



AMY JIRSA (left) and Kristopher Gordon Kling struggle for the leash during a scene from A.R. Gurney's play "Sylvia," running today through Saturday at Studio Theatre in the Temple Building.

NIKKI FOX/DN

Student staged as canine

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior Reporter

She barks at cats. She tugs at her leash. She jumps on the couch.

But she is not a dog. She is a junior theater major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and her name is Amy Jirsa.

Jirsa plays a dog named Sylvia in the UNL Theatix production of A.R. Gurney's play "Sylvia," which opens tonight in the Temple Building's Studio Theatre.

The play, directed by Kathy Dudley, tells the story of Greg - an unhappy financial trader who finds a dog named Sylvia in the park. Greg brings Sylvia home, but his wife, Kate, is less than pleased with the situation. Kate views Sylvia as a hassle and a distraction. As Greg obsesses more and more about Sylvia, Kate becomes more and more jealous.

The play's cast said they had been challenged to establish relationships with a character who was supposed to be a dog.

To make the character of Sylvia real, Dudley and Jirsa translated Sylvia's actions into human terms. Instead of licking characters like a dog, Sylvia gives them hugs and kisses. Instead of a dog collar, Sylvia wears a locket.

"When you watch (the play), I think you forget that (Sylvia) is a dog," Jirsa said. "She's just a character who can't ignore her instincts. Her intentions are completely innocent."

Kris Kling, who plays Greg, described Sylvia as a person with a dog attitude.

"Greg may scratch Sylvia behind

"(Sylvia) is never without energy. She is all over the stage and crazy and loud and obnoxious"

AMY JIRSA
actress who plays 'Sylvia'

the ears, but I think he sees her as another woman," Kling said. "She combines human characteristics with animal ones."

However, Amy Rafa, who plays Kate, said she decided early on to view Sylvia as more of a child than a dog.

"She constantly needs attention and care," Rafa said. "The way Kate relates with her is, therefore, more like an adult with a child."

Jirsa said playing a dog challenged her to find new levels within a character.

"(Sylvia) is never without energy," Jirsa said. "She is all over the stage and crazy and loud and obnoxious, but she wants real things like security and love."

Jirsa added that she identified with Sylvia's needs and the way she followed her instincts.

"She's not selfish," Jirsa said. "She just goes for what she wants. She can't understand why she shouldn't have what she needs."

Dudley said the way the actors identified with their characters was representative of the growth she had seen during the rehearsal process.

"Every night has been a journey," she said. "Early on, I could tell the

cast knew who their characters were vocally. Then, I could see a physical progression. Eventually, the scenes became identifiable units where you could see the characters trying to get what they want."

Chris Wachholz, who plays three characters, said Dudley's directing style helped the actors make the progression. By being receptive to the cast's ideas and opinions, Dudley made the actors feel more involved in the production, Wachholz said.

While directing the show, Dudley tried to emphasize the play's deeper meanings about sharing through the production's technical aspects, she said. All the scenes share the same basic set, and chairs and couches double for desks and beds.

"When you care about somebody, you're going to share things that you didn't necessarily want to or plan on sharing," Dudley said. "We've tried to make the entire show indicative of that."

"Sylvia" runs tonight and Friday night at 8, and Saturday at 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. Tickets are \$3 at the door. Though a comedy, the play contains language that may not be suitable for children.

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