

►PLAYWRIGHTS' WORKSHOP

3 plays to be premiered at SIUC

By Linda Sickler
The Southern Illinoian

It isn't often that a world premiere happens in Southern Illinois.

But next week will bring the world premieres of not one, not two, but three plays at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

The plays will be staged in SIUC's Laboratory Theater, in the Communications Building, during the Playwrights' Workshop, an annual event that presents from two to four new plays written by graduate students in playwriting.

Students who are candidates for master's degrees must write their plays as the basis of their thesis, and doctoral students write their plays as part of their dissertations. The results might be funny, controversial or even shocking, but they are always interesting.

This year is no exception.

The first play of this year's workshop is "Broke," written by master's degree candidate Jonathan Graham. It will be presented Monday and on July 29 at 8 p.m.

"It is about Generation X and the differences between Generation Xers and the Baby Boom generation," Graham said. "Four Generation X people are living in an apartment. They all have difficulties getting along with their landlord."

"Broke" combines dark comedy and mystery to tell how the apartment dwellers exact revenge on their landlord. Graham got the idea to write the play after intense media coverage of Generation X and its seeming collision course with the Baby Boom generation.

"I'm part of this generation, but in some ways I don't feel connected to it," he said. "Every generation is made up of individuals. If a young person

has a conflict with an older person, it is for specific reasons rather than general reasons.

"I felt I wanted to deal with a serious issue with comedy."

A native of Trenton, Ohio, Graham is a graduate of Beloit College in Beloit, Wis.

"I've known I wanted to be a writer since junior high," he said. "I had my first play performed at 17."

He hopes to be a professional playwright, and says he has been "really lucky to have teachers who encouraged me instead of telling me it was a waste of time."

The second play is "An Evening with Ira Aldridge," written by doctoral candidate Eddie Bradley. It will be presented Tuesday and on July 30 at 7 p.m.

It is based on the true story of a 19th century Shakespearean actor who was very successful in Europe, but who never appeared in a major theater in the United States because he was black.

"I first heard about Ira Aldridge as an undergraduate," Bradley said.

Sarah Blackstone, theater department chair and a theater historian, told Bradley that Aldridge's personal papers were stored in the Special Collections in SIUC's Morris Library.

"I was drawn to go through it," Bradley said. "Afterward, I felt obligated to try to write a play about Ira's struggle to succeed at that particular time in history. And it was a way to link me to research that was already here."

The collection includes letters, playbills, newspaper clippings, plays and notes. Bradley did 33 months of research before writing his first draft.

He is a native of Fayetteville, N.C., and he received his master's degree in theater education at Virginia Tech.

"I've always been interested in theater, from pre-teen to the present," he said. "There is a need for new works from African-American playwrights, and I want to be a part of that."

The third play in the series is "Woodhull," written by master's candidate Liza Lentini. It will be presented Wednesday and on July 31 at 7 p.m.

Like Bradley's play, "Woodhull" is based on fact. Victoria Claflin Woodhull ran for president in 1872 — almost 50 years before women were given the right to vote.

"I was reading a book on infamous women," Lentini said. "She was one of them."

The play focuses on the fall of Woodhull's campaign.

"Like any brilliant visionary before her time, she received opposition from everyone," Lentini said. "She went against every restriction to the extent that she lost all her support, even from the suffragettes."

"They even erased her from their history. She's not even mentioned in the history of women's suffrage."

Lentini is a native of Braintree, Mass., and a graduate of Wheaton College.

"I started performing when I was 3," she said. "I started writing plays at 12. I was really fascinated with dialogue. I like the thought of creating my own world and seeing it happen."

And like Graham, she hopes to be a professional playwright.

The three playwrights are more than just classmates; they're also friends who support each other's efforts.

"We all began school here at the same time," Graham said. "We took a lot of classes together. All of us have acted in at least one of the other's plays. It's really fitting we're sharing the same bill."

Student plays put on stage

By Lisa Pangburn
Daily Egyptian Reporter

The Laboratory Theater is the cocoon of many students' ideas. It breathes life into many dreams, and once again, several students are having the plays they concocted performed.

The Playwrights' Workshop is in full swing again this year with three plays by graduate students.

"Broke," written by Jonathan Graham, was the first of the three plays to start off the series.

Graham said the play shows many stereotypes of generations.

"It's really about the generation gap between the Baby Boomers and Generation X," he said. "One generation trying to take the place of the previous generation. I guess it's almost a coming of age play in the form of a comedy."

Graham said he was fascinated by all the media attention

" I wanted to try writing a comedy and something that wasn't exactly realistic. "

*Jonathan Graham,
playwright*

Generation X was receiving, so he felt compelled to write the play.

"For me, as a member of Generation X, I would read some of the things that supposedly described us, and it really didn't describe me," he said. "So, I wanted to play with stereotypes. I wanted to try writing a comedy and something that wasn't exactly realistic."

Eddie Bradley spent nearly two years researching the main character

of his play, "An Evening with Ira Aldridge," the second play of the series,

The play is based on a true story of an African-American actor in the 19th century. It portrays an actor who could not do much work in the United States because he was black, but when he traveled to Europe, his career blossomed.

Bradley said he felt compelled to write the play and first wrote it as a performance piece for himself.

"I put nearly two years of research into Aldridge," he said. "The play is grounded in history. I'm basing it on his life, so it's not an original work because it really is what happened to this man."

Bradley said he prefers the production as a play rather than a piece for himself.

"It's nice to be able to sit and watch your own work be per-

see PLAYS, page 11

Plays

continued from page 3

"It's nice to be able to sit and watch your own work be performed," he said. "I'm excited when the show is performed. It's nice to witness your own stuff."

The third play is also a historical piece. However, it is about a woman who was decades ahead of her time. "Woodhull," a piece by Liza Lentini, is about a woman presidential candidate in 1872.

Lentini got excited talking about the play written about Victoria Woodhull.

"She was such an amazing woman," she said. "Her ideas were way ahead of her time. For instance she had ideas on birth control. She wanted to run for president and she did, but very little is documented on her because she was such an outcast

in her time."

Lentini said the play is set around the time when Woodhull was running for president, almost 50 years before women could even vote.

"The play shows how she made money to run and what she went through just to get to the point of being put on the ballot," she said. "Her ups and downs, and even her time spent in jail is included in the play. She was a pretty amazing woman, and I hope this play does her justice."

The three plays are scheduled to run again next week beginning Monday.

"Broke" runs on Monday at 8 p.m., "An Evening With Ira Aldridge" runs Tuesday at 8 p.m., and "Woodhull" closes out the series on Wednesday at 8 p.m. All plays are performed in the Laboratory Theater. Tickets are \$4 and can be purchased at the McLeod Box Office.