 2007, which focus on the violence committed against women.

"It's pretty heavy subject matter," says Tarasenko. "I was lucky to find these women to work with. They are all so active, passionate and knowledgeable. It really is amazing.

"Violence against women is a huge problem in our society and around the world."

KIM DARY

"We tried to include as many people as possible," Tarasenko continues. "Basically, we just put out a casting call: 'All vaginas welcome!' And although some of the women who responded had limited drama experience, we never saw it as a problem. Our first rehearsal, all of us sat around talking about vaginas and periods, telling our own stories, and before we knew it, everyone had become best friends. After that, there's been no bad days, even when exploring the most difficult subject matter."

The performance is a part of V-Day, an international movement to end violence against women and girls, now in its ninth year. Events are organized independently by women and men in their own communities, and occur annually between Valentine's

Day and International Women's Day (8 March). This year's event is spearheaded by members of Medical Students For Choice.

"Each year, there's a theme for V-Day," organizer Kim Dary explains. "Our theme for V-Day is Reclaiming Peace. It tries to address violence in armed conflict around the globe and how that violence impacts women—or as Eve Ensler puts it, we are saying that if a government supports the use of force, weapons, violence as a method of control and dominance, this gives license to the same kind of behavior at home."

Dary makes it clear that the proceeds from admissions don't go to support the work of Medical Students For Choice. Instead, the group will give half the proceeds to support the ongoing activities of the University of Alberta Women's Centre Collective. The other half will go to Engender Health, an organization of medical professionals that supports sexual health initiatives for women and men in nearly 50 developing countries.

In the end, Dary wants the event to rise above the debate about the play, or even her own group's work for reproductive rights.

"Violence against women is a huge problem in our society and around the world," Dary says. "It takes many forms. That's true no matter what someone's views are about a woman's right to choose."

Cockatoo unruffles its feathers, catches the worm

Cockatoo

With The Secretaries and Gloom Room
Friday, 9 March at 8pm
The Powerplant

LACINA DESJARLAIS
Arts & Entertainment Writer

A band breakup isn't unlike breaking up with a significant other; both parties end up spiralling into an abyss of loneliness and self-judgement. But for singer-songwriter Robyn Bright of the Edmonton based indie-alternative band Cockatoo, she quickly found a way to cope with her group's disbanding.

After the original Cockatoo broke up in 2005 due to conflicts, which may have been related to getting caught up in industry hype, Bright decided to regroup. She recruited drummer Alan Levesque of Voice Industry and bassist Rod Wolfe, formerly a part of the band Skinny Puppy.

"I was really scared to call them and ask them to be in the band," Bright says. "After the first Cockatoo fell apart, I really just thought about giving up and I just realized that if I couldn't ask people who are better than me to play with me then I really should just give it up. If I don't believe enough in the music, then I shouldn't be doing it."

Luckily, though, Bright didn't quit, and now it seems her phone calls have paid off, for the new Cockatoo seems to be getting along better than ever.



"It just wasn't the right fit; it's like having the wrong boyfriend," says Bright of her former group with a note of regret in her voice. "The band mates I have now are sort of the missing part of Cockatoo. Now there's a real balance in the group. When you have balance in a group then the songwriting comes from that rather than any ego."

Although Cockatoo is easily described as a well-oiled collective, articulating the band's often brooding sound is almost impossible. However,

Bright maintains that Cockatoo definitely isn't goth or anything like Evanescence.

"I'm not really worried anymore about being compared with [Evanescence]," Bright says. "At a couple shows people who said they like Evanescence said they liked our music. That's okay; people just use what they like to reference us. I mean, I personally don't like Evanescence but people like what they like. For years I was really worried about stuff like

that, but I realized that people listen to that and that's what they like—and if they like me that's great."

It seems that people disliking the band won't be something Cockatoo will have to face anytime soon, as they are rapidly building a fan base both in Canada (they're slated to play at a number of local venues) and the UK.

Although Bright's excited about where Cockatoo's music is taking them, she assures us that the band is working hard to achieve their goals,

which include playing large venues for sold-out crowds. For now, though, she says that they're focusing on accomplishing smaller aspirations and having a good time doing what they love.

"We really believe in the music and we really do want to get in there," Bright says. "We really like to practice, but really we just play music because it makes us happy—although I would love to actually go and open for a band like The Cure or something."