

Vagina play celebrates women, awareness

By Shelley Mika
Staff writer

"The Vagina Monologues" isn't just another play — it's a play with a purpose.

Two purposes, actually. To increase consciousness about women's experiences — especially those relating to their vaginas — and to raise awareness about V-Day, a campaign to end sexual violence against women.

Valentine's is the day chosen for V-Day, a day to demand the end of sexual abuse and celebrate women.

"V-Day was born out of the play," said Keri Wayne, the director of this year's performance of "The Vagina Monologues."

This year, more than 150 college campuses will perform "The Vagina Monologues" in honor of V-Day. For the first time, the play will be performed in Lincoln, at the Seventh Street Loft. The cast is composed of 23 women from all over the city, including some from the university.

"The Vagina Monologues" is a compilation of individual monologues about vaginas written by women.

Eve Ensler, writer of "The Vagina Monologues," carried out interviews with hundreds of women (as diverse as a Long Island antiques dealer and a Bosnian refugee) to construct the series of monologues included in the play.

"There are many different voices: women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, age differences, sexuality differences. Not all of the women are feminists. They are all speaking from different points of reference," said Gretchen Obrist, a UNL student performing in the play.

The themes involved in the play are diverse, as are the women who address them.

"It covers a lot," Obrist said. "Everything

you could think of that has to do with the vagina, from developing as a woman, to sex and desire, to relationships, to recovering from violence and abuse to having an awareness of women's place in society."

After the debut of "The Vagina Monologues" at HERE, an off-Broadway theater in New York City, the first

V-Day was held in 1998. To commemorate it, several notable performers, such as Susan Sarandon, Glenn Close, Lily Tomlin, Calista Flockhart, Whoopi Goldberg and Winona Ryder, performed "The Vagina Monologues."

Now, V-Day has evolved, and "The Vagina

Monologues" is performed on campuses across the country. In 1999, 65 US campuses participated in the V-Day College Initiative, introducing the efforts to stop violence against women into mainstream America.

The idea to expand V-Day to college campuses came from Ensler.

"The playwright got together with a woman from feminist.com and tried to think of the most efficient way to get the play out and raise awareness," Wayne said. "They thought, what better way than through college campuses where there's a lot of ambition and motivation."

In addition to raising money for programs that help women, the national performances of the play will raise awareness through its themes, Wayne said. The profits from Lincoln's performance of "The Vagina Monologues" will go to the Rape and Spouse Abuse Crisis Center.

"The Vagina Monologues" may have a serious goal, but humor is included in the play, too.

"I can guarantee people will laugh and cry and experience a whole range of emotions in between," Wayne said.

"I think it'll raise awareness," Obrist said, "but it's entertaining, too — you can't forget that."

Some people may feel "The Vagina Monologues" will address issues that make them uncomfortable.

"It's normal to be uncomfortable," Obrist said.

The discomfort of the audience is addressed by the narrator of the play in hopes to dispel those feelings, Obrist said. "It's not a play where you can sit back and say 'that was a nice play.' It will make you think about things and the way you act in your life," Wayne said.

People shouldn't be discouraged about attending the performance, Wayne said.

"People shouldn't be afraid of the title. People really need to hear this message. It should make a positive impact on people's lives."



'Peanuts' creator Schulz dies; fans of all ages mourn

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (AP) — "Peanuts" creator Charles Schulz died Sunday at home following a battle with cancer, just as the last original cartoon of his half-century career was being published in newspapers worldwide.

The 77-year-old Schulz was diagnosed with colon cancer in November, and his spirits recently sagged as he battled the disease and pondered retirement, said Monte Schulz, his eldest son.

"I think maybe he decided that his true passion was in the strip, and when that was gone, it was over," Monte Schulz said Sunday. "He had done what he had wanted to do, and that was it for him ..."

His son said that while the cause of death Saturday wasn't known, "it appears he died in his sleep, almost between breaths," said his wife, Jeannie, who was with him when he died.

