Caption

Catnap Allegiance

Otterbein's gutsy play attacks the Gulf War

Courage, both artistic and political, rumbles across the stage of the Otterbein College Theatre in Kia Corthron's *Catnap Allegiance*. This tribute to the many victims on both sides of the Persian Gulf War forces its audience to consider the consequences of U.S. actions: on the "enemy," on itself, on those who fought the war.

"The desert is full of white trash," quips Jeddie (Aaron D. Carter), the intense African-American soldier at the center of *Catnap,* in response to the racist taunts of white fellow infantryman Theo (Mark Von Oesen). Racial conflict in the U.S. military is only one of the hot buttons Corthron presses. Why is it, she wonders, that when the U.S. plans a holocaust — Panama, Grenada, Hiroshima, Iraq — it rarely rains down on white people? Why does the military recruit so heavily in the inner-city, with dubious promises of education and training, much of which will have little use in civilian life?

Corthron frames these questions in an episodic, often nightmarish play. Much of the dialogue is in a stylized, poetic shorthand that requires precision on the part of the actors and concentration on the part of the audience. Although that precision sometimes escapes the student cast, audience concentration pays off in this world premiere that was first commissioned by the Manhattan Theatre Club. At Otterbein's request, Corthron revamped and sharpened the script.

Ed Vaughan's direction, Dana White's lighting and S.E. Reinick's sound merge to differentiate the Gulf scenes from those in Jeddie's New York home. Carter's and Von Oesen's characters are mirror opposites: the former, profoundly troubled and introspective; the latter, troublingly gullible and thoughtless. Rodney L. Cross's spacey, detached, yet hyperaware Shale grabs attention with every word. Michael A. Faber is an earthy Heath, a soldier torn between loyalty and his growing sense that his government may have lied about the rashes and headaches he suffers.

Jeddie's mother (Tonya Latrice Watson) opposes the Gulf War but often finds herself in the middle of the domestic war between Jeddie and his disabled Vietnam War veteran father (Yosvany Reyes). Watson's small role is occasionally reduced to that of referee, but her shell-shocked pleas for peace resonate. Reyes's TV-obsessed father conveys his pain as much through his bitter sulking as through his halting speech. Christopher M. De Paolo plays a brief, but pivotal, role late in the play, personalizing the suffering of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who "weren't meant to be thought about."

For all of its rough edges and its eagerness to take on a few too many themes, *Catnap Allegiance* is an exciting, skeptical, challenging, thoughtful and courageous memorial.

— *Jay Weitz*

Catnap Allegiance *plays June 1-4 at Otterbein College Theatre, 100 W. Home Street, Westerville. For tickets, call 823-1109.*

Theater

by Doug Hoehn

Desert shorn

Every young person who rallied to the military escapades of the Reagan-Bush era should be offered a free ticket to Otterbein's soul-shaking world premiere of Kia Corthron's *Catnap Allegiance*. The sanitized and quickly concluded media coverage of the Persian Gulf War precluded even a fraction of the volatile public reaction that accompanied Vietnam; as indeed the small proportion of American to Iraqi dead allowed some pacifists to slumber in second-nature racism.

The most intense drama of Corthron's play is not set in the sands, but in a New York living room where a wheelchair-confined black Vietnam vet confronts his own son back from a war the father likens to a beach party. Each man is torn apart by private horrors and is convinced the other doesn't give a damn. The son, Jeddie, alternates between recollections of the desert and the agony of his family life.

In the desert, the war is mostly a waiting game where Jeddie and three other soldiers fight with each other and with an impersonal Army. That army has claimed more casualties than the Iraqis: a fat soldier who died in a forced march and the hastily recruited Wisconsin kid who was found hanging from a barracks rafter. And

after a quick victory over some pathetic Iraqi recruits, one of the Americans picks up a funny-looking golf ball that is really made-in-America "anti-personnel ordnance." In a way, he is luckier than two of the others.

War stories are cliche, and the evil of war can also become cliche. Corthron avoids this by a gentle interjection of warm humor and cold irony. Director Ed

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Theater

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Vaughan establishes believable character conflicts by pacing and pauses, and he is well-served by the dynamic cast.

Yosvany Reyes and Tonya Latrice Watson are stunning as Jeddie's parents, the one obsessed with his television and memories and the other passionately defying the public hoopla for the war. If Watson's character is a mouthpiece for Corthron's point of view, we never know it through her teary eyes and forceful presence.

Aaron D. Carter's portrayal of Jeddie is multi-leveled and full of insight. He conveys resentment and compassion with vivid expressions and physical energy. Mark Van Oesen gives an outstanding performance as the taunting punk of the outfit. Rodney L. Cross and Michael A. Faber provide adequate support in the first act and have memorable scenes in the second.

