

# Vaginas Rising The Monologues return to raise awareness and spread the love

By Middlebury Campus

Author: Grace Duggan Once a year, the word “vagina” is used repeatedly by a group of Middlebury women in the McCullough Social Space. Taboos are challenged and confronted as women talk openly about their vaginas. They fake orgasms, elaborate on their sex lives, marvel at the process of giving birth, criticize spouses who do not like pubic hair and share intimate, often painful moments from their past. They perform “The Vagina Monologues.” Written by Eve Ensler ’75 in 1996 (and directed this year by Myra Palmero, Leah Day, Meg Young and Sally Swallow, all Class of 2007), “The Vagina Monologues” grew out of more than 200 interviews Ensler conducted with women of all ages, ethnicities and sexual orientations. The play would go on to win an Obie Award, a prestigious award given to Off- and Off-Off-Broadway works. The overall tone of “The Vagina Monologues” this year was noticeably more lighthearted, as the cast had audience members laughing frequently during almost every monologue. Concerning the tone and direction of the show this year, co-director Day said they wanted “to make it more approachable for everyone in the community.” “Also, there was a better mix of actors and non-actors than there’s ever been,” noted Laura Harris ’07. Claire Graves ’09.5 and Emily Kron ’09.5 performed the controversial “The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could,” a monologue that has been criticized for its alleged distinction between “good” and “bad” rape. Harris brought the house down with her strong and hysterical portrayal of a sex-worker with an all-female clientele in the monologue “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy.” While she was not the only member of the cast to fake an orgasm, she stood out as she imitated all of the different moans she had come across in her line of work, including a humorous “Middlebury Moan.” Saila Huusko’s ’10 performance of “My Vagina Was My Village,” a monologue that focuses on the violent and horrifying rape of a Bosnian woman by soldiers, stood out not only because of the depth and pain Huusko brought to the monologue, but also because it was the only monologue that did not rely on humor to connect with the audience. Jackie Antonson’s ’10 turn as an elderly woman telling her therapist about an embarrassing incident involving sexual arousal in “The Flood” was well-received. She brought a sharp wit and strong comic timing to the monologue, but as in other parts of “The Vagina Monologues,” the emphasis on a more humorous interpretation of the lines was noticeably stronger this year. Another difference this year was the inclusion of a new monologue written by Liz Lyon ’07. Lyon performed the monologue with Associate Dean of Affairs Karen Guttentag, Chrissy Etienne ’07 and Kerren McKeeman ’07.5. Lyon’s motivation to write her own monologue sprang from her desire to “feel that I was representing something that I felt a personal connection to.” Her monologue looked at the complicated question of what defines rape and sexual assault. “What I wanted to reflect in my monologue was the complexity and normalcy and ambiguity of sexual violence in day-to-day life. Focusing on the extreme [violent] cases can be a way of ignoring the sexual violence and vagina disrespect we go through every day in our life,” Lyon said. Her monologue’s inclusion of a lesbian pressured into having sex with another woman without violence (Etienne) and of a woman who ignores the extreme pain she feels while having sex with her boyfriend (McKeeman) distorted the typical and prevalent perception of rape. All of the proceeds from “The Vagina Monologues” will be donated to WomenSafe. WomenSafe is an independent organization whose mission it is to work “towards the elimination of physical, sexual and emotional violence against women and their children through direct service, education and social change.” Also on hand outside of the McCullough Social Space were representatives of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, Middlebury Men Advancing Change (a group that grew out of the recent White Ribbon Campaign) and Vermont Access to Reproductive Freedom. This year’s performance of “The Vagina Monologues” found particular poignancy in light of charges filed late last month against a former Middlebury student who sexually assaulted a female student and tried to assault another. In fact, just one day following the performance of “The Vagina Monologues,” the student body received an e-mail regarding a reported sex offense in Brackett House late Friday night. After Guttentag read statistics on kidnapping, rape and other forms of sexual assault that occurred in Vermont in 2005, she paused to remind the audience that Middlebury students and members of the wider Middlebury community are included in these statistics and that violence against women is, unfortunately, an on-campus issue.