

We Are Proud to Present... A Preview

By Leslie Howard

Six actors. Five performances. One Day. The countdown begins for Southwest Minnesota State University as the KCACTF Region Five festival quickly approaches.

The university's cast of *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation about the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury, will perform on Wednesday Jan. 20 in the Normandale Community College black box theatre. Performances will take place at: 9a.m., 11:30a.m., 2p.m., 4:30p.m., and 7:30p.m.

"We Are Proud to Present..." delves into the rehearsal process of six actors, three black and three white, as they attempt to tell the story of the German genocide of the Herero people, which was the first documented genocide of the 20th century. This genocide took place in Namibia, a country along the Atlantic coast of Southern Africa.

"I hope the audience will reflect on issues related to race in America, and maybe begin on a path of "replacing judgment with curiosity" which is a key element of trying to practice equity," director Nadine Schmidt said.

The rehearsal process portrayed in "We are Proud to Present..." causes the actors to look inside themselves, acknowledge their own biases, find answers to challenging questions, reevaluate the world in which they live and create a production by working together.

While working on "We Are Proud to Present..." the six actors who make up the cast of SMSU's production, have formed a "unique bond," stage manager Turi Jystad explained.

A number of the production's actors are new to the university stage. Three of the actors are freshmen and four are in their first university production. For two of the actors, this is their first experience performing in a staged production.

Schmidt feels that even though a number of her actors don't have a lot of theatre experience, "that [it] frees them from preconceptions about how anything 'should' be done." Schmidt notes that her cast has a lot of energy and enthusiasm, which aids resilience during rehearsals for a play grappling with emotionally difficult and draining themes such as race and gender.

In terms of tech and performance, the show is simple and organic, Schmidt said, what the actors bring to the space is the main focus.

"[There are] layers of significance and meaning in this play. Almost every conversation/discussion/argument between characters in this show is an example of interactions that happen every day and usually also a microcosm of or metaphor for something that happens on a larger societal level," Schmidt said.

An SMSU Theatre press release describes “We are Proud to Present...” as “powerful, energetic and surprisingly funny.”

Tickets for “We Are Proud to Present...” are available for conference participants on the Eventbrite app. Ticket sales will begin at 11pm on Tuesday, Jan 19. Due to the intimate nature of the play, seats. But tickets early for a chance to experience this societally prevalent play.