If there is something unsatisfying about the Otterbein production, it is the technical transition from the war to the home front and back again. Paul Marr's set is excellent, but the boulder from Kuwait simply does not pass for the family couch. Each scene change seems too forced.

Catnap Allegiance is a courageous examination of American values in the 1990s. The play runs through June 4. For tickets, call 823-1109.

Otterbein stages world premiere

For the second straight year, Otterbein College Theatre ends its season with the world premiere of an original play. Otterbein is presenting "Catnap Allegiance," written by noted New York playwright Kia Corthron and directed by Ed Vaughan, who directed last year's critically acclaimed "The Brothers Karamazov."

Set against the background of the Persian Gulf War and its aftermath, Corthron focuses on the emotional journey of one young Black soldier, Jeddie, through his relationships with fellow soldiers and his family. Taking a page out of recent history, Jeddie and the audience are forced to explore the meaning of allegiance in these modern times.

"One bomb and hundreds could die. We dropped thousands and thousands of bombs. But in a year, it will all be blurred images of an American catnap. The American dream means that no matter what America has done, it can always wake up and forget it -- like it was some sleep fantasy."

That passage from the play is at the heart of "Catnap Allegiance." It is Corthron's call for people to study how easily issues, values, causes, and events are embraced and then abandoned when the next big thing comes along. She challenges the audience to question their loyalties to their country, themselves, their families and their beliefs.

Early in the story, Jeddie and three other soldiers are given inadequately explained medicine and sketchy instructions before being dropped into the war. The men, two white and two Black, must learn to transcend their stereotypes of each other to form a bond that will carry them through the brief war.

The action then follows Jeddie as he returns home and tries to forge a new relationship with his father, who refuses to discuss his own combat experiences. Throughout the play, Jeddie is a young man searching for his identity -- a difficult task when no one seems to show any allegiance to him. He went into the service to gain the approval of his father, a Vietnam War veteran, with the belief that he could stay out of combat by declaring himself a contentious objector. The military did not support that agreement when the Gulf War broke out and on his return his father offers only scorn for his fighting "that television war."

CATNAP ALLEGIANCE -- These men will first fight and then must transcend racial differences in order to survive the Gulf War and its aftermath in "Catnap Allegiance," a world premiere being presented this spring by Otterbein College Theatre.

The opening Evening performances begin at 8 p.m. and the Sunday matinees are at 2 p.m.

Tickets are $9.50 for Friday and Saturday shows and $8 for Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday shows. Reserve tickets by calling the Otterbein College Theatre box office at 823-1109 between 1 and 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

Call & Post May 25, 1995

Otterbein Theatre to premiere new play May 24

For the second straight year, Otterbein College Theatre will end its season with the world premiere of an original play.

On May 24, Otterbein will open "Catnap Allegiance," written by New York playwright Kia Corthron and directed by Ed Vaughan, who directed last year's critically acclaimed "The Brothers Karamazov."

"Catnap" will run May 24-28 and May 31-June 5.

Set against the background of the Gulf War and its aftermath, Corthron's play focuses on the emotional journey of one young black soldier, Jeddie, through his relationships with fellow soldiers and his family. Taking a page out of recent history, Jeddie and the audience are forced to explore the meaning of allegiance in modern times.

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Throughout the play, Jeddie is a young man searching for his identity — a difficult task when no one seems to show any allegiance to him. He went into the service to gain the approval of his father, a Vietnam War veteran, with the belief that he could stay out of combat by declaring himself a contentious objector. The military did not support that agreement when the Gulf War broke out, and on his return his father offers only scorn for his fighting "that television war."

Corthron's plays are hard-hitting and unrelenting. Her plays address political issues, but transcend the political to capture the essence of the human struggle.

Corthron, who was featured in the October 1994 issue of American Theatre magazine, is known for giving a voice to the voiceless. She writes about victims — of racism, of the military, of the government — who, for whatever reason, society would like to forget. She instead puts these characters on stage to tell their stories.

Corthron currently lives in New York City and has had plays commissioned by the Manhattan Theatre Club, the Long Wharf Theatre, and Second Stage Theatre. Her other works include "Cage Rhythm," "Come Down Burning," and "Wake Up Lou Riser."

Her plays have been produced at Long Wharf Theatre, Circle Repertory Company, American Place Theatre, and Columbia University. She has also presented readings of her plays at Manhattan Theatre Club, the Philadelphia Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, and Voice and Vision, a women's theatre project.

Corthron has won the New Professional Theatre Screenplay-Playwrighting Festival and in 1992 received the first Van Lier Playwrighting Fellowship from the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Otterbein College Theatre will present "Catnap Allegiance" in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., with opening night performance on May 24 at 7:30 p.m. All other evening performances begin at 8 p.m., and Sunday matinees are at 2 p.m.