On news of his passing, fans and colleagues across the country hailed Schulz as an irreplaceable artist whose work over the years had become infused in American popular culture.

"I think 'Peanuts' has been for most of its existence the best comic strip in history, and nothing's ever approached it," said Mell Lazarus, who draws the "Momma" and "Miss Peach" strips, and knew Schulz for 42 years.

The famous strip — with its gentle humor spiked with a child's-eye view of human foibles —

had at least one endearing trait: constancy.

Year after year, the long-suffering Charlie Brown faced misfortune with a mild, "Good grief!" Tart-tongued Lucy handed out advice at a nickel a pop. And Snoopy, Charlie Brown's wise-but-weird beagle, still took the occasional flight of fancy back to the skies of World War I and his rivalry with the Red Baron.

The strip was an intensely personal effort for Schulz. He had had a clause in his contract dictating the strip had to end with his death — no one could imitate it.

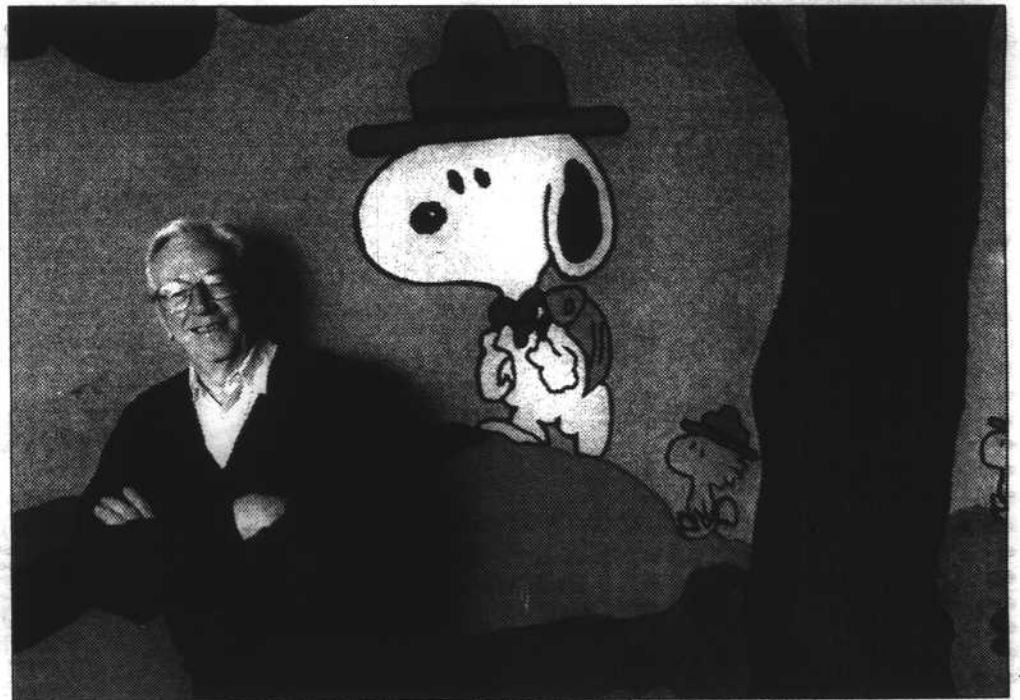
While battling cancer, he opted to retire it, saying he wanted to focus on his health and family without the worry of a daily deadline.

His last daily comic ran in early January, and the final farewell strip appeared in newspapers on Sunday. Old versions of the strip will continue to be published.

The last strip showed Snoopy at his typewriter along with other "Peanuts" regulars, and a "Dear Friends" letter thanking his readers for support.

"I have been grateful over the years for the loyalty of our editors, and the wonderful support and love expressed to me by fans of the comic strip," Schulz wrote. "Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy ... how can I ever forget them ..."

It ended with his signature. Fans of all ages mourned his passing.



Cartoonist Charles Schulz is seen in this file photo from March, 1999. Schulz, the creator of the popular 'Peanuts' comic strip, died February 12 of a heart attack.

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