Tickets are $9.50 for the Friday and Saturday shows and $8 for Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday shows. Tickets may be reserved by calling the box office weekdays between 1 and 4:30 p.m. at 823-1109.

Colo. Disp

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

■ TODAY

The compleat entertainer

Mandy Patinkin has done it all: Broadway *(Evita, Sunday in the Park With George)*, movies *(Impromptu, Dick Tracy)*, television *(Chicago Hope)* and music. Patinkin will sing Rodgers and Hammerstein and other favorites at 8 tonight at the Palace Theatre, 34 E. Broad St. Tickets cost $20.50-$33.50. Call 431-3600 or 469-0939.

Gulf War drama

Otterbein College Theatre's second annual commissioned play is *Catnap Allegiance*, Kia Corthron's new drama about two black and two white soldiers during the Persian Gulf War. Performances are at 8 tonight through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets cost $8-$9.50. Call 823-1109.

■ FRIDAY

Irish sisters

Irish playwright Brian Friel fictionalized his childhood in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, his affecting memory piece about poor Irish sisters struggling during the Depression. OSU Theatre Company performances are at 8 tonight through Saturday in Drake Union's Thurber Theatre, 1849 Cannon Dr. Tickets cost $9.50-$10.50, or $7.25 on weekdays and matinees for OSU faculty members, staffers, students, Alumni Association members and senior citizens. Call 292-2295.

■ SATURDAY

New one-acts

Red Herring Theatre Company presents *Head Cheese and Conga Lines: An Evening of Original One-Acts*, including four one-acts and two monologues by central Ohio writers. Performances are at 8 tonight through Saturday at the Milo Arts Center, Room 208, 617 E. 3rd Ave. Tickets cost $10, or $7 for students and seniors. Call 291-8252.

A divided self

Raw teen-age hopes and harsh adult realities blend in *The Destiny of Me*, an autobiographical AIDS drama by Larry Kramer *(The Normal Heart)*. Reality Theatre presents the play at 8 tonight through Saturday at 736 N. Pearl St. Tickets cost $10-$12, or $8 for senior citizens. Call 294-7541.

Old-fashioned Muffins

Ohio Village, at the Ohio Historical Center, I-71 and 17th Avenue, bustles with activities on weekends. The Ohio Village Muffins, Junior Muffins and Diamonds Ladies' Base Ball clubs play 19th-century-style ball every Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m., beginning Saturday through Sept. 3. The Muffins will open the village's baseball schedule at 2 p.m. Saturday with a match against the National City Bank '45ers. A parade will begin at 2 p.m.; a brass band concert will be held during the game. Cost of attending the game is included with the village's site-admission fee: $4 for adults, $1 for children ages 6-12. Call 297-2300.

■ SUNDAY

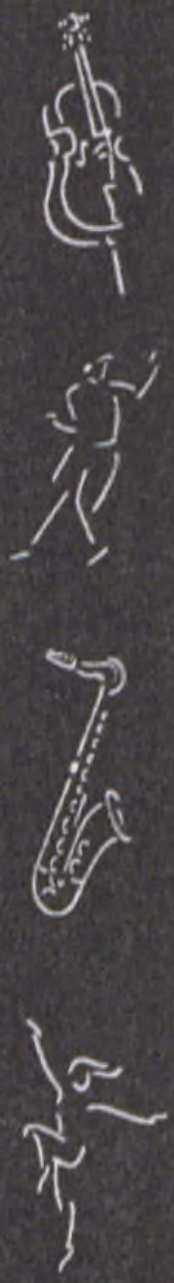
Asian Festival

The first statewide Asian Festival will be held Saturday and Sunday at Franklin Park, 1777 E. Broad St. The cultures of such countries as India, China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Korea, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will be the focus of booths, demonstrations, music and activities for adults and children. Admission is free. Hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. For more information, call 464-0044.

Broadway hit

Contemporary American Theatre Company will present *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, Frank McGuinness's cross-cultural hostage drama, at 8 tonight through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at 512 N. Park St. Tickets cost $13-$22, or $10-$13 at some performances for students, senior citizens and teachers (K-12). Call 461-0010.

Live at Otterbein



Otterbein College

World Première!

An emotional journey set against the backdrop of the Gulf War. A new play by Kia Corthron. Directed by Ed Vaughan.
May 24 to June 4, Campus Center Theatre, times vary.

Coming Up

Concert Band, June 4

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P.O. May 26, 1995

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CATNAP ALLEGIANCE

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DIRECTED BY ED VAUGHAN

A deeply affecting political drama about war, racism and family!

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